

fabrik

Ladds Garden Centre, Bath Road, Hare Hatch

Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment
September 2025

Issue sheet

Job Name: Ladds Garden Centre, Bath Road, Hare Hatch
Job number: D3478
Client: Westbourne Homes
Report number: 0001

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Figure 2.1 – Site location (fabrik, 2025)

Site boundary District boundary

Introduction

fabrik Chartered Landscape Architects have been appointed by Westbourne Homes to carry out this report, in order to consider the likely physical and visual impacts arising as a result of the proposed redevelopment of the Site.

This report sets out landscape policy (together with any related policy on ecological and heritage assets) and any supporting guidance documents / informatics and then goes on to describe the constituent baseline landscape elements (the existing geology, soils, landform, drainage, vegetation cover, land use, settlement, the history of the landscape and the way that landscape is experienced) which together inform landscape character, landscape condition and value. The LVIA then describes the baseline character and amenity of the identified visual receptors (considering the visual envelope, the different groups of people, places affected, the nature of the view and the visual amenity).

The landscape constraints and opportunities are then set out to inform the proposed redevelopment. Any mitigation measures and assumptions which have informed the assessment of effects are set out after the description of the proposed development. The effects of the proposed redevelopment are then considered against each of the landscape and visual receptors relative to the particular stages of the project. The penultimate section of this report comprises a landscape policy assessment.

The location of the Site is shown at Figure 2.1.

The methodology for the LVIA is based on the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (third edition) by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (Routledge, 2013). A full methodology is set out at Appendix 1.

1.1 Desktop Research

The desktop survey carried out as part of the LVIA included the review of Ordnance Survey maps, interactive maps, aerial photography, published landscape character assessment documents, planning policy and the emerging development proposals. The extent of the baseline and therefore the impact appraisal extends to 2km from the Site.

1.2 Field Work

The field work was carried out in May 2025 and recorded the existing landscape elements within the Site; the contextual landscape elements; and identified a series of key visual receptors. The visual assessment element includes a photographic survey of the Site taken from a series of representative key views, chosen to represent a range of locations including both public and private views, distances and directions around the Site.

2.0

Landscape Planning Context

2.1 Designations and Policy

Designations

As illustrated in figure 2.1 to the right, there are no landscape or ecological designations that cover the Site itself. The Site does however lie within close proximity to the Hare Hatch Area of Special Character to the west.

Ancient woodlands within the vicinity of the Site include:

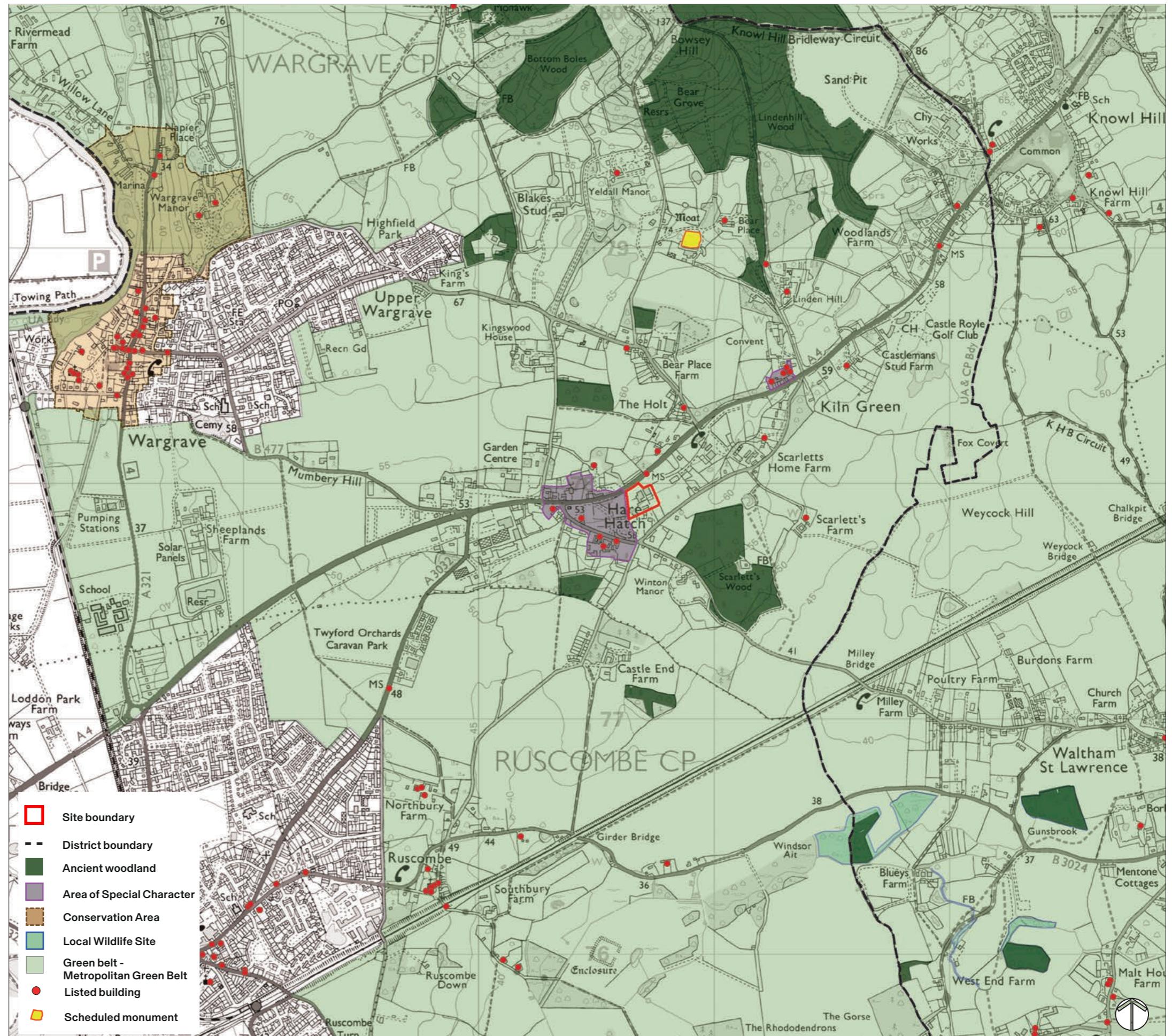
- Scarlets Wood 0.15km southeast;
- 'The Wood' 0.26km southwest;
- Cutlers Copse 0.3km northwest;
- Dean Pitt 0.6km north; and
- Areas of woodland sitting on Bowsey Hill 1km north.

The Site is approximately 5km from the Chilterns National Landscape.

Although not a landscape designation, the Site is located within the Wokingham Borough Green Belt.

There are a number of listed buildings in the surrounding area. Those within the Site's immediate vicinity include:

- Hare Hatch Grange 150m northeast
- Hill House 116m southwest
- The Old House 180m west



Public Rights of Way

As illustrated in figure 2.2, the surrounding area has a relatively limited number of PRoW. Those within close proximity to the Site include:

- PRoW WARG49 to the west of the Site that runs from Miley Lane Castle End Road
- PRoW WARG50 to the east of the Site that runs from Scarlett's Lane to Miley Lane, alongside Scarlett's Wood.
- PRoW WAG6 to the north of the Site that runs from Tag Lane to Blakes Lane.

Several PRoW traverse and are contained within the woodland on Bowsey Hill to the north of the Site. Additionally, the Wargrave Recreation Ground is located 1.2km to the northwest of the Site.

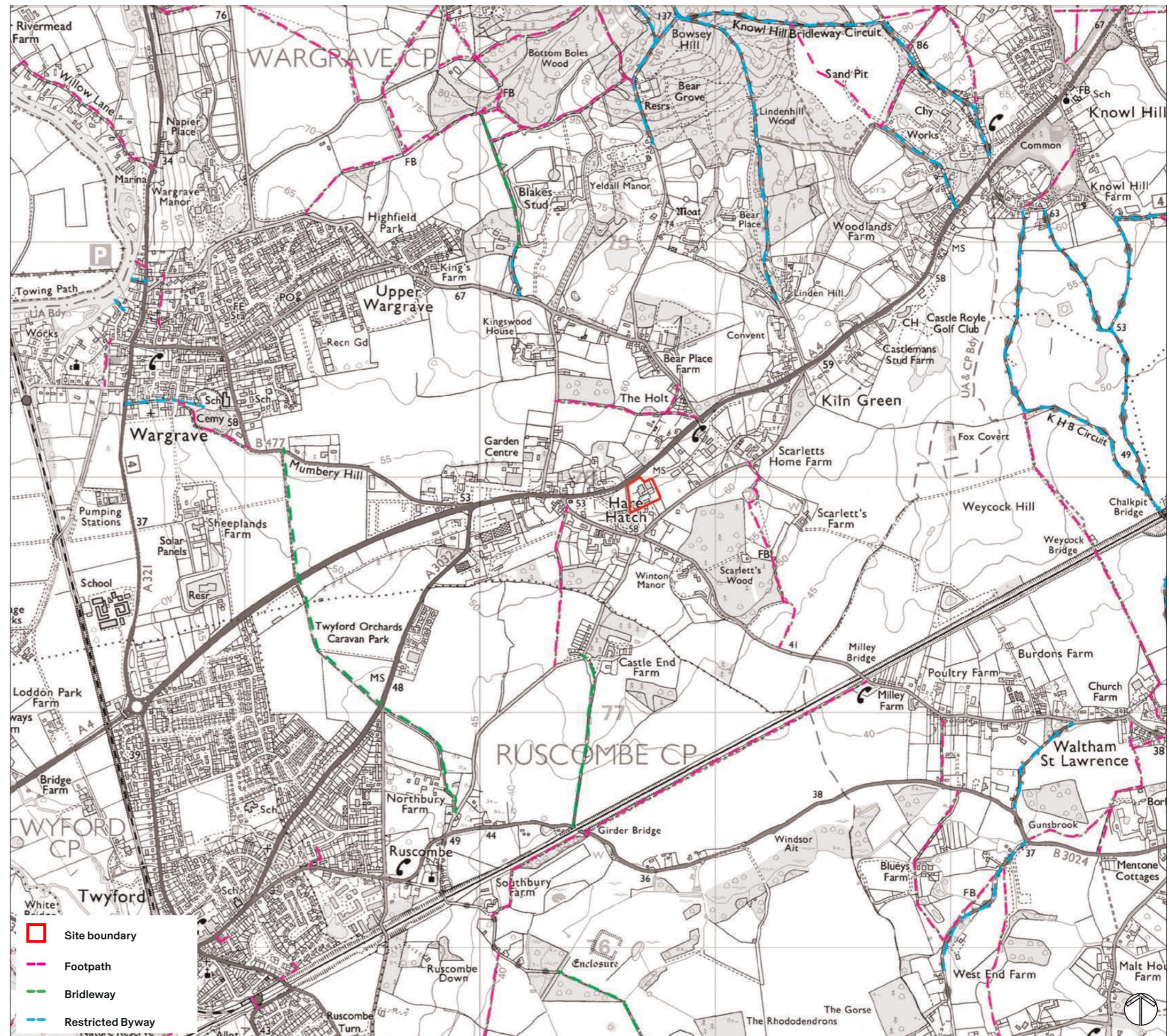


Figure 2.2 – Public rights of way, open access land and Registered Common Land (fabrik, 2023)

2.11 National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The December 2024 NPPF seeks the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The following issues and policies of the NPPF are pertinent to the proposed development and this assessment.

Section 2 - achieving sustainable development, para 8, subsection c relating to an environmental objective, states:

"to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change..."

Section 8 - promoting healthy and safe communities, para 103 under the open space and recreation sub-heading states:

"Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support effects to address climate change..."

Para 105 states:

"Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails."

Para 106 on Local Green Space states:

"The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them..."

Para 108 goes on to state: *"Policies and decisions for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with national policy for Green Belts set out in chapter 13 of this Framework."*

Section 12 - achieving well-designed places. Para 131:

"The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities..."

Para 132:

"... Design policies should be developed with local communities so that they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics..."

Para 135:

"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

a. will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b. are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c. are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

d. establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;

e. optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and

f. create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience."

Para 136 relates to trees and states:

"Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users."

Para 137:

"Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals..."

Para 139:

"Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

a. development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes; and/or

b. outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings."

Section 13 - Protecting the Green Belt. Para 142 states:

"The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban

sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence."

Para 143 sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt as:

a. to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;

b. to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

c. to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

d. to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and

e. to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land."

A separate Green Belt Appraisal has been prepared by Woolf Bond to accompany the application.

Section 15 - conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Para 187:

"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a. protecting and enhancing valued landscapes... (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b. recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the most and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.

c. maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it..."

Para 189:

"Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas."

Para 190:

"When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

a. the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;

b. the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated

area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and

c. any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated."

