

BLACK MOUNTAIN GUEST HOUSE

"TEACH FÁILTE"

A FEASIBILITY STUDY

BY

BDP LANDSCAPE LTD

FOR

BLACK MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP



September 1993

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Description of the Proposed Development**
- 3. Planning Issues**
- 4. Servicing the Site**
- 5. The Building**
- 6. Site Selection**
- 7. Development Costs**
- 8. Conclusion and Recommendations**

A P P E N D I C E S

- 1. Maps and Drawings**

- L01 Study & Site Location**
- L02 Location of Existing Services**
- L03 Site Option 1**
- L04 Site Option 2**
- L05 Site Option 3**
- L06 Site Option 4**
- L07 Diagrammatic Site Layout**
- A01 Building Plans**
- A02 Elevations**

- 2. Land Ownership**

- 3. Brief for Accommodation**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This Report has been prepared by BDP Landscape Limited at the request of Black Mountain Environmental Group and Springhill Development Agency.**
- 1.2 The purpose of the Report is to advise on the feasibility of the development of a Guest House at Upper Whiterock/Ballygomartin Road, Belfast.**

Context

- 1.3 In 1991, the Black Mountain Environmental Group published their proposals for the Preservation and Development of Black Mountain. The Plan included proposals for the development of visitor and interpretation facilities, upgrading access to the mountain, based on the network of traditional paths, and habitat preservation and creation.**
- 1.4 Under the auspices of Springhill Development Agency, the Group proceeded to assemble financial backing for the projects identified. The International Fund for Ireland agreed to support a Guest House Development originally proposed to be located at Milltown, Belfast. The negotiation of land purchase was not successful for this site, and it suggested relocation in the area now under consideration, with the added benefit of including for the improvement of access to the mountain as part of the project.**

Terms of Reference

- 1.5 The Terms of Reference were established over a series of meetings between BDP, Springhill Development Agency and Black Mountain Environmental Group.**
- 1.6 The scope of the study includes:**
 - investigation of land ownership**
 - investigation of the planning issues, and an initial approach to the Planning Service about permissible development.**
 - sketches for a proposed building sufficient to allow costs to be established.**
 - provision of a mixture of accommodation: individual rooms and hostel-style.**
 - site selection in view of the above and the physical, services and access issues affecting the development.**
 - costs of the development, with recommendations for phasing if appropriate.**

Content of the Report

- 1.7 In the following pages, the nature of the proposed development is described with the results of investigations into planning/access/services/ownership issues. Proposals for a building are outlined, and four site options with their development costs.
- 1.8 This Report presents a summary of the opportunities and constraints inherent in the development, and recommendations are set out in Section 8 for the next steps to be taken if the proposals are to become reality.

2.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The Guest House

- 2.1** The Guest House is to be aimed at visitors and tourists to West Belfast, at groups engaged in outdoor pursuits on the mountain, and at groups attending conferences and festivals in the area.
- 2.2** The style of accommodation will be of two kinds: guest house rooms to NITB standards, and hostel-style dormitory accommodation.

The Site

- 2.3** It was originally proposed to locate the Guest House on the site of a former farmstead near the reservoir at Upper Whiterock Road. There are springs here with the opportunity of developing them into a feature round which the buildings could be set.
- 2.4** In the light of the other issues affecting the development, it was decided to identify up to three other potential locations to allow for flexibility in approaching statutory authorities, land owners and in the design of the development - these are described in detail in Section 6 of the Report.
- 2.5** The Study Area identified is shown on drawing number L01.

Issues to be Addressed

The main issues to be addressed were:

- 2.6** Planning Issues - the sites are outside the development area established in the Belfast Urban Area Plan; BUAP however also sets out policies supporting tourism/recreation/open space related development in green belt areas. These are considered in Section 3 of the Report.
- 2.7** Services Issues - the sites are remote from other development, and the costs and practicalities of bringing public utilities to the building are important factors in determining the feasibility of the project. The results of enquiries to the Statutory Authorities are set out in Section 4 of the Report.
- 2.8** Land Ownership - a previous enquiry had shown a multiplicity of owners in the Study Area, and one major landowner. (See Appendix 2 for details). In identifying potential sites, the size of the overall holding and the ownership of access to the site are important criteria.

3.0 PLANNING ISSUES

3.1 The Planning Issues were approached under three headings:

- The Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP 2001):
The status of the study area, BUAP policies in regard to tourism, green belt, recreation, and landscape;
- Development control issues, including access and parking, the relationship of the development to its environment, etc.
- Approaches to the Planning Service to obtain their early reaction to the proposal and it's planning feasibility.

3.2 The boundary of the development area and the green belt are shown on Drawing L01. The proposed sites are in an "area of high scenic value" within the green belt. The Green Belt Strategy states that there will be a presumption against further development within the Green Belt unless (inter alia) "it is required for the purpose of open space, recreation and tourism" (Policy GB1). However, BUAP policies under other headings are supportive of tourism developments in the Green Belt, where appropriate. These are summarised in the following paragraphs.

3.3 Tourism Policies:

Policy T1 - The Development of Tourism Facilities

To encourage the development of tourism facilities on key sites in the Belfast Urban Area and Green Belt.

Policy T2

To facilitate the development of accommodation for tourists in the Belfast Urban Area.

This Policy recognises that there is a major deficiency of self-catering accommodation in the city's hinterlands. BUAP "encourages the development of hotel and self-catering accommodation within the Belfast Urban Area and at appropriate locations in the Green Belt."

3.4 Green Belt Policies

Policy GB1 - Land Use in the Green Belt

Land uses which would contribute to a positive use of green belt land would include agriculture and forestry, recreation and amenity uses. "Open space and recreation uses must be of a type related to preserving the rural landscape with any building being ancillary to the recreational use of the land".

Policy GB7 - Siting and Design

"All developments within the green belt must have special regard to siting, massing, shape, design, finishes and landscaping in order that they may be integrated into the rural setting to as great a degree as possible. The sensitive siting and design of large agricultural buildings will also be encouraged in the interests of amenity."

3.5 Recreation Policies

Policy R5 - Recreation and Amenity Development in the Belfast Hills

"To provide for recreational and amenity development of the Antrim, Castlereagh and Holywood Hills."

The policy is to improve access to the hills with pedestrian paths, nature trails, some car parks, vantage points and picnic areas. However, most of the hills will remain untouched as open moorland or farmland. Major development will be focussed on a few acres of concentrated leisure activity where the emphasis will be on the exploitation of existing, recreational assets, eg the schemes at Cave Hill, Dundonald Leisure Park.

3.6 Landscape Policies

One of the main elements of the Landscape Strategy is:

"The protection and development for recreational and amenity uses of the natural landscape areas of hills, valleys, lough shore and green wedges within and surrounding the urban area."

Policy L4

"To protect areas of high scenic value in the Antrim and Castlereagh Hills, the Lagan Valley and the Belfast Lagan Shores." i.e. protected from urban development.

Policy L6

"To encourage the establishment of an urban forest."

This policy also states that tree planting should normally be an integral part of all new development schemes.

3.7 Development Control Issues to be addressed fall into categories related to:

- the site, its location and adjacent land uses, existing features, e.g. trees, positive effects on e.g. current unauthorised dumping; proposed landscape treatment.
- access and parking (related to numbers of visitors), effects on rights of way, removal of restrictions on access to the mountain.
- services authorities agreement to provision of services and disposal of effluent.

- that the design of any new building is sensitive to the surrounding environment and traditional nature/design of local buildings, the materials to be used externally, the amount of floor space to be used for different purposes.

These are dealt with under their appropriate sections of this Report.

- 3.8 BDP met with the Planning Officer for the area. BDP presented the sketches for the proposed building, and the 4 site options, and argues the case of the development based on the above.
- 3.9 The Planning Officer agreed that BUAP policy would not suggest a "presumption of refusal", given that it is a tourism development in the Green Belt.
- 3.10 Although this is an encouraging statement, it does not guarantee that approval would be granted, and an application for Outline Planning Permission should be made, which will allow the proposal to be given full consideration by the Planning Service, and formal consultations to be carried out with Statutory Bodies, including services authorities, Roads Service, Countryside and Wildlife Branch, etc.

4.0 SERVICING THE SITE

- 4.1 Records of existing services were obtained from DOE Water Executive, DOE Sewerage Division, British Telecom, NIE, and Belfast Gas.

The location of services is shown on drawing L02. No sewerage and no gas mains are present in the area.

British Telecom and NIE have overhead cables in the area.

Water

- 4.2 There is a reservoir situated at the top of Whiterock Road. However, it is at a lower level than Sites 1, 3 and 4. It is fed by a pumping main, which is only pumped at certain times to maintain the water level in the reservoir. The Water Executive Officer for the area advised that the "head" of water in the outlet would not be sufficient to service sites at a higher level.
- 4.3 It is possible to connect into the outlet mains and to pump the water to the higher sites, but this would require the acquisition of additional lands on which to site the pump, pipework and associated tanks.
- 4.4 The other farm houses in the area are provided with water from their own wells. The four sites under consideration are located on a Spring line, so that the installation of a well would be feasible. Site 3 is located on fill material, which might necessitate a deeper well than the other sites, and would need to be backed up by a pump, with consequent cost implications.

Drainage

- 4.5 As there is no sewer within 60 ft (18 m) of the sites considered, effluent disposal must be by septic tank or cess pit.
- 4.6 In a septic tank system, the effluent is collected in a settling tank where the liquid is separated from the solids. The solids are broken down by organic decomposition, while the liquid is drained off and is either piped to a water course, or allowed to percolate into the surrounding soil.
- 4.7 In either case, because of the danger of contaminating ground water, standards are laid down governing the quality of the discharge, and a Discharge Consent must be obtained from the Environmental Health Department of the Local Authority. An Environmental Health Officer visits the site, and, after detailed consideration of the ground conditions, sets down a specification of the standards to be met by the discharge.
- 4.8 Various septic tank systems are available providing different methods of collection and treatment. The choice of system depends on the ground conditions and on the Environmental Health Officer's specification.
- 4.9 The alternative to this system is a cess pit, from which there is no discharge, but for the number of visitors expected at the Guest House, might require weekly emptying. The disadvantage of the long term running costs of cess pits make this option less attractive.
- 4.10 Surface water may be disposed of either to a soakaway or to an open field drain.