Section 16 - conserving and enhancing the historic environment, para 202 states:

"Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations"

Under the subsection on considering potential impacts, para 213:

"Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

a. grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks and gardens, should be exceptional;

b. assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and grade II listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional."*

Planning Practice Guidance

The NPPF is supported by the on-line resource Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). There are a number of sections of relevance, as set out below.

Climate change is considered in para 001 (ID 6-001-20140306) states: *"... local planning authorities should ensure that protecting the local environment is properly considered alongside the broader issues of protecting the global environment. Planning can also help increase resilience to climate change impact through the location, mix and design of development."*

Addressing climate change is one of the core land use planning principles which the National Planning Policy Framework expects to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking..."

Planning for well-designed places and the sub-section on 'How are well-designed places achieved through the planning system?' are set out at para 001 (ID: 26-001-20191001) which states: *"Well-designed places can be achieved by taking a proactive and collaborative approach at all stages of the planning process, from policy and plan formulation through to the determination of planning applications and the post approval stage... To be read alongside this guidance, the National Design Guide sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice.*

... significant weight should be given to: a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and

supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

Good design is set out in the National Design Guide under the following 10 characteristics:

- context
- identity
- built form
- movement
- nature
- public spaces
- uses
- homes and buildings
- resources
- lifespan

The National Design Guide can be used by all those involved in shaping places including in plan-making and decision making."

With regards to the factors to be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt, para 001 (ID: 64-001-20190722) states that: "... where it is relevant to do so, requires a judgment based on the circumstances of the case. By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:

- openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;
- the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and
- the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation."

With regard to development on brownfield land in the Green Belt, para 004 (ID: 64-004-20231219) states that: "The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the policy on proposals affecting the Green Belt. Where previously developed land is located within the Green Belt, the National Planning Policy Framework sets out the circumstances in which development may not be inappropriate. This includes limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, subject to conditions relating to the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt.

The Framework indicates that certain other forms of development are also 'not inappropriate' in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This includes the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction."

The setting to a heritage asset is described at para 013 (ID: 18a-

013-20190723) as follows: "All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not. The setting of a heritage asset and the asset's curtilage may not have the same extent.

The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to the visual relationship between the asset and the proposed development and associated visual/physical considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part in the assessment of impacts on setting, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust, smell and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places. For example, buildings that are in close proximity but are not visible from each other may have a historic or aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of the significance of each.

The contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage asset does not depend on there being public rights of way or an ability to otherwise access or experience that setting. The contribution may vary over time.

When assessing any application which may affect the setting of a heritage asset, local planning authorities may need to consider the implications of cumulative change. They may also need to consider the fact that developments which materially detract from the asset's significance may also damage its economic viability now, or in the future, thereby threatening its ongoing conservation."

Green infrastructure is the topic of para 004 (ID: 8-004-20190721) and states: "Green infrastructure can embrace a range of spaces and assets that provide environmental and wider benefits. It can, for example, include parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and 'blue infrastructure' such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies. References to green infrastructure in this guidance also apply to different types of blue infrastructure where appropriate."

Para 006 (ID: 8-006-20190721) then sets out that green infrastructure can help in:

- "Building a strong, competitive economy: Green infrastructure can drive economic growth and regeneration, helping to create high quality environments which are attractive to businesses and investors.
- Achieving well-designed places: The built environment can be enhanced by features such as green roofs, street trees, proximity to woodland, public gardens and recreational and open spaces. More broadly, green infrastructure exists within a wider landscape context and can reinforce and enhance local landscape character, contributing to a sense of place and natural beauty.
- Promoting healthy and safe communities: Green infrastructure can improve the wellbeing of a neighbourhood with opportunities for recreation, exercise, social interaction, experiencing and caring for nature, community food-growing and gardening, all of which can bring mental and physical health benefits. Outdoor Recreation Value (ORVal) is a useful online tool that can be used to quantify the recreational values provided by greenspace. Green infrastructure can help to reduce health inequalities in areas of socio-economic

deprivation and meet the needs of families and an ageing population. It can also help to reduce air pollution and noise.

- Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change: Green infrastructure can contribute to carbon storage, cooling and shading, opportunities for species migration to more suitable habitats and the protection of water quality and other natural resources. It can also be an integral part of multifunctional sustainable drainage and natural flood risk management.
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment: High-quality networks of multifunctional green infrastructure contribute a range of benefits, including ecological connectivity, facilitating biodiversity net gain and nature recovery networks and opportunities for communities to undertake conservation work.'

Guidance on trees and woodland is set out under the natural environment is set out within para 029 (ID 8-20190721) and states: 'Well-placed and well-chosen trees on streets and in urban spaces can provide a range of benefits: encouraging walking and enhanced physical and mental health; contributing to local environmental character and distinctiveness; providing habitats for wildlife; reducing noise and excessive heat; and supporting sustainable drainage. Changing climate, in particular hotter summers and more frequent periods of dry weather, and unknown pests and diseases, will place new pressures on green infrastructure in the long-term, so trees of the right species and age profile are essential'.

Para 036 (ID: 8-036-20190721) considers landscape and sets out that: 'The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally designated landscapes but also the wider countryside. Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence... The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.'

Open space, sports and recreation facilities are considered under para 001 (ID: 37-001-20140306) which states: 'Open space should be taken into account in planning for new development and considering proposals that may affect existing open space (see National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 96). Open space, which includes all open space of public value, can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. It can provide health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby; have an ecological value and contribute to green infrastructure (see National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 171, as well as being an important part of the landscape and setting of built development, and an important component in the achievement of sustainable development (see National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 7-9).'

National Design Guide

The National Design Guide (30 January 2021) illustrates how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. Paragraph 20 sets out the components of good design, including layout, form and scale, appearance, landscape, materials and detailing. The

10 characteristics of a well designed place are described in paragraph 36 as follows:

- Context - enhances the surroundings.
- Identity - attractive and distinctive.
- Built form - a coherent pattern of development.
- Movement - accessible and easy to move around.
- Nature - enhanced and optimised.
- Public spaces - safe, social and inclusive.
- Uses - mixed and integrated.
- Homes and buildings - functional, healthy and sustainable.
- Resources - efficient and resilient.
- Lifespan - made to last'.

National Model Design Code

The National Model Design Code forms part of the Planning Practice Guidance expanding on the characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide.

2.1.2 Development Plan

Wokingham Borough Adopted Core Strategy (2010)

The following policies are of relevance to the Site and this Lvia (including those policies that have an influence on design):

CP1- Sustainable development

'Development within the borough should enhance the overall sustainability of the area through minimising impact on the environment...'

Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that:

- Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment;
- Minimise the emission of pollutants into the wider environment;
- Limit any adverse effects on water quality (including ground water);
- Ensure the provision of adequate drainage;...
- Avoid areas of best and most versatile agricultural land;
- Avoid areas where pollution (including noise) may impact upon the amenity of future occupiers;
- Avoid increasing (and where possible reduce) risks of or from all forms of flooding (including from groundwater);
- Provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes...'

CP3- General Principles for Development

'Planning permission will be granted for proposals that:

- Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the

amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life;

- Provide a functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable scheme;
- Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses.
- Maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species;
- Use the full potential of the site and contribute to the support for suitable complementary facilities and uses;
- Contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping;
- Provide for a framework of open space in secure community use achieving at least 4.65 ha/1,000 population provision together with recreational/sporting facilities in addition to private amenity space;
- Contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities;
- Do not lead to a net loss of dwellings and other residential accommodation or land; and
- Do not lead to a loss of community or recreational facilities/ land or infrastructure unless suitable alternative provision is available'.

CP7- Biodiversity

'Sites designated as of importance for nature conservation at an international or national level will be conserved and enhanced and inappropriate development will be resisted. The degree of protection given will be appropriate to the status of the site in terms of its international or national importance.

Development:

A) Which may harm county designated sites (Local Wildlife Sites in Berkshire), whether directly or indirectly, or

B) Which may harm habitats or, species of principle importance in England for nature conservation, veteran trees or features of the landscape that are of major importance for wild flora and fauna (including wildlife and river corridors), whether directly or indirectly, or...'

CP11 Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)

'In order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:

1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and

2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings ..."

Wokingham Borough Adopted Managing Development Delivery Document (2014)

This document 'adds extra detail to the policies within the Core Strategy. Together, these two documents set out how the Borough will develop up until 2026'. The policies of relevance to the site are listed below (with those starting with CC being Cross cutting policies; and those TB being Topic based policies):

CC03: Green Infrastructure, trees and landscaping

'Policy CP1 – Sustainable Development of the Core Strategy seeks to maintain the high quality of the environment. Policy CP3 – General principles for development of the Core Strategy recognises the importance of sites both to maintain or enhance the ability of a site to support fauna or flora including protected species and policy CP4 – Infrastructure requirements also refers to the improvement or provision of infrastructure, community and other facilities.'

Policy CC03: Green Infrastructure enhances these Core Strategy policies in setting out how these criteria can be met by providing for or enhancing green corridors in developments'.

TB21: Landscape Character

'1. Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues.

2. Proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape'.

TB23: Biodiversity and Development

'Policy TB23: Biodiversity and Development enhances policy CP7 – Biodiversity of the Core Strategy. Policy CP7 refers to habitats or species of principle importance in England for nature conservation and designated sites are set out below.'

A) Sites of national or international importance

i. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and,

ii. Adjacent to the Borough, the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA).

B) Sites of local importance

i. Local Nature Reserves (LNR), as designated in consultation with Natural England, and as listed in Appendix 7

ii. Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) (these were previously known as Wildlife Heritage Sites)

iii. Local Geological Sites as set out in Appendix 8

iv. Ancient Woodlands'

TB26: Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character

'Planning permission will only be granted for proposals to or affecting Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character where they demonstrate that they retain and enhance the traditional, historical, local and special character of the building or area and its setting'.

2.1.3 Material Considerations

In addition to the above and landscape character assessment and associated landscape guidance and strategies, the following are also considered as material considerations.

Wokingham Borough Design Guide (2012)

The purpose of the Wokingham Borough Design Guide is to ensure that all new development within the borough is of high quality and responds sensitively and positively to its local context. As an SPD, it provides detailed guidance on how to interpret and apply policies in the Core Strategy, particularly in relation to design, landscape character, open space, streetscape, and building form.

Its guidance ensures that development proposals not only respect but actively contribute to the visual and environmental quality of their setting. The structure and content of the guide, including topic-based policies and design checklists provide a comprehensive reference for the design process.

Wokingham Borough Council Open Space, Sports and Recreation Strategy (2013)

The strategy supports the implementation of Policy TB08 of the MDD, guiding how open space, sport, and recreational standards are to be applied across residential developments. It ensures high-quality, accessible facilities for current and future communities up to 2026.

Regarding amenity greenspace, it states: "The Council expects that this typology should be aimed at providing useable public open space such as unequipped children's play space, pocket parks for informal recreation and visual amenity space. However the council does not consider road verges and roundabout centres etc. can be considered as contributing to this typology

The Council expects a minimum facility size of 0.4ha although it may be possible to consider a smaller minimum facility size if it can be demonstrated that the proposed space is particularly useable or valuable in the local context."

Concerning Children's play, it states: "The Council is committed to the provision of a wide range of children's play facilities that are fully inclusive and suitable for the entire age range, both genders and disabled children. The council is keen to encourage innovative and imaginative approaches to children's play provision and would welcome schemes that incorporate elements of natural play and/or Local landscaped Areas of Play (LLAP) where this is deemed to be appropriate."

Wokingham Borough Council Valued Landscapes Assessment (2024)

The council is preparing a new local plan – the Local Plan Update (LPU), that will guide sustainable development across the borough in the period to 2040. A series of public consultations have been undertaken to inform the LPU.

The Draft Plan proposed a spatial strategy to meet development needs and a series of development management policies to guide future decisions on planning applications. Policy NE6 (Landscape Character, Value and Green Routes) set out the

proposed policy approach to the protection and enhancement of landscape character across the borough. The policy proposed to designate 11 areas as 'valued landscapes'.

Development proposals in these valued landscapes are expected to protect and enhance the valued landscapes as a whole. The council takes this to include protecting and enhancing their character, quality, attributes and their interpretation.

The Site is located within the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape, one of the 11 areas identified in the Draft Plan. This area was identified through the council's Valued Landscapes Assessment. While the Local Plan Update has not yet been adopted, the assessment provides up-to-date landscape evidence and is therefore a relevant material consideration.

3.0

Landscape Character

3.1 Published Landscape Character

The term 'landscape' commonly refers to the view or appearance of the land as perceived by people. Landscape applies to any natural, rural, urban or urban edge areas, in land, water and seascape areas.

Landscape character is the combination of both natural / physical, cultural / social and perceptual / aesthetic influences, which give rise to a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse and which define the 'sense of place'. The landscape is not therefore simply a visual phenomenon.