Telephones

- 4.12 Arising out of discussions with British Telecom, BT propose to provide a service from their existing overhead line as far as the boundary of the chosen site, free of charge.
- 4.13 Within the site area, BT will provide ducts for installation in trenches and will make the connections to the Guest House for the normal fee per line provided.

Electricity

- 4.14 There is an overhead, medium voltage supply in the area, with the last pole just north of Rodgers' Farm.

Arising out of discussions with NIE, a three-phase 60 Amp supply was recommended based on the anticipated "loading", with the final approach to the building underground, as for BT. At the time of printing this Report, however, NIE had not responded with a cost estimate for this provision.

Heating

- 4. The heating system needs to be flexible to serve this type of accommodation. Oil fired central heating is proposed as being both flexible and competitively priced. Accommodation for both a boiler and an oil tank would be required.
- 4. Electric heating based on Economy 7 has a higher running cost than oil, and provides very little flexibility.
- 4. Gas fired central heating provides flexibility but has a higher running cost than oil. The running of coal fired central heating is labour intensive and not as flexible as oil or gas, as well as being less desirable from an environmental point of view.

5.0 THE BUILDING

- 5.1 The Brief for the accommodation to be provided was established after discussions with Black Mountain Environmental Group, and taking into account the requirements of the Tourist Board for registration and grant aid.

A summary of these is included in Appendix 3.

- 5.2 The proposals for the building are based on the original scheme for the Milltown site by Community Technical Services, and are illustrated on Drawing A01 and A02.

- 5.3 It is envisaged that the building will be partly single storey and partly two storey. Its style will reflect the traditional farmhouse style, of a main "house" with single storey "wings".

Ideas for external treatments are illustrated on Drawing A02.

Accommodation

- 5.4 The building will provide both guest house accommodation and hostel accommodation. It is envisaged that whilst both are contained in the same building they would be segregated. Each section will have its own dining and sitting areas, served by one central kitchen. Two separate accesses and reception areas provide for the differing type of visitors envisaged.

Guest House

- 5.5 The guest house accommodation is aimed at the visitors who may arrive in cars as couples or families. Sleeping accommodation for a maximum of 20 people is envisaged, in one family room, four double and two twin bedrooms. Two bedrooms for disabled visitors are also provided on the ground floor, one of which could alternatively be used as a family room, depending on demand.

All rooms are provided with en-suite bathrooms.

Hostel

- 5.6 The hostel will provide accommodation aimed at people who are more likely to arrive by bicycle, walking, hitch hiking or public transport. Provision is made for four six-bed rooms, using bunk beds, with separate toilet and shower rooms.

- 5.7 A linen store, and a laundry with a drying area for wet clothes and boots are also provided.

Catering

- 5.8 It is envisaged that breakfasts and evening meals would be served from the central kitchen, in the separate dining areas. No provision has been made for self-catering facilities.

6.0 SITE SELECTION

6.1 The four site options are detailed on drawings L03-L06, which show the main constraints and opportunities associated with each site. The criteria governing site selection are:

Accessibility

6.2 The views of Roads Service were canvassed in relation to access off the public roads, on the basis that visitors are expected to arrive on foot, by bicycle or car. Arrival by bus or coach is not anticipated, since the surrounding public roads are too narrow and steep for coaches.

6.3 However, Roads Service response was not available at the time of printing this Report.

6.4 The distance of the site from a suitable access will have cost implications also.

Serviceability

6.5 The main issues regarding services have been discussed in Section 4.

Ground Conditions

6.6 The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland were consulted and their maps and field records examined.

In general terms, the lower lying areas consist of glacial fill while the higher levels are basalt. The slopes within the study area are mainly chalk with flints, with narrow bands of green sand. There are several fault lines across the slopes and two dykes cross Site 4. A large area denoted as "Slip" lies to the north and south of the Whiterock/Ballygomartin Road junction.

6.7 The Geologists general advice was:

- the area of slip may be material which had slipped in the past, as the houses from Rodgers' farm to the Quaker house, as well as the reservoir all lie within this area.
- nevertheless, it is their general advice to avoid building on slip and the point was made that Insurance Companies may take such factors into account in determining premiums.
- the development should avoid blocking the natural drainage, e.g. the springs, also along the side or line of a dyke would be an area of drainage.
- septic tank discharge should preferably be below the spring line

Aesthetic Considerations:

6.8 The character of the site, the views into and out of it, its relationship to the mountain, etc are all factors which are difficult to quantify, but which influence the choice of one site over another.

- 6.9 Site features such as the presence of springs, rock outcrops or quarries, and vegetation have potential in the design of the site layout - how they relate to the approach to the building, provide focal points round which sitting areas may be designed etc.
- 6.10 These elements are noted for each site considered. No attempt has been made to design a layout for any site, but they would certainly be important in the more detailed design of the chosen site.

Land Ownership

- 6.11 This is an important consideration, especially where additional land may be required for access or servicing, e.g. Site 1.
- 6.12 The size of the parcel of ownership in relation to the area required for the development of the Guest House and ancillary facilities will be significant in terms of allocating funds between land acquisition and the development project.

The four sites are compared under these headings on the following pages.

Site 1

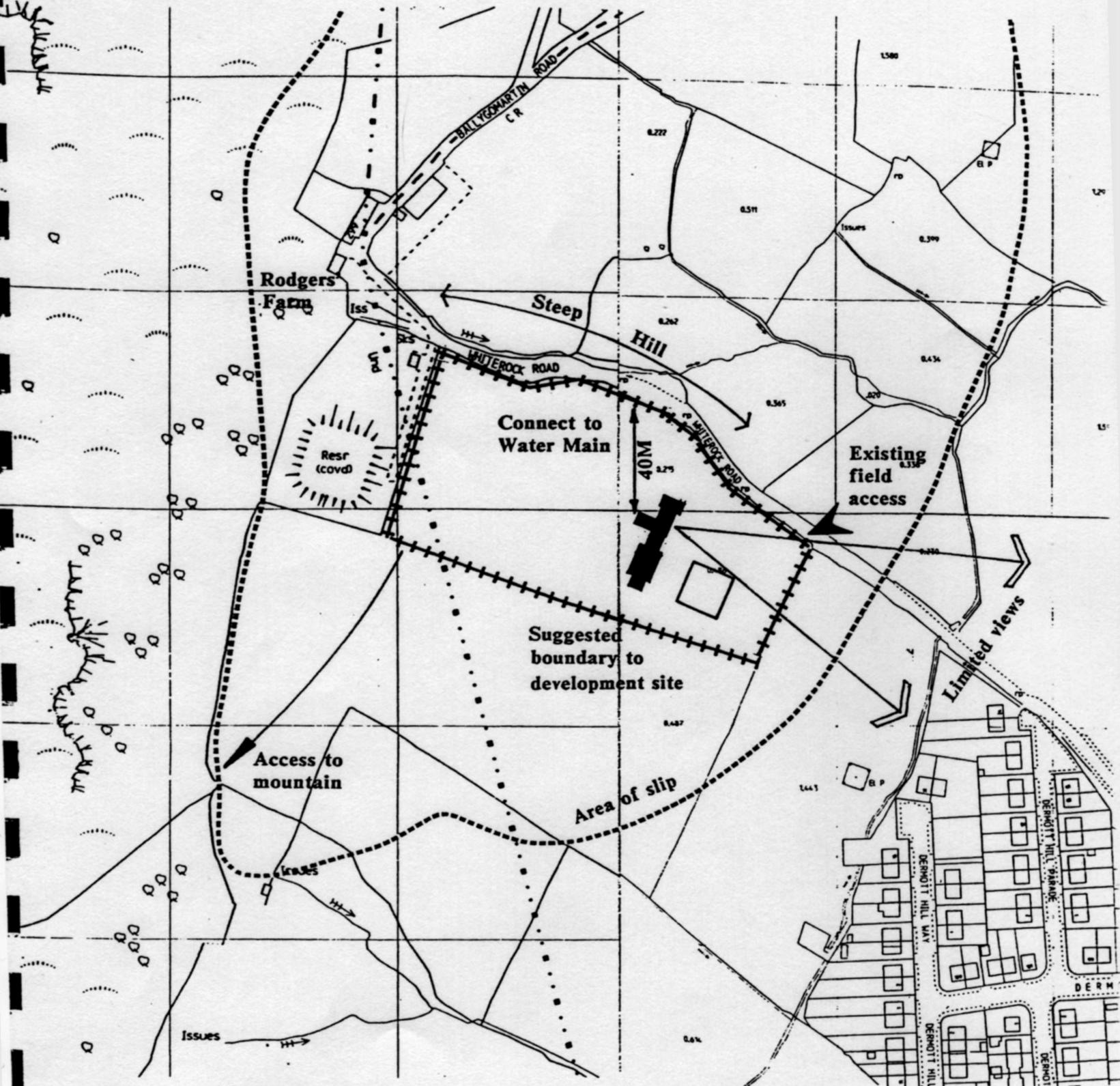
- 6.13 This is the site of a former farmstead with remains of buildings grouped around a spring. It is situated below a small disused quarry and is surrounded by mature hedgerows with the vegetation growing around the quarry as backdrop. There are superb views over West Belfast from the site. Unfortunately these include an overview of a security base, and it may be objected to on these grounds.