The following sections set out the landscape character framework of the study area from the national level through to the district and parish scale based upon existing character assessments undertaken by Wokingham Borough Council.

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019)

The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2019 is an updated version of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment, 2004. The documents are cited and referenced within the current and emerging Local Plans. In both Landscape Character Assessments, the Site lies within Landscape Character Area (LCA) G1 Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes.

LCA G1 is described as "gently sloping landform supporting a farmed landscape with an intimate mosaic of arable fields and pasture interspersed with small woodland blocks. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of rural hamlets, scattered farmsteads and large manor houses".

Key characteristics of the Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes include:

- Sloping and gently undulating landform between 45 and 85m AOD which creates a transition between the flatter open ground of the Arable Chalk Lowland (H1) and hilly landscape of the Wooded Chalk Knolls (F1). The chalk formations are overlain by clayey sands of the Lambeth Group and London Clay. Poor drainage of the clay soils has resulted in roadside ditches and small farm ponds.
- Mixed agricultural land use of arable and pastoral fields, with compartmentalised land for horse grazing and exercising.
- An irregular pattern of small to medium sized field units bound by well-maintained hedgerows or wooden post and rail fencing. Larger fields in the south and west reflect the

transition towards the arable farming of the chalk lowlands. Smaller irregular fields adjoin steeper ground on the woodland edge including pockets of well-preserved field systems of pre18th century assarts.

- Numerous small woodland blocks and roadside belts of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, characteristically a combination of oak, ash and hazel, many of which are ancient. The ecological importance is recognised through LWS designation at Fairman's Wood/ Little Fairman's Wood, Cutler's Coppice, Scarlett's Wood and Square Wood.
- A scattered rural settlement pattern of small linear villages and hamlets which align roads or form small clusters at crossroads as well as individual farmsteads, stud farms and large manors. These are connected by a network of leafy rural lanes crossing the landscape.
- A high number of listed buildings are scattered across landscape with clusters at Crazies Hill, Hare Hatch and Kiln Green.
- Landscaped parkland surrounding Georgian or Victorian manor houses, such as the moated manor at Bear Place (Scheduled Monument), Linden Hall and Yeldhall Manor (both Grade II listed), with its avenue of large but still young Wellingtonias. These parklands impart a designed character to parts of the landscape.
- An intimate landscape with a strong sense of enclosure created by the undulating landform and the scattered woodland blocks, which is exaggerated by the wooded horizon of neighbouring knolls at Bowsey Hill (F1).
- Tranquil farmed and estate character interrupted to the south by the busy A4 and the linear development of industrial and commercial properties alongside it.

Landscape Guidelines are described as:

- "Conserve existing woodland copse and belts including ancient woodlands. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland."
- Manage the integration of new woodland coppice using locally occurring native species and following the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnecting valley. Seek to avoid the introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the rural qualities of the farmed landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field

margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.

- Conserve, manage, and enhance hedgerow field boundaries with standard oaks as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.
- Conserve, protect, and enhance the intricate pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve, protect, and enhance the parkland landscapes associated with historic manor houses, planning for the next generation of parkland trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities and hobby farms into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and control of associated built elements.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued woodland habitats including BAP priority habitats and those designated as LWS. The area of land at around Linden Hill is part of the Bowsey Hills BOA and part of Crazies Hill is included within the Chiltern's Escarpment BOA. The network of diverse natural woodland habitats has been identified as a target for woodland habitat restoration, including replanting of ancient woodland sites. An appropriate woodland management regime is critical.
- Conserve the value of the numerous listed and historic buildings including farmsteads and large country manor houses and the parkland landscape associated with them.
- Conserve the individual identity of the villages and hamlets, farmsteads and manors through control of new development. In particular avoid the spread of linear development along the A4.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the historic leafy lanes with their ancient trees and unimproved road side verges. Resist unsympathetic highway improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural areas.
- Protect the views to the wooded knolls at Bowsey Hill and consider the effect of any change on the wooded hills on this adjacent area.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and intimate character of the landscape through the management of development."

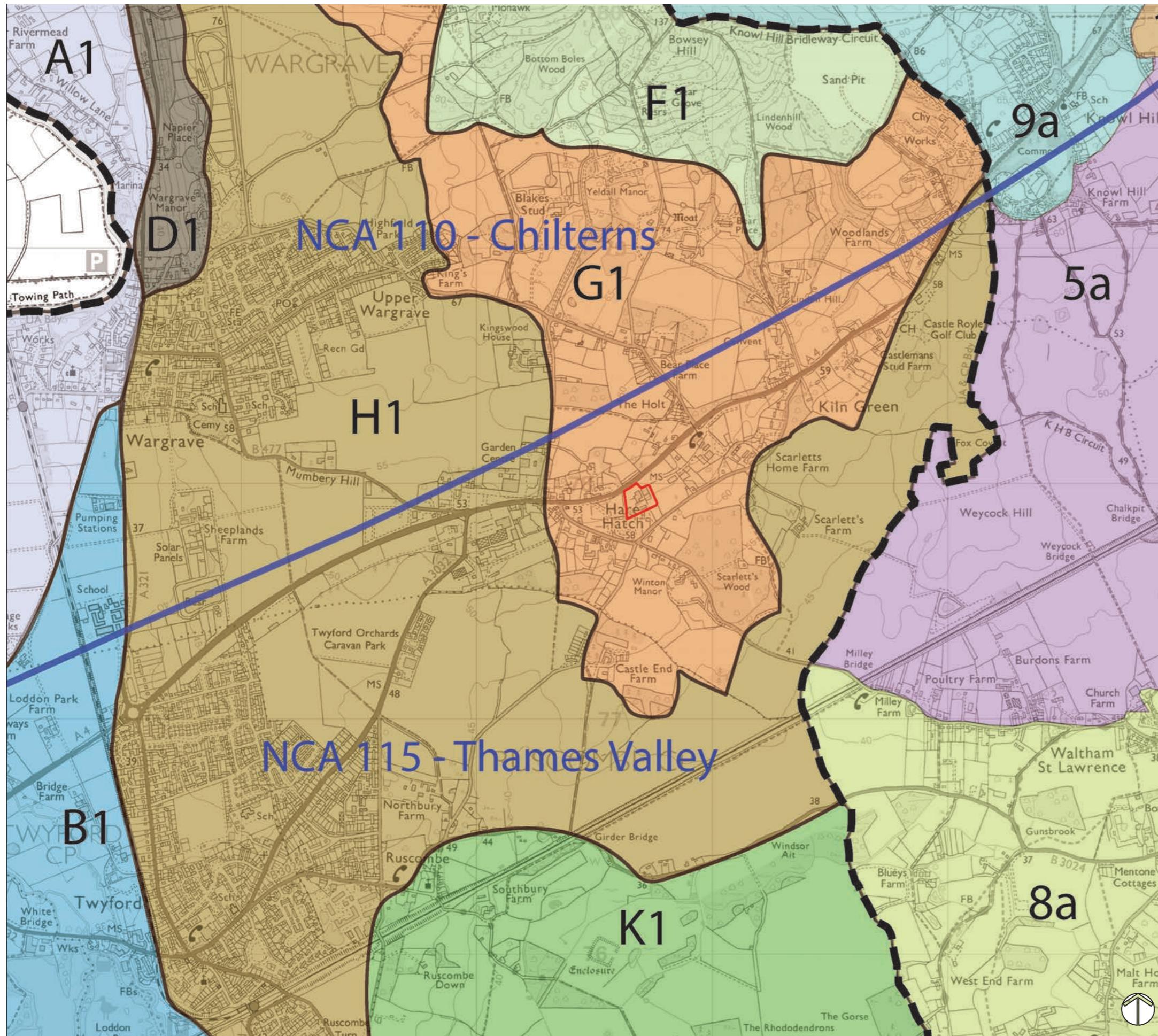


Figure 3.1 – Landscape Character Areas (fabrik, 2025)

3.2 Contextual Landscape Appraisal

Landform and Drainage

As illustrated in figure 3.3 overleaf, the area around the Site has a gently sloping, undulating landform, with ground levels typically between 45 and 85 metres above sea level. This variation creates a subtle sense of enclosure, particularly where it's reinforced by woodland. The Site lies within a transitional landscape, sitting between the flatter chalk lowlands to the south and the more elevated, wooded hills to the north.

The underlying geology is a mix of clayey sands and London Clay over chalk, which gives rise to clay-rich soils that drain poorly. This is reflected in the presence of roadside ditches and small ponds dotted around the area. These conditions, as described by the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment, make the land less suited to intensive arable farming and have shaped the area's current land use and vegetation.

Vegetation Cover

The local landscape has a varied mix of vegetation, with a patchwork of farmland interspersed with small to medium-sized woodlands. These include ancient and semi-natural woodlands such as Scarlett's Wood to the south west of the Site and Bowsey Wood to the north. The tree cover is typically made up of oak, ash, and hazel, many of which were historically managed through coppicing. That management has largely ceased, and some woodlands now show signs of neglect.

The woodland blocks and roadside vegetation break up the landscape visually and contribute to a strong sense of enclosure. Roadside vegetation, especially along the A4, provides substantial containment and effectively limits any mid to long-range views. Several of these areas are designated as Local Wildlife Sites or priority habitats, highlighting their ecological value. The presence of ponds, some known to support protected species like great crested newts, adds to the area's biodiversity.

Land Use

Land use around the Site is primarily agricultural, with a mix of arable fields and pasture. Field sizes and shapes are quite varied ranging from larger, more open fields in the south and west to smaller, more irregular plots near the woodland edges. This irregular field pattern points to a history of gradual, piecemeal woodland clearance, rather than planned enclosure.

There is also some equestrian use locally, and in these areas, field boundaries tend to be more temporary or ad hoc in appearance. Across the landscape, boundaries are typically defined by hedgerows or post-and-rail fencing. As described by the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment, this creates a rural patchwork of land uses that feels organic and unplanned, contributing to the character of the area. Garden centres are also commonplace around Hare Hatch, forming a notable part of the local land use and character.

Settlement Pattern

The settlement pattern around the Site is scattered and rural. Hare Hatch and nearby Kiln Green are small hamlets along the A4 corridor, both of which retain a number of listed buildings. There is a mix of building types in Hare Hatch, including historic vernacular buildings such as former coaching inns and farmhouses. Large detached houses and farmsteads are interspersed with garden centres, a notable feature of the area, contributing to the mixed-use semi-commercial feel. There are also small clusters of dwellings or individual properties that extend along minor lanes that branch from the A4, but there is no central core or village green typically associated with more nucleated settlements.

The Site is located adjacent to the Hare Hatch Special Area of Conservation, which identifies areas or groups of buildings that exhibit a coherent historic character or reflect a consistent period of development, but where formal Conservation Area designation is not currently justified. This locally recognised area encompasses a cluster of heritage assets and buildings of historic interest to the west of the Site. These include the Grade II listed Old House and its associated grounds, as well as Grade II listed Hill House and its listed outbuildings, both located off Milley Lane. The Horse and Groom public house, situated at the junction of Milley Lane and the A4, also falls within this area, along with a number of two-storey residential properties located to the north of the A4 that contribute to the area's traditional built character. As illustrated in Photograph F, construction is also currently underway for the development of a new 4 bedroom detached dwelling, garage and workshop, plus associated parking and landscaping (ref: 220521) that lies adjacent to the Site.

Time Depth

Place names in the area hint at past uses, such as seasonal pasture linked to the Royal Forest of Windsor, or woodland used for pannage. Historic estates and parklands, some still evident in the landscape, further reflect this long evolution of land use and ownership. As noted in the character assessment, parts of this area contain some of the best-preserved early enclosure landscapes in the borough.

Perceptual and Aesthetic Qualities

The overall character of the landscape is quiet, rural, and somewhat enclosed. Wooded horizons, narrow lanes, and small fields give it an intimate feel. Views are often limited by tree cover or subtle changes in topography, and there is a strong sense of containment, especially when compared with the more open landscapes to the south.

Despite some commercial activity along the A4, the wider area has a strong sense of place. The Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment recognises this combination of small-scale structure, ecological richness, and visual enclosure as key to the area's distinctive character.