Criterion	Advantages	Constraints
Access	Accessed from a traditional path. A blocked access would be opened.	Site is 300 metres from public road. Access point at road is blocked.
Services	There is a spring on site for fresh water. Septic tank could be placed below the spring line.	Service vehicle access to septic tank would have to be provided on the building access path.
Ground Conditions	The majority of the site lies outside the area of slip, at the junction with green sand and below the chalk band.	
Land Ownership	The parcel of land lies across the contours from lower slopes to hilltop with advantages for access to the mountain.	It is part of a very large parcel of land (folio 2397). The access path is in another ownership (folio 19185).

Table of Selection Criteria.

An alternative access to this site has been proposed, from the Upper Springfield Road/Monagh By-pass junction. The advantages are ready access to M2 Motorway, and avoidance of the steep hill at Whiterock Road. The disadvantages are: nearly 700 M of new access road would require to be built, and at least three landowners to be negotiated with for land acquisition.

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TITLE Black Mountain Guest House
SITE OPTION 2

JOB NUMBER B 5520

DRAWING NUMBER L04

DATE 9-93

SCALE 1:2500

DRAWN BY MOC

AUTHORISED

MW

BUILDING DESIGN PARTNERSHIP

2 BRUCE STREET

BELFAST BT2 7JD

TELEPHONE 0232 243394

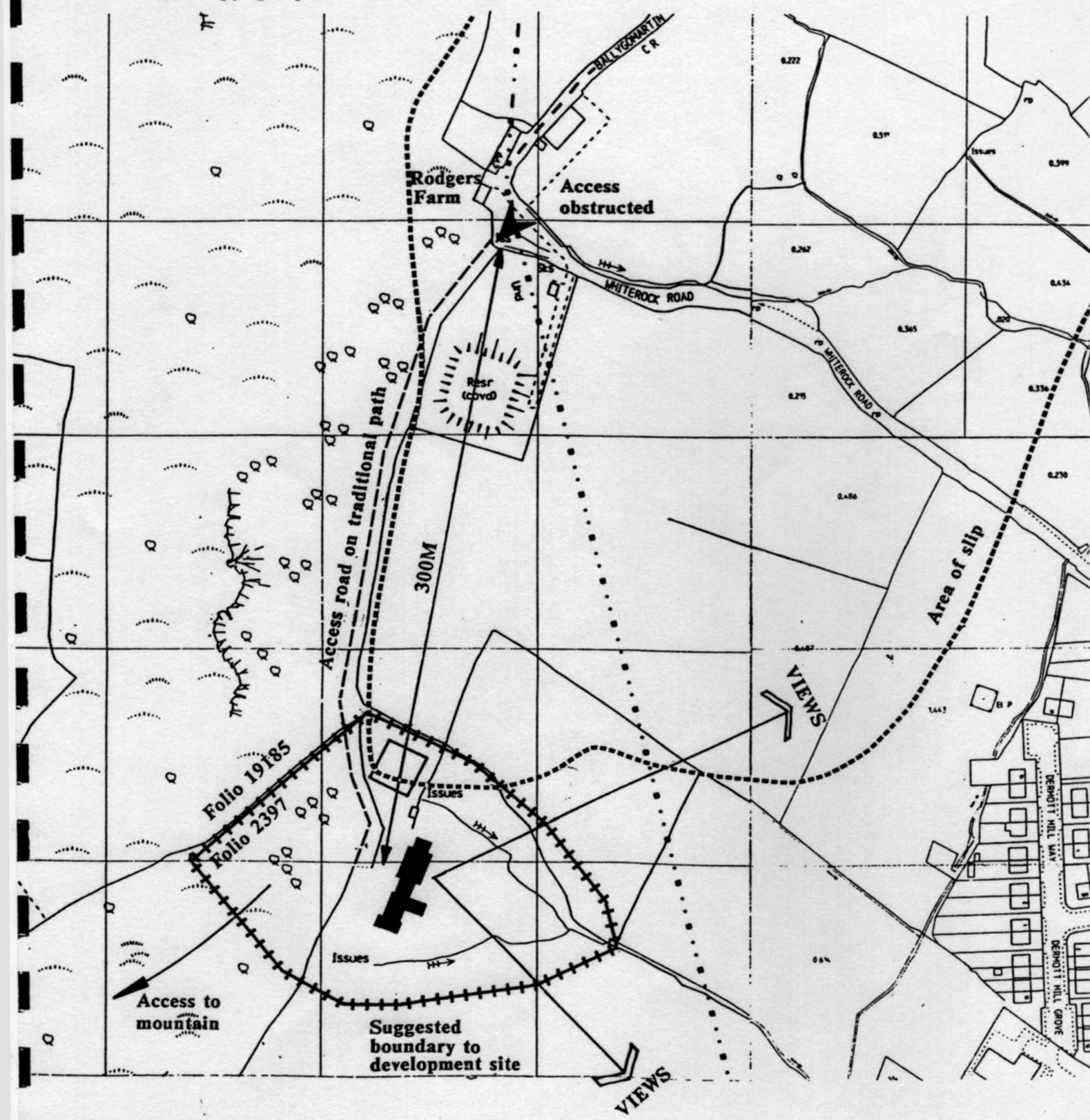
FAX 0232 329337

Site 2

- 6.14 This site lies on pastureland below the steep slope below the reservoir. Being at a lower level, the views out are not so extensive as the higher sites, but it still gives impressive views over Belfast Lough. It is partially surrounded by mature hedgerows, which would contribute to screening of views into the site from a distance.