Figure 3.2 – Land Cover (fabrik, 2025)

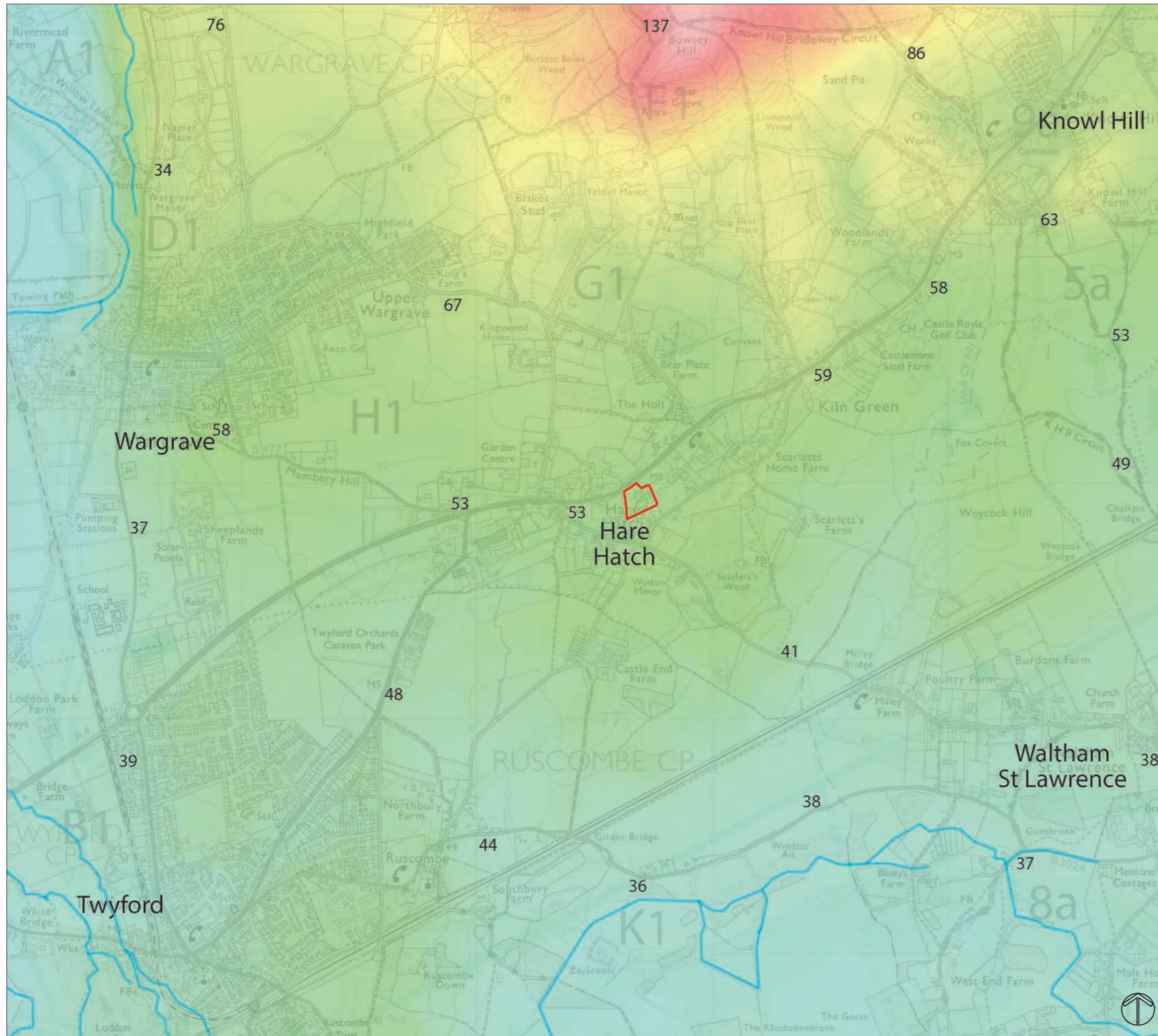


Figure 3.3 – Topography and Drainage (fabrik, 2025)

3.3 Site and Immediate Context Appraisal

Figure 3.4 illustrates the key components of the Site's character and associated photographs, taken on 15th May 2025 are set out overleaf.

Landform and drainage

The Site is relatively flat, sitting consistently at approximately 55 metres AOD, and lacks significant internal topographic variation, except for some localised undulations around a former pond area in the northwest corner.

Although the Site itself is level, it lies within a gently undulating wider landscape that slopes from higher wooded ground to the north towards the lower chalk lowlands in the south.

Vegetation Cover

Vegetation across the Site is generally unmanaged. As illustrated in Photograph A, there are overgrown thickets of shrubs, particularly in peripheral areas, and scattered areas of grass and ruderal vegetation. Some small areas of managed shrub planting remain, notably around the car park as shown in Photograph B. A tall hedgerow defines part of the eastern boundary (Photograph C), while to the west, a mature woodland block provides strong visual containment beyond the boundary fenceline (Photograph D).

The A4 / Bath Road is by-large a very well vegetated transport corridor and is identified in local policy as a Green Infrastructure Route (CC03). In contrast, as demonstrated in Photograph B, the north western boundary along the A4 is relatively open, with only intermittent screening provided from a line of Oak and Scots pine, exposing the Site to views from the road. A waist-height wooden fence also runs along this boundary, but it offers little screening value. Along the Sites northeastern boundary that fronts the car park, there runs a strip of well maintained shrubs and trees.

Key Natural Elements, Features and characteristics

The most notable natural feature within the Site is the pond located in the northwest corner, shown in Photograph E. This area introduces localised variation in landform and supports wetland-style planting, offering some ecological interest and limited habitat potential. The pond is a valuable landscape feature that softens the otherwise degraded character of the Site.

In addition, mature boundary vegetation, particularly along the western edge, and parts of the eastern boundary, provides strong visual containment and contributes to the sense of enclosure. This vegetative screening helps to integrate the Site into its wooded and rural surroundings.

Aside from these elements, the Site is predominantly a brownfield landscape, characterised by poorly maintained structures, overgrown hardstanding, and unmanaged scrub vegetation.

Land Use

The garden centre is not use as intensively as it appears to have been in the past. The main uses now include some plant sales inside of the main garden centre buildings, as well as turf, sand, and gravel storage and sales. As illustrated in Photograph F, this ongoing semi-industrial activity contributes to the Site's hybrid character, where the garden centre retail use, overlaps with other commercial uses. Beyond the main built structures, the land is visually fragmented, with outbuildings, sheds, and informal yard areas in various states of disrepair. As illustrated in Photograph G and H, adjacent land to the south includes further garden centre outbuildings, areas of hardstanding, and residential properties at The Hollies.

Built form

As illustrated in Photograph I and J, built form within the Site is low-rise, consisting primarily of single-storey sheds, glasshouses, and the main derelict garden centre building. These structures are scattered and irregular in layout. The overall grain is loose and informal, and many structures are in poor condition, contributing to a neglected appearance.

The most visually prominent built structure on the Site is a large multi bay covered sales and storage area. These steel frame structures are low-rise but horizontally extensive, with arched roofs and plastic covering that has become heavily weathered and discoloured. The main garden centre building, illustrated in Photograph B and J, is also prominent on the Site.

The skyline of the Site is often screened by trees, particularly to the west and east. As illustrated in Photograph B, the openness of the A4 frontage exposes the garden centre's main building and the upper extents of the green house unit to immediate views, with the built form behind screened.

As illustrated in Photograph F, immediately outside the Site but within the Hare Hatch Area of Special Character, construction is currently underway for a new four-bedroom detached dwelling with an associated garage, workshop, parking, and landscaping. The property is designed with hipped roofs finished in red tiles and is configured over 2.5 storeys, reflecting a traditional yet substantial residential form. Positioned directly adjacent to and overlooking the Site, this new development reinforces the residential context of the wider Hare Hatch area.

Perceptual / Aesthetic Qualities

The Site carries a strong association with its use as a garden centre, now largely defunct, and with the commercial uses and plant sales that continues in a reduced form.

The wider area of Hare Hatch retains a degree of rural tranquillity, particularly along smaller lanes and within enclosed wooded sections. However, the A4 corridor introduces constant traffic movement and noise, and this affects the northern part of the Site, reducing perceptual tranquillity. The ongoing commercial use by suppliers also detracts from any sense of remoteness.

The Site itself does not pertain or contribute strongly to natural beauty, with its brownfield condition, degraded built form, and unmanaged vegetation.

As discussed in the visual appraisal in the following section, the Site is well-contained from any distant or elevated views, and

does not form part of a wider scenic panorama or landmarked viewing experience. Its visual influence is limited only to close-range receptors, and even then, intermittent screening and mature vegetation restrict the Site's prominence.

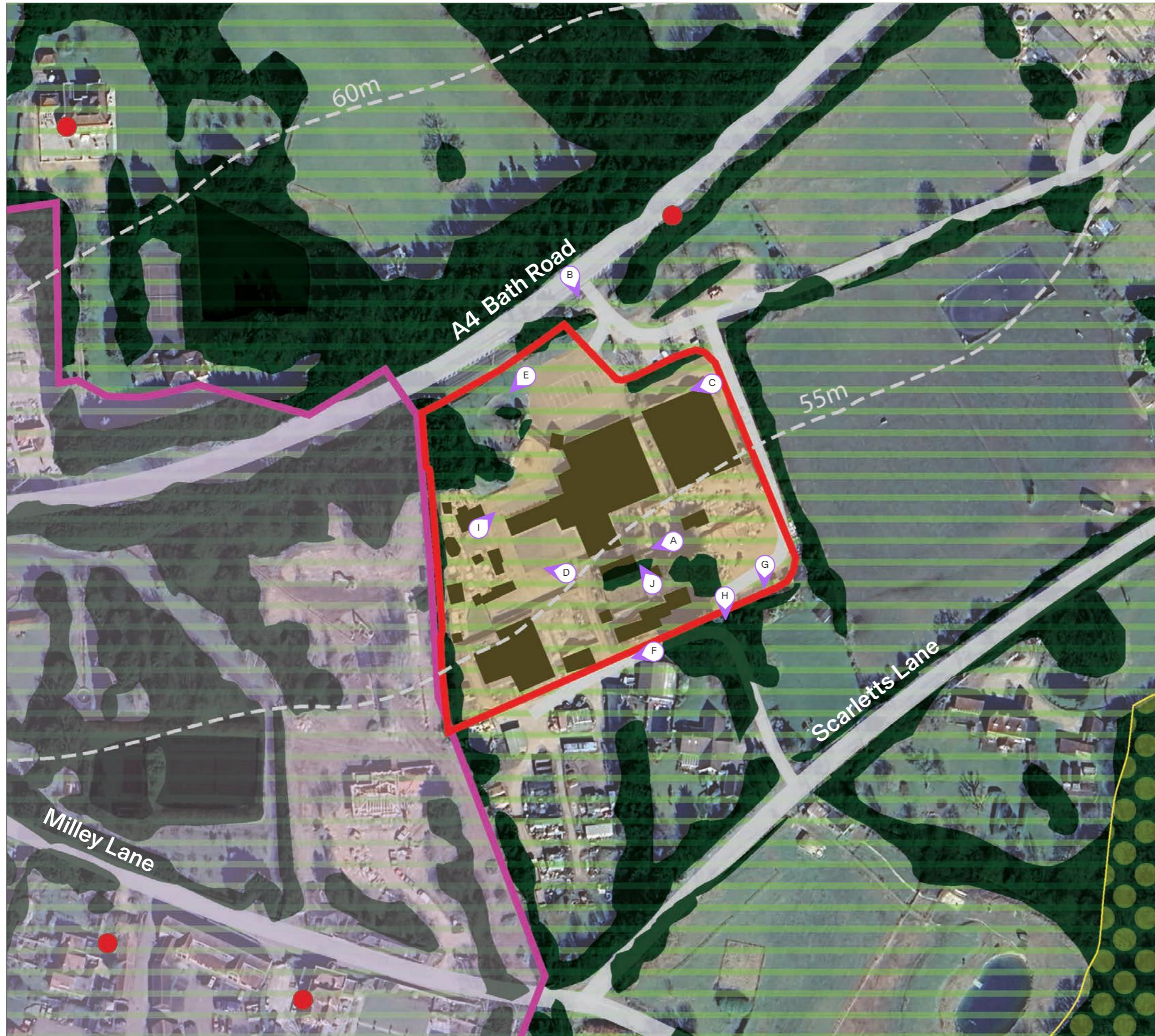


Figure 3.4 – Site landscape appraisal with photograph locations (fabrik, 2025)

- Site boundary
- Existing Buildings
- Existing Hard Standing
- Existing Woodland / Vegetation
- Road corridor
- Listed building
- Green Belt
- Area of Special Character
- Ancient Woodland
- 50 Contour
- Viewpoint location



Photograph A
View looking west from within the Site, demonstrating the unmanaged and ruderal nature of the on-site vegetation.



Photograph B
View looking south from the A4, illustrating the degree of planting along the Site's north western boundary and extent of existing built form visible from the road.





Photograph C
View looking west at the Site's eastern boundary, which in part comprises a mature and managed hedgerow.



Photograph D
View looking west at the Site's western boundary that comprises the fenceline, beyond which there is robust blocks of woodland planting.



Site boundary
 Photo location



Photograph E
View looking west at the feature pond / wetland area at the Site's northwestern corner.



Photograph F
View looking south from within the Site, illustrating the commercial land use. To the left, construction is currently underway for the development of a new residential property within the Hare Hatch Area of Special Character.





Photograph G
View looking south beyond the Site's arbitrary southern boundary.