Criterion	Advantages	Constraints
Access	It is immediately adjacent to the public road with an existing field access.	Access is off a steep slope in the road with restricted visibility.
Services	Lies below the reservoir - could be serviced from the mains water.	
Ground Conditions		The site is in the area of slip. The soil is wet, with running flushes after heavy rain. It is on a slope.
Land Ownership	The parcel of ownership contains a traditional path and old quarries with potential for access to the mountain and recreational use.	It is part of a large parcel of land (folio 19185) which includes Dermot Hill Estate, and has been leased for 10,000 years to a builder.

Table of Selection Criteria.



TITLE Black Mountain Guest House
SITE OPTION 1

JOB NUMBER B 5520

DRAWING NUMBER

L03

DATE 9 - 93

SCALE 1:2500

DRAWN BY moc

AUTHORISED Mac

BUILDING DESIGN PARTNERSHIP

2 BRUCE STREET

BELFAST BT2 7JD

TELEPHONE 0232 243394

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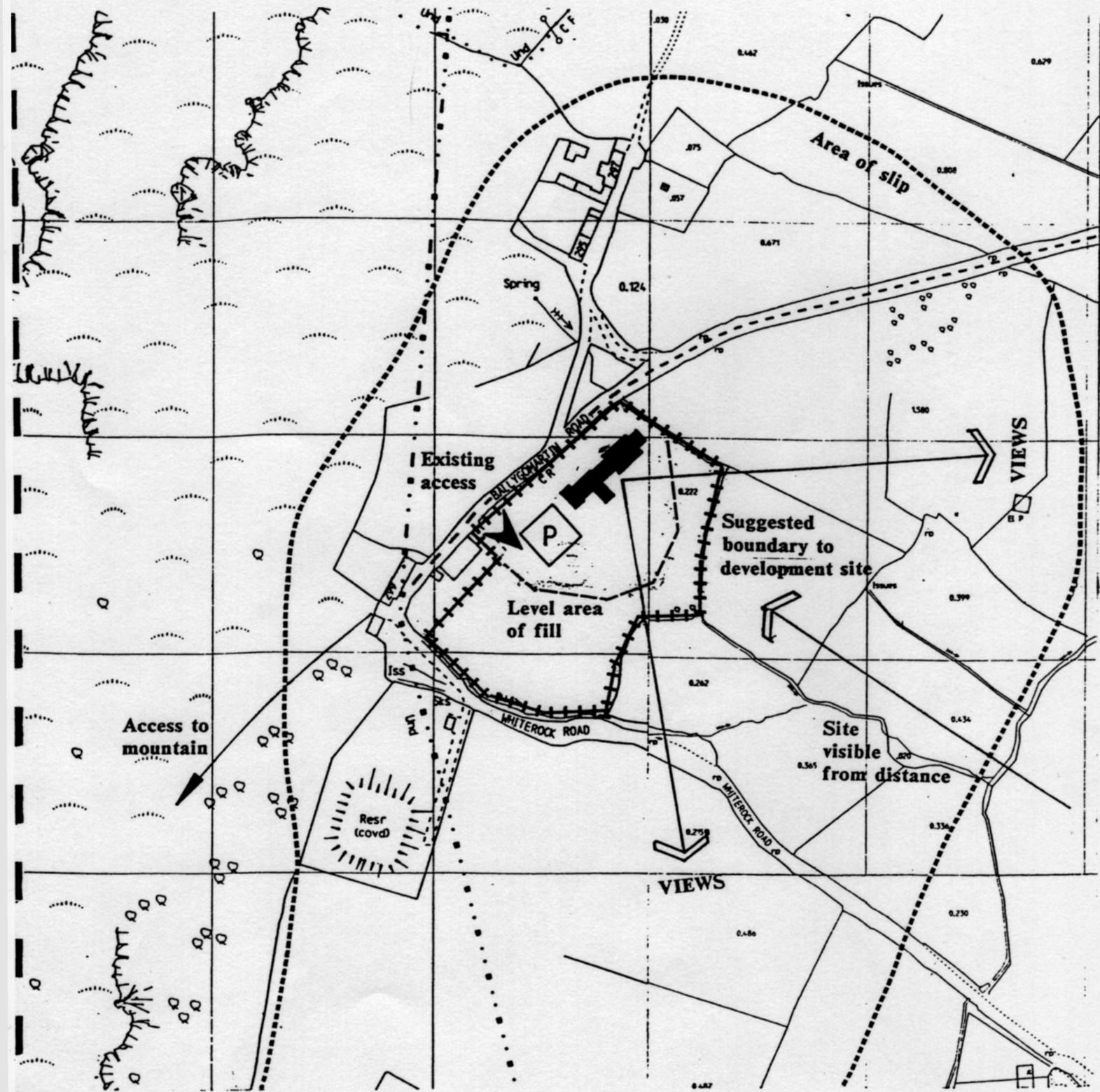
Site 3

6.15 This site is an area of fill with superb views over Belfast Lough to Castlereagh and beyond. Conversely it is very exposed to view from the distance, with little vegetation on site. The level area would allow the design of patio sitting areas, while the lower levels offer the opportunity for planting and habitat creation. On the other hand it is remote from the mountain itself.