Photograph H
View looking south beyond the Site's arbitrary southern boundary towards 'The Hollies'.



Site boundary
Photo location



Photograph I
View looking west within the Site, demonstrating its brownfield and unkempt nature in parts.



Photograph J
View looking east towards the main garden centre building.



 Site boundary
 Photo location

4.0

Visual Assessment

4.1 Overview

The extent to which the Site is visible from the surrounding landscape is based on grading degrees of visibility. It has been determined through a visual inspection of the Site and its context from roads, public rights of way and properties.

Seasonal change in existing evergreen and deciduous plant material will affect the available views. Typically views will be different through the seasons with a greater sense of enclosure in the summer months when deciduous trees are in leaf. The viewpoint photography was completed on 15th May 2025. Summer views have therefore been provided.

The photographs have been taken in line with the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 6/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals (Landscape Institute, 2019) and are presented at the same scale and resolution, with viewpoint location plans for reference. Full size extracts, presented in accordance with TGN 6/19 can be provided at request.

The Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 2/19 Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (Landscape Institute, 2019) has informed the approach to the assessment of residential visual amenity, within the scope of this report.

- Site boundary
- Open view location (the whole site / much of the site is visible, or where the Site forms much of the view)
- Partial view location (some of the Site is visible, or where the Site forms a small part of the wider view)
- Truncated view location (the Site is obscured by intervening elements, or is difficult to perceive)



Figure 4.1 - Visual Summary from local area (fabrik, 2025)

4.2 Visual Assessment

The Site's visual envelope is highly constrained, largely due to mature vegetation both within and surrounding the Site, as well as the relatively level landform of the surrounding landscape. The degree of openness is low, with views primarily contained to its immediate boundaries and rarely extending into the wider landscape. The character of views into the Site offer minimal amenity value. The experience of the Site varies depending on the viewer type, but generally, the Site is only perceptible from close-range receptors, such as users of the A4 and adjacent residential properties.

Public Rights of Way

Users of nearby PRoW have no visibility of the Site due to woodland and established field boundaries. To summarise:

- WARG49 (to the west): Views of the Site are fully obstructed by The Wood and strong field boundary planting. The alignment of the path and intervening vegetation prevent any visibility of the Site.
- WARG50 (to the east): This route runs east of Scarleets Wood, which fully obscures any potential visibility toward the Site.
- WARG6 (south of Scarleets Lane): Views are contained along the footpath by mature hedgerow and planting on both sides, which restrict intervisibility with the Site.
- Bowsey Hill PRoW network (north): Located within a highly enclosed woodland landscape, this network offers no views towards the Site due to distance and the heavy woodland coverage.

Overall, the PRoW network provides little to no visual interaction with the Site, with the landscape structure ensuring complete containment.

Public Open Spaces

Public open spaces are limited in the surrounding area:

- Bowsey Hill Footpaths: These form the main open space walking network but, as noted, are visually separated from the Site by dense woodland.
- Wargrave Recreation Ground (to the northwest): This is the nearest accessible open space, however, views towards the Site are curtailed by mature intervening vegetation, including belts of trees and hedgerows. As such, the Site is not perceptible from this location.

Transport Corridors

- A4 (Bath Road): The A4 forms the Site's northern boundary and is the principal visual receptor. The road is typically lined with mature vegetation that contains views, however, this containment is less effective in the immediate vicinity of the Site's entrance, where screening is weaker. At this location, users experience open and direct views into the car park and of the garden centre's main building and multi bay sales and storage buildings.
- Scarleets Lane: A narrow, rural lane to the south, with scattered dwellings and very little vehicle traffic. Tree cover and hedgerows along the lane restrict visibility into the Site. Views are largely screened except near The Hollies where there are glimpses.

Residential

Residential views are extremely limited:

- The Hollies (to the south): These are the only residential properties that directly interface with the Site. Rear-facing windows and gardens have partial and glimpsed views towards the Site through a thin layer of trees and garden vegetation (see Photograph H). The perception of the Site is filtered but still evident due to its proximity.
- Scarleets Lane and the A4 corridor: Other residential properties along these roads are sporadically located and are typically well enclosed within treed plots or located behind vegetated frontages. Combined with roadside vegetation, this results in minimal to no visibility toward the Site from these properties.

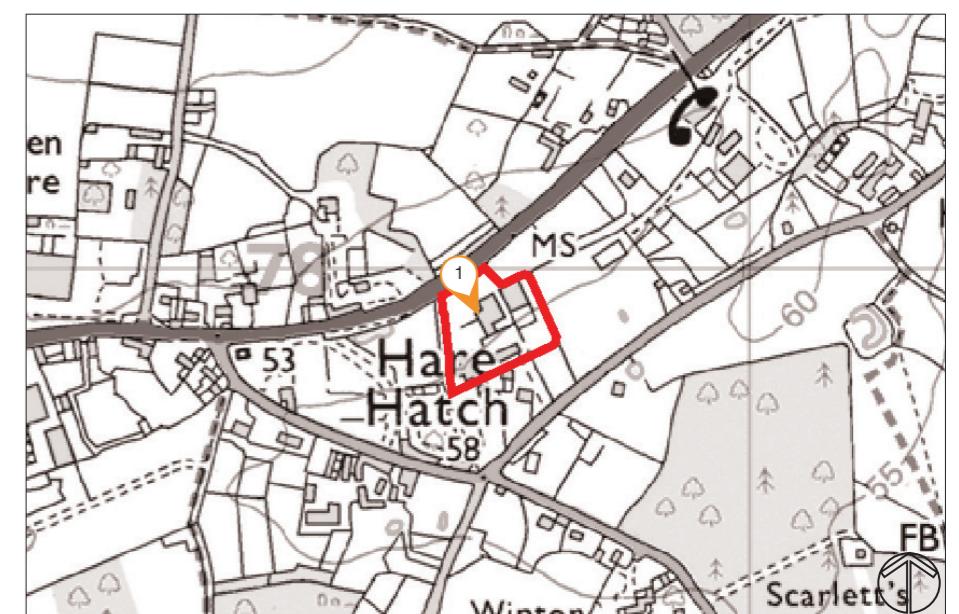
Summary

The Site is visually well-contained, with only limited localised visibility for short-range receptors. The main visual exposure is along the A4 corridor, where the entrance offers a glimpse into the car park and garden centre buildings. Aside from this, residential visibility is sparse and filtered, and the wider public rights of way network and public spaces are effectively screened.



Viewpoint 1			
Receptors	Elevation	Distance from site	Description of view
Road users travelling along the A4 (Bath Road).	54m AOD	<5m	View looking south towards the Site at the access point to Ladds Garden Village. As illustrated, the Ladds Garden Centre's main building and poly-tunnels are visible in the mid-ground of the view, beyond the intervening carpark. The remainder of the Site is hidden from the view by these structures. Ornamental shrubs and a belt of mature trees line the road and provide a degree of screening along the Site's northern boundary.

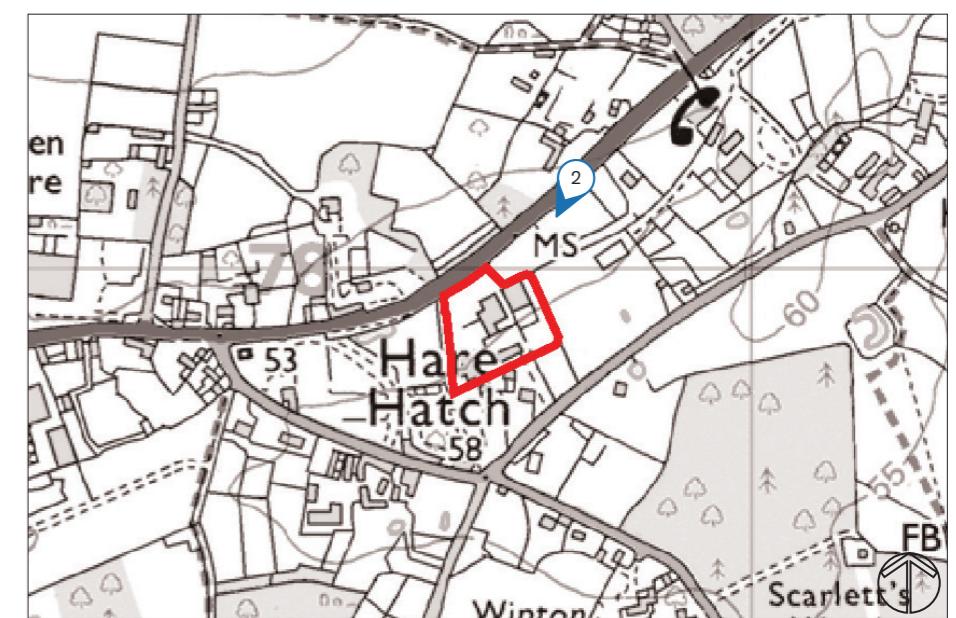
- Site boundary
- 21 Viewpoint location – open view
- 21 Viewpoint location – partial view
- 21 Viewpoint location – truncated view





Viewpoint 2			
Receptors	Elevation	Distance from site	Description of view
Road users travelling along the A4 (Bath Road).	56m AOD	168m	View looking southwest along the A4. Other than directly outside of the Site's northern boundary at the access to Ladd's Garden Village (Viewpoint 1), views of the Site from the road are curtailed by robust belts of tree planting.

- Site boundary
- 21 Viewpoint location – open view
- 21 Viewpoint location – partial view
- 21 Viewpoint location – truncated view

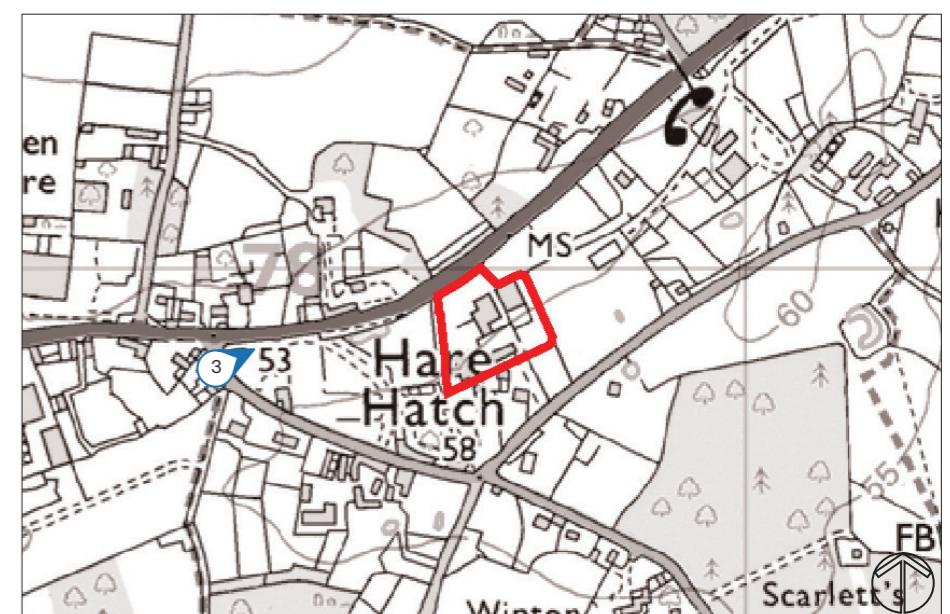


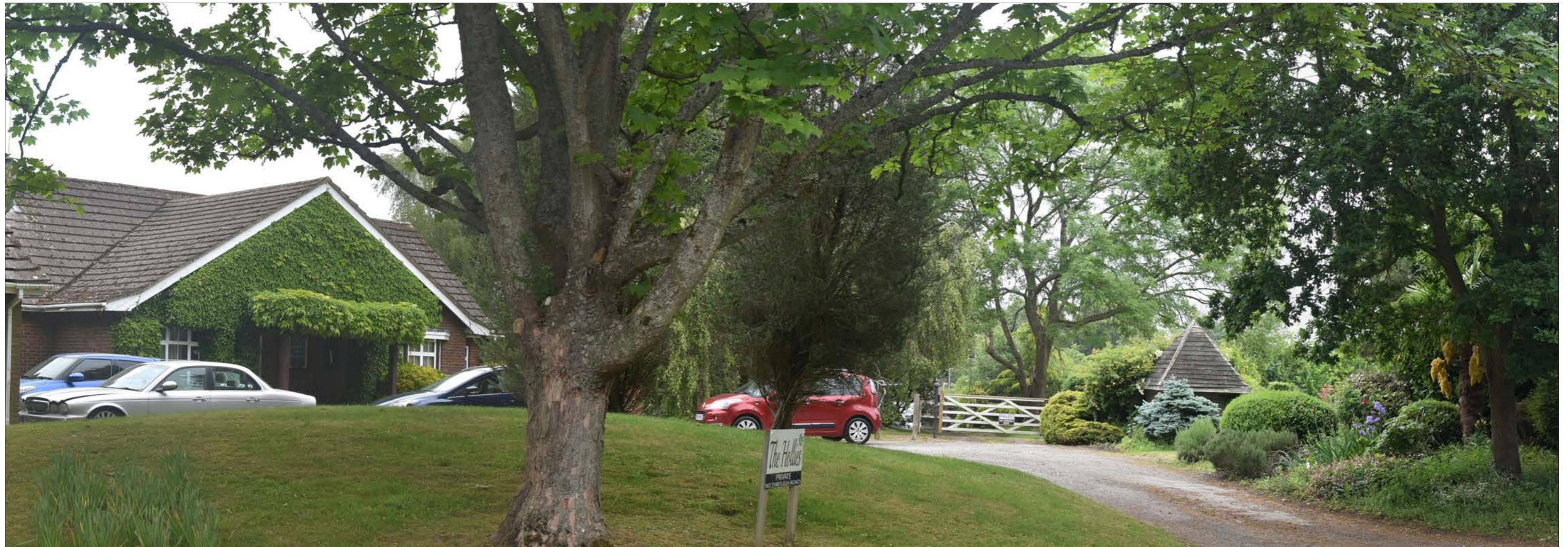


Viewpoint 3

Receptors	Elevation	Distance from site	Description of view
Road users travelling along Milley Lane	55m AOD	265m	View looking east from Milley Lane. Views towards the Site along this road in general are entirely obstructed by a combination of fencing and mature blocks of vegetation.