Criterion	Advantages	Constraints
Access	It is immediately adjacent to the public road - reasonable levels and visibility.	
Services	It is below the spring line - advantageous for siting septic tank.	It is at a higher level than reservoir and will require a well and being on fill, the well may be deep and require pumping.
Ground Conditions	The site is level	It lies in the area of slip, as well as having been filled with implications for the design of foundations.
Land Ownership	The parcel of land in the folio (AN 12358) has boundaries onto both Ballygomartin and Whiterock Road, allowing non-vehicular access from either side.	The land does not connect directly with accesses to the mountain.

Table of Selection Criteria.

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TITLE Black Mountain Guest House
SITE OPTION 3

JOB NUMBER B 5520

DRAWING NUMBER L 05

DATE 9-93

SCALE 1:2500

DRAWN BY MOC

AUTHORISED

MOC

BUILDING DESIGN PARTNERSHIP

2 BRUCE STREET

BELFAST BT2 7JD

TELEPHONE 0232 243394

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Site 4

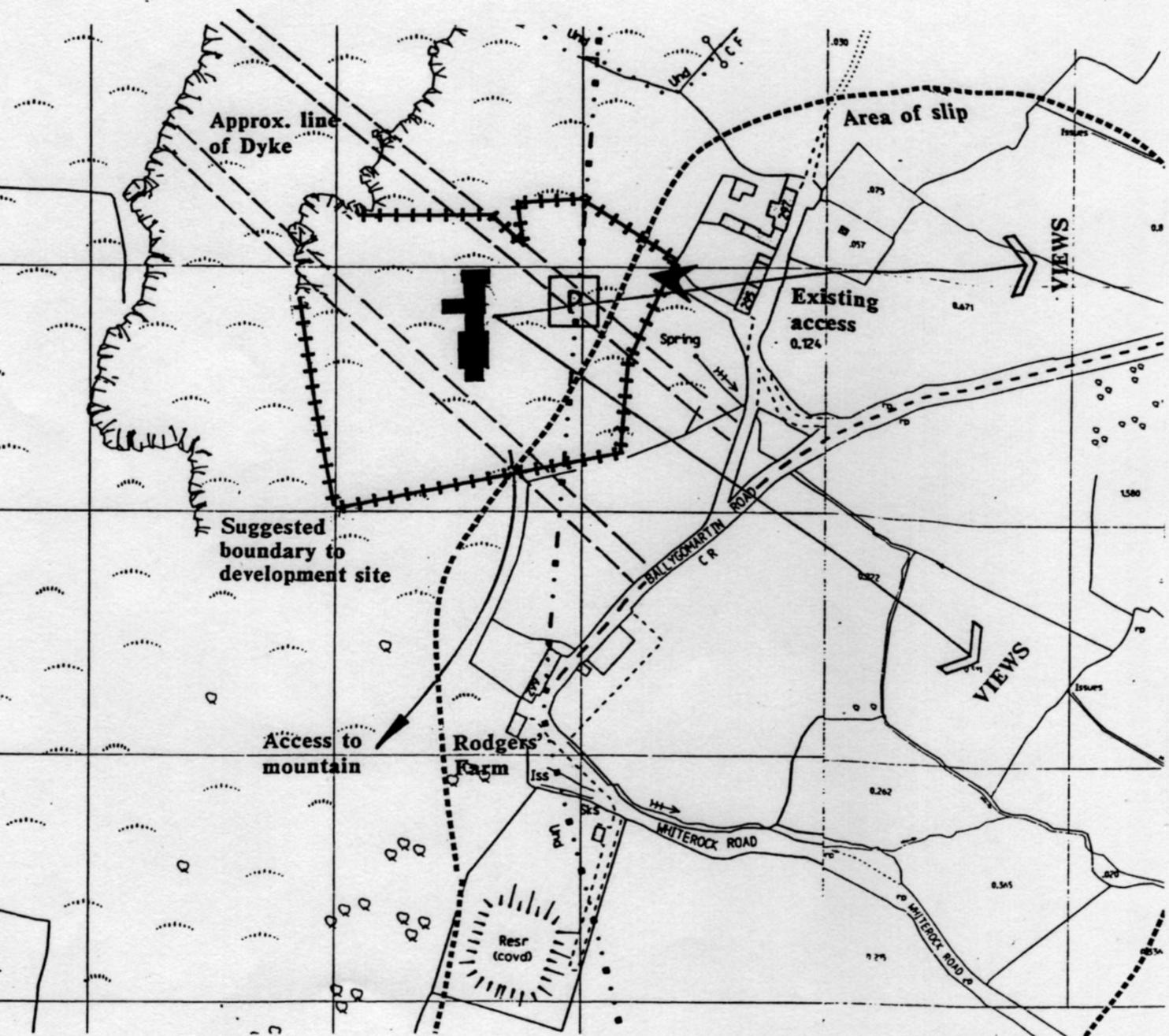
- 6.16 The site has a level area and extends up the slope towards the hilltop. It is well vegetated with a mixture of wetland, scrub, mature hedgerow and scattered trees. Excellent views are given over Belfast Lough and West Belfast, while a hedgerow to the road boundary offers screening in distant views of the site. The level part of the site is backed by disused quarries, giving opportunities for the development of gardens or for recreational use.