- Site boundary
- 21 Viewpoint location – open view
- 21 Viewpoint location – partial view
- 21 Viewpoint location – truncated view

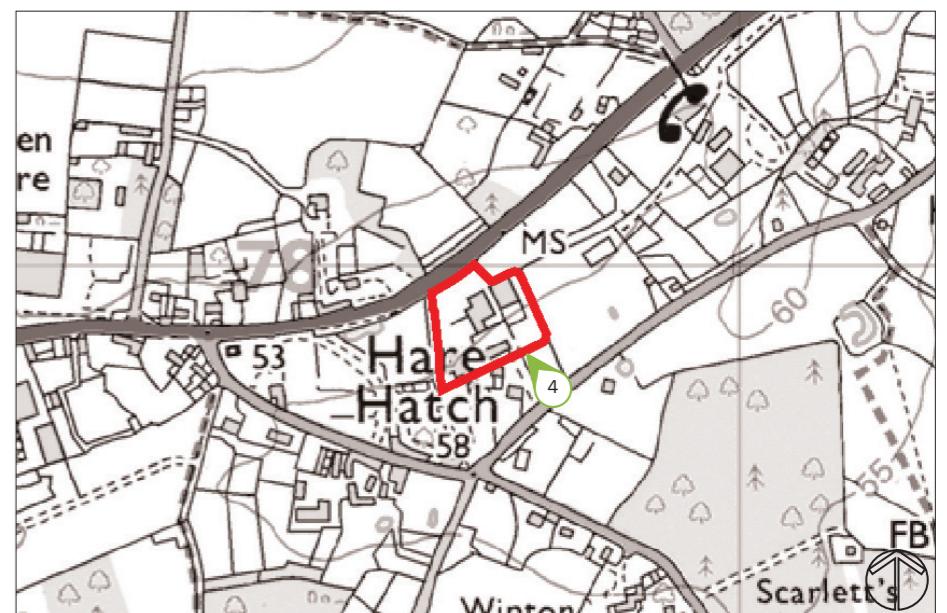




Viewpoint 4

Receptors	Elevation	Distance from site	Description of view
Road users travelling along Scarleets Lane	61m AOD	68m	View looking north from Scarleets Lane across 'The Hollies' residential drive way. The Site is not directly discernible, however development may introduce glimpses of additional built form into the background of the view, albeit would be framed in the context of the existing residential property.

- Site boundary
- 21 Viewpoint location – open view
- 21 Viewpoint location – partial view
- 21 Viewpoint location – truncated view

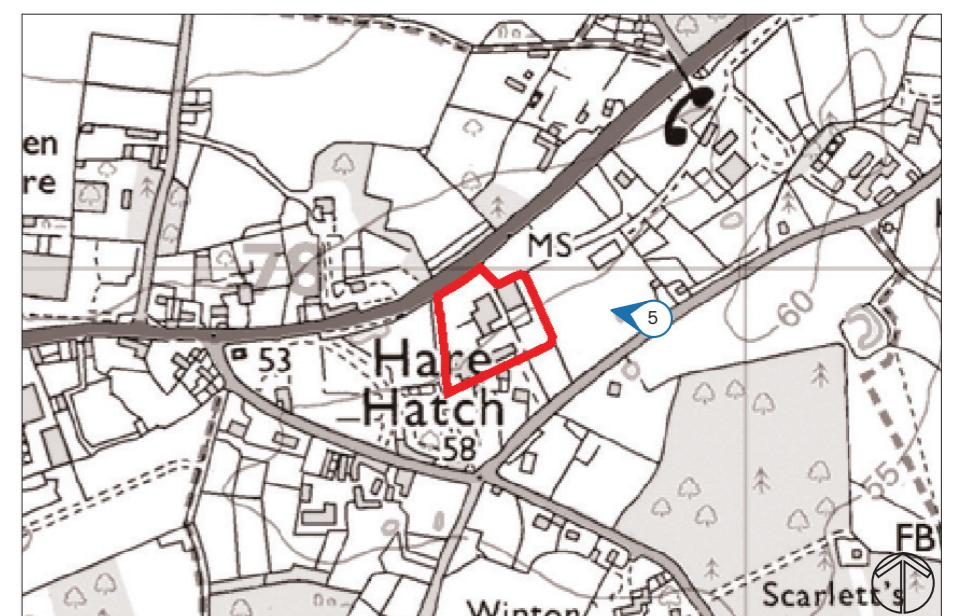




Viewpoint 5

Receptors	Elevation	Distance from site	Description of view
Road users travelling along Scarlests Lane	60m AOD	140m	View looking northwest from Scarlests Lane. The Site is contained from the view and along the road in general by a mixture of roadside trees, tall shrubs, and an agricultural outbuildings.

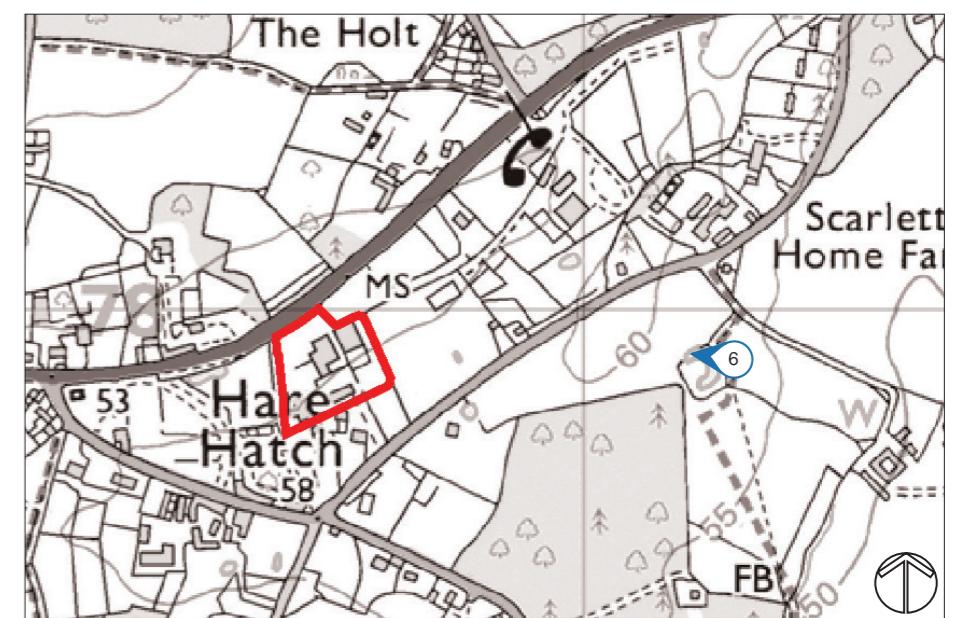
- Site boundary
- 21 Viewpoint location – open view
- 21 Viewpoint location – partial view
- 21 Viewpoint location – truncated view





Viewpoint 6			
Receptors	Elevation	Distance from site	Description of view
Those using PRoW	57m AOD	410m	View looking west from the PRoW south of Scarlett Home Farm. Views of the Site from this footpath are entirely screened by blocks of tree planting, namely those associated with Scarleets Wood.

- Site boundary
- 21 Viewpoint location – open view
- 21 Viewpoint location – partial view
- 21 Viewpoint location – truncated view

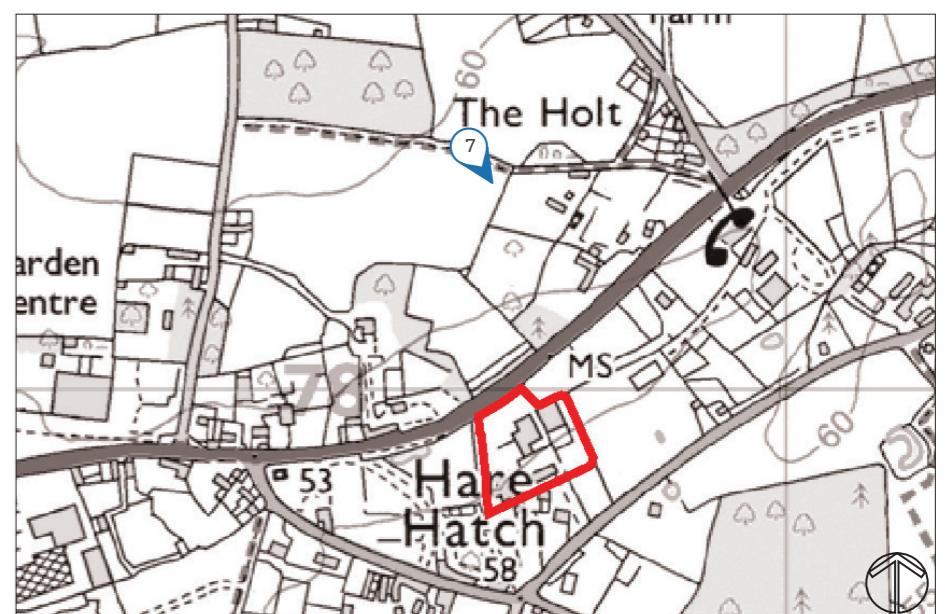




Viewpoint 7

Receptors	Elevation	Distance from site	Description of view
Those using PRoW	59m AOD	325m	View looking south from the PRoW at The Holt. Views towards the Site are entirely screened by vegetation belts that contain the footpath and prevent views out towards the wider landscape in general.

- Site boundary
- 21 Viewpoint location – open view
- 21 Viewpoint location – partial view
- 21 Viewpoint location – truncated view



5.0

Summary of Baseline Assessment

5.1 Landscape and Visual Considerations

Based on the initial desktop analysis and field work, the following landscape and visual constraints and opportunities have been identified to inform the iterative masterplan design process:

Opportunities

- Mature vegetation along the western and parts of the eastern boundary provides strong visual containment. These areas can be retained and enhanced to bolster Site enclosure and visual integration.
- The pond in the northwest corner offers ecological and visual interest, contributing positively to the landscape character. Potential to enhance biodiversity and introduce amenity value.
- The Site is well-contained visually, with limited views from the public realm and PROW network. This minimises the potential for wider landscape and visual impacts from development.
- Bath Road, located to the north of the Site, is identified as a Green Infrastructure Route under local planning policy. Any development of the Site should seek to retain and enhance this vegetated corridor, which in turn will provide ecological connectivity and contribute to the visual amenity and character of the wider landscape setting.
- The construction of a new detached dwelling with associated outbuildings immediately adjacent to the Site reinforces the area's evolving residential character. This introduces an opportunity to respond sensitively to nearby built form in terms of scale, design, and landscape integration.

Constraints

- The main point of visual exposure is from the A4, particularly at the Site entrance, where screening is minimal. This corridor is a key constraint in terms of visual impact and first impressions.
- Proximity to Residential Properties (The Hollies). Partial visibility from adjacent dwellings means that any redevelopment must be sensitive to overlooking and amenity impacts.
- The Site is located adjacent to the Hare Hatch Area of Special Character. While the Site does not fall within this designation, any future development should be carefully designed to respect the setting, scale, and character of this historic environment, ensuring visual and contextual compatibility.

5.2 Recommended Embedded Mitigation Strategies

This mitigation strategy has been developed through desktop analysis of the landscape character assessments and historic mapping as well as field work to understand the landscape and visual constraints and opportunities identified above. The resulting mitigation strategy incorporates recommendations as set out in published landscape character assessments and reinforces the strategies set out in green infrastructure supplementary planning guidance. The key principles of which are:

- Retain and strengthen existing mature trees and hedgerows, particularly along the western and eastern boundaries, to maintain containment.
- Supplement planting along the A4 frontage with native tree and hedgerow species to screen views of the entrance and built form, using a layered structure of hedgerows, shrubs, and small trees.
- Enhance and expand the pond area to improve biodiversity value, sustainable drainage, and the overall visual amenity of the Site. The space surrounding the pond can be sensitively designed as a public open space (POS) incorporating a Local Area for Play (LAP), creating a landscape focal point that adds functional and aesthetic value. This enhanced green infrastructure will also contribute to a positive, natural frontage along the A4, helping to visually soften and offset built development from the road while reinforcing the Site's integration with the surrounding landscape and Green Infrastructure Route.
- Design new dwellings to respond sensitively to the surrounding built context, namely existing development within the Hare Hatch Area of Special Character. Building heights should generally remain modest, between 2 and 2.5 storeys.
- Use natural materials, such as timber, brick, and adopt muted tones to ensure new development is visually integrated into the Hare Hatch Area of Special Character and respects the setting of nearby heritage assets.
- Along the interface with The Hollies, implement visual buffers such as tree belts or native hedgerows to provide privacy and soften the view of new development.

6.0

Development Proposals

6.1 Description of the Proposed Development

Land Use

The proposed development comprises the complete redevelopment of the Site, replacing the retail and commercial land uses with a residential scheme of 19 dwellings. The layout includes a balanced mix of detached and attached properties, responding to the surrounding built grain and emerging residential character of the area. This change of use introduces a coherent residential land use, aligning with adjacent properties while transitioning the Site from a semi-industrial, brownfield landscape to a more integrated and sustainable residential setting.

Vegetation

The redevelopment of the garden centre provides opportunities to enhance existing vegetation and introduce new planting, particularly along the northern boundary adjacent to the A4, where gaps in the existing tree line will be infilled with native species. This intervention will strengthen the existing Green Infrastructure corridor, contributing to ecological connectivity and screening views from the transport corridor. Street trees are incorporated within the internal layout to create an attractive and verdant street scene, while the retained and enhanced pond area to the north will be bordered by informal planting and amenity landscaping, supporting biodiversity and visual interest.

Topography / Drainage

The Site's relatively level topography enables sensitive integration of built form with minimal earthworks. The existing pond in the northwest corner will be retained and enhanced as a key sustainable drainage feature, supporting surface water management while also delivering ecological and visual benefits.

Perceptual and Aesthetic Qualities

The proposed redevelopment of the Site aims to establish a visually harmonious and contextually responsive residential environment. The generous setback from the A4 allows for a landscaped frontage with new tree planting, which will soften built form and reduce visual prominence from the road. The area around the pond is proposed as POS, incorporating a LAP, creating a focal point within the development that enhances amenity, encourages community use, and improves the perceptual experience of the Site. The architectural approach and material palette will reflect the muted, natural tones and traditional forms found within the surrounding Area of Special Character, ensuring that the development complements both its immediate and wider visual context.



Figure 6.1 – Proposed Masterplan (Arktec, 2025)

7.0

Identification of Receptors for Impact Assessment

7.1 Landscape Receptors

The baseline section of this report identifies the key planning policies and designations, landscape character areas and key features and characteristics of the Site and study area. The baseline assessment considers and a value is assigned for each landscape receptor. Table 7.1 summarises the types of landscape receptors found within the study area and their associated value.

Due to the Site's inherent characteristics and associated limited visual envelope resulting from the high quantum of woodland in the study area, it is considered that there will be negligible change to published landscape character areas at the county level, and there will be negligible effects at the range of contextual level landscape receptors in extent of the study area.

Those receptors identified in Table 7.1 (highlighted in pale green), will be taken forward into the impact assessment.

7.1 Summary of Landscape Receptors	
Landscape Receptors	Value
Published Guidelines: County character area G1 Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes.	Medium
Contextual landform and drainage	Low
Contextual vegetation	Medium
Contextual land use	Medium
Contextual settlement pattern	Low
Contextual time depth	Medium
Contextual perceptual / aesthetic elements	Medium
Site landform and drainage	Low
Site vegetation	Medium
Site land use	Low
Site built form	Low
Site perceptual / aesthetic qualities	Low
Overall Site Landscape Character	Low

7.2 Visual Receptors

As set out in the visual baseline at Section 4, the Site is well contained in views from the wider landscape due to the combination of topography, built form and vegetation. Where views of the Site are truncated, there will be no change to the character and amenity of the view with the proposed development in place.

The visual baseline sets out the visual assessment with description of how the Site is viewed from within the study area. Those receptors identified in Table 7.2 (highlighted in pale green), will be taken forward into the impact assessment.

7.2 Summary of Visual Receptors		
Visual Receptor Type / Group	Representative Viewpoints	Value
Transient from the A4 / Bath Road to the north of the Site	1 & 2	Low
Residences of 'The Hollies' to the south of the Site	4	Medium
Transient from transport corridors within proximity	3 & 5	Low
PRoW users to the north of the Site, including those along the footpath network on Bowsey Hill	7, 8 & 13	Medium
PRoW users to the east, south and west of the Site in the wider area	6, 10 & 11	Medium
Users of the Wargrave Recreation Ground	9	Medium

7.3 Limitations and Assumptions

The following assumptions will be made in relation to the assessment of effects:

- The assessment baseline year is 2025.
- Existing vegetation will continue to grow at rates typical of its location, species and maturity.
- For the visual assessment from residential properties, transport corridors and public rights of way, the receptor is a standing adult with an eye height of 1.65m.
- Visual effects are based on good visibility. Visual effects can be expected to vary, with poor visibility at times of low cloud, rainfall and at dusk. At these times a reduction in visual clarity, colour and contrast will be experienced. Reduced visibility will limit the extent of views, particularly long distance views. Therefore, the assessment of effects will present a worst case scenario, when the proposed development will be most visible.
- The assessment is based on publicly accessible locations. Professional judgement is used to determine the likely effects from private properties.

8.0

Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects

The criteria for the significance of landscape and visual effects is set out in the LVIA methodology at Appendix 1. The landscape and visual receptors and their values are categorised into receptor types and are assessed alongside the receptor susceptibility to the specific proposed change in order to identify the receptors sensitivity.

The sensitivity of the landscape and visual receptor is combined with the magnitude of change to determine the significance of effect. Magnitude is determined relative to the size, scale, geographic extent, duration, permanence and reversibility of the individual project through the application of professional judgement and opinion.

The landscape and visual effects of the proposed development are set out in a series of impact tables as follows:

- Effects on contextual landscape receptors (i.e. effects on landscape receptors beyond the Site boundary, for example, indirect effects on landscape character).
- Site landscape receptors (i.e. direct effects on landscape receptors within the Site boundary only).
- Visual receptors (i.e. effects arising from the changes to the landscape which are perceived by both static and transient receptors).

The significance of effects are considered for the proposed development - at Year 1 post construction and at Year 15. Construction effects have been scoped out from the assessment as effects are anticipated to be temporary, small scale and as such are not deemed significant.

Included overleaf is the assessment of landscape and visual effects resulting from the proposed development. The judgements and associated process, is presented in a tabulated format for ease of reading and includes commentary regarding susceptibility, sensitivity, magnitude of change and professional judgement for the level of effect plus the nature of effect, for identified receptors as set out at tables 7.1 and 7.2.

Table 8.1 Landscape Receptors

Landscape Receptor	Landscape Sensitivity				Magnitude of Change					Landscape Effect	Nature of Effect	
	Landscape Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity Judgement	Description	Scale	Duration and Reversibility	Magnitude Judgement	Description				
Published Landscape Receptors												
County character area G1 Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes	Medium	Low	Medium - Low	<p>The character area holds a Medium landscape value, reflecting its mostly rural structure and mix of ecological and historical features, including ancient woodland, pre-18th century field systems, and numerous listed buildings. The presence of Local Wildlife Sites, historic parklands, and a tranquil, enclosed character further enhance its value. The A4 corridor introduces some visual and acoustic disruption, diminishing tranquillity in the immediate vicinity, however the wider landscape retains a largely coherent and scenic quality.</p> <p>Susceptibility is Low as the type of development proposed, particularly along the A4, is unlikely to alter the overall integrity of the wider character area.</p>	Compact	Long	Year 1 Year 15	Negligible Negligible	<p>The Proposed Development will result in the permanent change of the existing garden centre land use and the introduction of 19 new residential dwellings, however the scale and extent of change is considered to be very localised in relation to the extent of the wider LCA. Although the development will result in an increase in the quantum of built form in the much wider LCA, the new residential use will replace an existing derelict, brownfield garden centre that is visually degraded and no longer fit for purpose.</p> <p>Therefore considering the above, there will be a Negligible magnitude of effect, which when combined with the Medium - Low sensitivity of the receptor, results in a Negligible Neutral significance of effect at both Year 1 and 15.</p>	Year 1 Year 15	Negligible Negligible	Neutral Neutral
Site Landscape Receptors												
Vegetation	Medium - Low	Low	Low	<p>The vegetation within the Site is of Low-Medium value, comprising mostly unmanaged scrub, ruderal grassland, and remnants of ornamental planting with limited ecological or visual quality. However, boundary features, including mature trees to the north and the hedgerow to the east, provide effective visual containment and contribute positively to local character. The pond and associated wetland vegetation in the northwest corner also add localised ecological interest, modestly elevating the overall value.</p> <p>Susceptibility is Low as the type of development proposed is unlikely to alter the overall integrity of the more valued pieces of vegetation, and is capable of incorporating recommendations as set out in published landscape character guidelines.</p>	Compact	Long	Year 1 Year 15	Low Low	<p>Key vegetative features, including the eastern hedgerow, mature trees along the northern boundary, and woodland edge in the northwest, will be retained and supplemented with new planting, including street trees and marginal vegetation around the pond. Existing ruderal vegetation and overgrown shrub thickets across the Site will be selectively cleared to accommodate the development and introduce a more coherent and managed landscape framework. As such, there will be a Low magnitude of effect.</p> <p>At Year 1, newly planted vegetation across the Site will begin the process of replacing that which is lost, but these features will be in their early stages of establishment and will not yet offer the same functional benefits as mature vegetation, resulting in a Minor Neutral significance of effect.</p> <p>At Year 15, once the vegetation has matured there will be an improvement to the overall structure and quality of the receptor. Tree planting along the A4 in particular will provide lasting benefits to the locally designated Green Infrastructure Route. As such, the overall significance of effect will increase to Minor Beneficial.</p>	Year 1 Year 15	Minor Minor	Neutral Beneficial
Land use	Low	Low	Low	<p>The Site is predominantly occupied the garden centre, which has Low landscape value, owing to its degraded condition, derelict structures, and fragmented layout. While it reflects a previous commercial land use, the Site is now largely inactive, visually disordered, and contributes little to the character or amenity of the wider landscape.</p> <p>The Site's land use has Low susceptibility to further change, as it is already a brownfield site with minimal visual or functional sensitivity. Its current condition and context make it suitable for redevelopment without undermining valued landscape characteristics.</p>	Sizeable	Long	Year 1 Year 15	High - Medium High - Medium	<p>The existing garden centre use, characterised by derelict buildings, overgrown hardstanding, and informal layout, will be entirely replaced by a new residential development. This represents a clear change in land use but one that removes low-quality and redundant built form. The scheme retains and enhances the pond area in the northwest corner, around which a LAP and public open space will be provided. This maintains and builds upon a key landscape feature, helping to offset the scale of change and integrate the development into its setting.</p> <p>Owing to the sizeable change of landuse and its permanence, there will be a High - Medium magnitude of effect, which when combined with the Low sensitivity of the receptor, results in a Moderate Beneficial significance of effect at both Year 1 and 15. The replacement of degraded infrastructure with structured, high-quality development and retained natural features represents an overall improvement in landscape terms.</p>	Year 1 Year 15	Moderate Moderate	Beneficial Beneficial