Criterion	Advantages	Constraints
Access	The site is equally accessible from Ballygomartin and Whiterock Roads and contains an access path to the mountain.	Via a shared access off the public road.
Services	A well is feasible as it is on the spring line. It is immediately adjacent to both NIE and BT overhead lines.	It is above the reservoir, requiring a well. Careful siting of septic tank required as it is on the spring line.
Ground Conditions	Lies outside the area of slip, and provides a reasonably level area for the building.	
Land Ownership	The parcel of ownership stretches from Ballygomartin Road to the hill top.	The ownership is divided 2/3 to 1/3 between two folios (19188 and 19189).

Table of Selection Criteria.

- 6.17 By reason of the combination of relative ease of accessibility and serviceability, ground conditions, proximity to traditional paths giving access to the mountain, as well as the aesthetic qualities of the site and its key position relative to Whiterock and Ballygomartin Roads, Site 4 is the favoured location for the Guest House.

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TITLE Black Mountain Guest House
SITE OPTION 4

JOB NUMBER B 5520

DRAWING NUMBER L06

DATE 9-93

SCALE 1:2500

DRAWN BY MOC

AUTHORISED MOC

BUILDING DESIGN PARTNERSHIP

2 BRUCE STREET

BELFAST BT2 7JD

TELEPHONE 0232 243394

FAX 0232 329337

7.0 COSTS

- 7.1 The building costs were estimated by comparison with another recently constructed building of a similar type.
- 7.2 The costs for the siteworks and landscape treatment are based on the diagrammatic site layout illustrating on Drawing L07 and differ only in quantity from one site to another.

7.3	The Building	All Sites	£
	Guest House Accommodation		
	Ground Floor: 244 sq m		
	First Floor: 197 sq m		
	Total Floor Area: 441 sq m @ £525/sq m		231,525.00
	Hostel Accommodation		
	Total Floor Area 272 sq m @ £350/sq m		95,200.00
	Add Contingencies @ 5%		16,336.00
	TOTAL, excluding professional fees and VAT.		343,061.00

7.4	Siteworks	SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3	SITE 4
	Access road and parking *	19,500.00	10,300.00	9,525.00	11,835.00
	Patio and paving	6,000.00	6,000.00	6,000.00	6,000.00
	Access path to mountain	4,300.00	4,300.00	4,300.00	4,300.00
	Boundary stock-proof fence	8,280.00	9,300.00	8,100.00	9,010.00
	Services **	6,000.00	4,000.00	6,000.00	6,000.00
	Planting and grassing	24,050.00	28,230.00	21,313.00	27,830.00
	Add Contingencies @ 5%	3,406.00	3,106.00	2,762.00	3,249.00
	TOTAL, excluding professional fees and VAT.	71,536.00	65,236.00	58,000.00	68,224.00

* Assumes access to Site 1 from Upper Whiterock Road : access from Upper Springfield Road has not been costed.

** NIE costs are not known at time of printing the Report.

8.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 In summary, none of the issues identified as materially affecting the feasibility of the project have proven negative:
- The planning Office response is encouraging;
 - Sites have been identified which are accessible and serviceable;
 - Ground conditions suggest the sites identified are capable of being built on.
- 8.2 It is apparent that the constraints identified will have cost implications for the development. In particular, ground conditions require more detailed investigation (beyond the scope of this study) to establish any special requirements for foundations, as well as for the construction of the well and septic tank.
- 8.3 The pre-disposition of land owners to sell the lands considered was not investigated. Where the site area required for the Guest House was part of a much larger holding, this was generally advantageous to the project in giving access to the mountain. Note that Site 1 requires negotiations with a second owner in order to acquire the access path to the site, from Whiterock Road.

Recommendations

- 8.4 This Report progresses the project another step towards realisation. Further actions are required stemming from the findings and proposals in the Report:
- * **Planning Consent:**
An application for Outline Planning Permission should be made, for the favoured site, to allow for a detailed and formal response from Planning Service and the other statutory bodies.
 - * **The Site:**
Open negotiations with land owners regarding land costs, and area of land to be acquired.
 - * **The Building:**
Investigate the feasibility of gaining further funding for the overall development.
Consider phasing the development to match funds already secured.
- 8.5 If the responses to these are favourable, the next step will be to initiate the implementation of the scheme.

APPENDIX 1

Maps and Drawings