Table 8. Landscape Receptors Continued

Landscape Receptor	Landscape Sensitivity				Magnitude of Change					Landscape Effect	Nature of Effect	
	Landscape Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity Judgement	Description	Scale	Duration and Reversibility	Magnitude Judgement		Description			
Built form	Low	Low	Low	<p>The existing built form on the Site holds Low value. Structures consist of sheds, greenhouses, and derelict garden centre buildings in various states of disrepair. The layout is irregular and visually fragmented, with no architectural or heritage interest. The built form detracts from the character of the area and contributes to a degraded Site appearance.</p> <p>The built form is of Low susceptibility. Given its current condition and lack of design coherence, the buildings are not sensitive to redevelopment. Their removal or replacement is unlikely to adversely impact the character of the wider landscape.</p>	Substantial	Long	Year 1	High	<p>All existing built structures on the Site will be demolished and replaced with 19 new residential dwellings, leading to a large and permanent change and High magnitude of effect. While this increases the overall quantum of built form, the proposed development will remove low-quality and deteriorated buildings and introduce a coherent layout, improved architectural quality, and a design that responds more appropriately to the surrounding context. Additionally, the built form will be generously offset from the A4, with softened edges through landscaping and planting, reducing visual dominance.</p> <p>Combining the High magnitude of effect with Low sensitivity of the receptor, results in an overall Moderate Beneficial significance of effect at both Year 1 and 15. The nature of the effect is beneficial because the removal of deteriorated and low-quality buildings and their replacement with sensitively designed residential development leads to a visual and functional uplift of the Site.</p>	Year 1	Moderate	Beneficial
							Year 15	High		Year 15	Moderate	Beneficial
Perceptual/aesthetic qualities	Low	Low	Low	<p>The Site's perceptual and aesthetic qualities are of Low value. It is currently characterised by unmanaged vegetation, degraded hardstanding, derelict structures, and an overall neglected appearance. While there is some visual containment from boundary vegetation, and the pond area to the northwest does provide an attractive feature, the Site lacks design quality or scenic interest.</p> <p>The Site is of Low to susceptibility to change in perceptual and aesthetic terms. Its degraded condition means it has capacity to absorb change, particularly if the proposed development enhances visual coherence and landscape integration.</p>	Sizeable	Long	Year 1	High - Medium	<p>The proposed development will result in a noticeable and permanent shift from an untidy, brownfield condition to a planned residential environment with structured landscaping, leading to a High - Medium magnitude of effect.</p> <p>The retention and enhancement of the pond area, incorporation of a LAP, and planting along key frontages all contribute to a more attractive site experience, in particular from the A4 and within the Site itself. The proposed planting at Year 1 however will be immature, slightly hindering its perceptual and aesthetic benefits. As such, at Year 1 there will be an overall Minor Beneficial significance of effect. At Year 15 once the planting matures, the significance of effect will increase to Moderate Beneficial.</p>	Year 1	Minor	Beneficial
							Year 15	High - Medium		Year 15	Moderate	Beneficial
Overall Site landscape character	Low	Low - Medium	Low	<p>The Site's landscape character is of Low value. Even though it is set within a broadly rural and wooded context, the Site itself is degraded in nature, comprising a mix of derelict built form, unmanaged vegetation, and hardstanding remnants of its garden centre use. The presence of the pond area and mature boundary vegetation introduces some landscape interest, but overall coherence and scenic quality is limited.</p> <p>The assessments of the above individual receptors such as vegetation, built form, and perceptual/aesthetic qualities provide a strong indication of the Site's current disjointed composition and its capacity for positive transformation. As such, the type of development proposed is unlikely to negatively alter the integrity of the receptor, resulting in a Low susceptibility.</p>	Substantial	Long	Year 1	High	<p>The proposed development will introduce 19 new residential dwellings across the Site, replacing the declining plant sale / commercial land use. This represents a substantial scale of change, with permanent effects on the Site's land use, structure, and appearance. As such, there will be a High magnitude of effect.</p> <p>While the increase in built form is large, the transition away from a declining garden centre and light industrial landscape toward a residential scheme with integrated green infrastructure results in an overall improvement in landscape quality, structure, and contribution to the setting. The proposed development will also incorporate measures such as retention and enhancement of key landscape features (pond, tree lines, hedgerows), creation of public open space, and improved boundary screening.</p> <p>Considering the above, and combining the High magnitude of effect with Low sensitivity of the receptor, there will be an overall Moderate Beneficial significance of effect on the character of the Site at both Year 1 and 15.</p>	Year 1	Moderate	Beneficial
							Year 15	High		Year 15	Moderate	Beneficial

Table 8.2 Visual Impacts Table

Visual Receptor	Visual Sensitivity				Magnitude of Change					Landscape Effect	Nature of Effect	
	Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity Judgement	Description	Scale	Duration and Reversibility	Magnitude Judgement	Description				
Transient receptors from transport corridors												
Users of the A4 / Bath Road to the north of the Site (Vp 1 & 2)	Low	Low	Low	<p>A Low value is assigned to the receptor as views are from a landscape with no designations and with minimal / no cultural associations.</p> <p>The susceptibility of the receptor is Low, as users of the A4 are focused on the direction of travel and there is little to no opportunity to appreciate the view.</p>	Modest	Long	Year 1	Medium	<p>As illustrated in Vp 2, the majority of views from along the A4 are screened by dense roadside tree belts, and there will be no change to the view experienced.</p> <p>Users of the A4 currently only experience glimpsed and passing views into the Site through the existing entrance to the garden village and intermittent roadside vegetation, as shown in Vp 1. At this specific location, there will be a perceptible and permanent change to the view experienced. The dwellings at Plots 1 - 7 and 19 that front, but are generously offset from, the A4 will replace views of the existing vacant garden centre main building and poly-tunnel structure. The limited building heights (maximum 2.5 storeys), use of materials reflective of local character, and mix of detached and semi-detached homes will introduce a more porous and contextually sympathetic built form, contrasting with the monolithic mass of the former structures. On this basis, the Magnitude of effect will be Medium.</p> <p>At Year 1, the proposed development will result in an overall Minor Beneficial significance of effect. While new elements will be visible, the replacement of deteriorating garden centre structures with more contextually appropriate built form and the introduction of a green, landscaped frontage represents an immediate visual improvement. Although at Year 15 the significance of effect will remain Minor Beneficial, with the maturation of planting, the development will contribute positively to the visual character of the A4 corridor. The proposed planting along the A4 will enhance the existing vegetated corridor context, reinforcing the green infrastructure character of this route.</p>	Year 1	Minor	Beneficial
							Year 15	Medium		Year 15	Minor	Beneficial
Residential receptors												
Residences of 'The Hollies' to the south of the Site (Vp 4 and Photographs E & I)	Low	Medium	Medium - Low	<p>A Low value is assigned to the receptor as views are from the rear and side elevations of the property which are not orientated to take advantage of a particular view.</p> <p>Susceptibility is Medium as the view contributes in part to the amenity experience from the dwelling.</p>	Sizeable	Long	Year 1	High - Medium	<p>The nature of the view experienced from rear and side elevations of the Hollies can be obtained from Photographs E and I. Views from windows facing directly into the Site are currently dominated by a degraded and cluttered scene comprising a mosaic of derelict garden centre infrastructure. This includes disused sheds, dilapidated timber fencing, remnants of former structures, overgrown scrub vegetation, and scattered storage containers.</p> <p>The proposed development will result in a noticeable and permanent change to the existing view from rear of The Hollies. Beyond the proposed boundary fencing and trees, the current cluttered and visually degraded outlook will be replaced by the side elevation of Plot 14 and the rear elevations of Plots 12 and 13. Due to the sizeable scale, permanence and proximity of the change, there will be High - Medium magnitude of effect.</p> <p>While new built form will be introduced, the dwellings will be of much higher visual quality and residential character. Plots 12 and 13 will be set back from the boundary by their rear gardens, softening their visual impact. As such, due to the removal of unsightly and derelict structures and their replacement with contextually appropriate, well-designed residential buildings that improve the outlook for the Hollies, the significance of effect will be Minor Beneficial at Year 1. Proposed tree planting along the southern boundary fencing will have matured by Year 15, further softening the views and integrating the development, resulting in a Moderate Beneficial significance effect.</p>	Year 1	Minor	Beneficial
							Year 15	High - Medium		Year 15	Moderate	Beneficial

9.0

Assessment Against Landscape Policy and Landscape Character

The National Planning Policy Framework, guidance, plus local plan alongside supplementary guidance have been key considerations in the preparation of the development proposals, and are summarised below.

9.1 NPPF

Public open space and a LAP is proposed as recommended at Para 102, in order to provide opportunities for physical activity, health and wellbeing of communities and to deliver benefits for nature and support effects to address climate change.

High quality design is proposed in accordance with recommendations set out at Para's 131, 132 and 135, in that the scheme:

- is evidenced by the local areas defining characteristics.
- adds to the overall quality of the area.
- is visually attractive with good architecture, layout and landscaping.
- is sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.
- establishes a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials.

Streets are tree-lined and opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere within the development, as recommended at Para 136.

Design quality is considered, and takes into consideration local design guidance and supplementary planning documents, as recommended at Paras 137 and 139.

Proposals conserve and enhance the natural environment as per Para 180 and as recommended at Para 182, the development is sensitively located and designed to avoid adverse effects on the setting to any designated area.

9.2 Local Policy

The proposed redevelopment represents a sustainable and appropriate reuse of previously developed land. The Site is currently occupied by derelict structures, abandoned sheds, broken fencing, and unmanaged vegetation, all of which contribute little to the surrounding landscape. The scheme replaces this with a well designed residential layout of 19 new homes, which makes efficient use of land without encroaching into open countryside or areas of agricultural value. As such, the proposal supports the principles of sustainable development and environmental enhancement set out in Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy.

The layout and architectural approach of the development is sympathetic to local character and context. Limited to 2 - 2.5 storeys in height, with a mix of detached and semi-detached dwellings, the development respects the prevailing scale and form of surrounding properties, including those within the Area of Special Character. The proposed built form replaces the visually monolithic appearance of large commercial structures with a more porous and articulated design. Materials will be carefully selected to reflect those commonly experienced in the locality, including red brick and clay tiles, thereby helping the scheme integrate sensitively into its surroundings. These characteristics demonstrate compliance with Policy CP3 on general design principles and with MDD Policy TB26, which seeks to retain and enhance the traditional and local character of Areas of Special Character.

The proposed development places strong emphasis on green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancement. Existing mature trees and vegetation along the northern boundary will be retained and reinforced with new native planting, therefore enhancing the designated Green Infrastructure Route that follows the A4 corridor. A high-quality public open space and a LAP will be delivered around the retained pond, transforming this part of the Site into an ecological and visual asset. Street trees and marginal planting will be provided throughout the development, ensuring that green infrastructure is integrated throughout the Site. These measures contribute positively to the biodiversity and ecological potential of the Site, in accordance with Core Strategy Policies CP3 and CP7, and further supported by MDD Policies CC03 and TB23, which encourage enhancement of green corridors and protection of habitats of principal importance.

In terms of landscape character and heritage setting, the development respects the area's transitional and intimate landscape character. The proposal introduces a built form that responds to local landform, vegetation structure, and the pattern of nearby residential properties. It maintains separation from the Grade II listed Hill House and Old House, helping to preserve the setting of these heritage assets. Visual containment provided by existing woodland and new planting will further reduce visual impacts and reinforce landscape integration. Accordingly, the proposal aligns with MDD Policy TB21, which requires development to retain and enhance key characteristics of landscape character, and with Policy TB24, relating to the preservation of designated heritage assets and their settings.

Finally, the scheme will enhance the amenity of neighbouring residents and road users. For example, those at The Hollies, which currently overlook cluttered and degraded land, will benefit from the removal of unsightly structures and their replacement with high-quality dwellings and garden boundaries. Similarly, users of the A4 will experience a softened and more visually attractive frontage, with enhanced tree planting reinforcing the vegetated corridor over time. As such, consistent with the requirements of Policy CP3, these improvements will deliver an attractive, accessible and secure environment that respects existing occupiers.

9.3 Emerging Policy

Although the Site is located within the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape, it does not reflect the key characteristics of the Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes LCA, which forms the primary evidence base for the valued landscape designation in this location. The Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes are defined by a gently undulating landform, intact historic field patterns, mixed agricultural use, scattered woodland blocks, and a rural, tranquil character shaped by traditional settlement patterns and estate landscapes.

In contrast, the Site comprises previously developed land with a degraded brownfield character. It contains derelict buildings, unmanaged scrub, remnants of ornamental planting, and ongoing commercial / retail activity, none of which are representative of the wider LCA. While mature boundary

vegetation provides a degree of visual containment and reflects some features of the surrounding landscape, the internal character of the Site differs. The influence of the adjacent A4, together with the Site's condition and land use, interrupts the perceived continuity and tranquillity of the Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes. As a result, the Site contributes little to the character or scenic quality of the wider valued landscape and cannot be considered a strong expression of the landscape characteristics that underpin the Bowsey Hill designation.

The proposed redevelopment will deliver an improvement to the Site's current condition, replacing disjointed commercial uses with a coherent and contextually appropriate residential scheme. The layout responds to the surrounding built form and incorporates native planting, public open space, and enhanced green infrastructure, particularly along the A4 boundary. These interventions will improve visual containment, support biodiversity, and enhance the Site's contribution to local landscape character. Overall, the development aligns with the objectives of draft Policy NE6 by restoring a degraded site and delivering landscape and visual enhancements in keeping with the valued landscape setting.

10.0

Summary and Conclusions

10.1 Summary

The Site, located in Hare Hatch, Wokingham, occupies a relatively flat parcel of land at approximately 55m AOD within a gently undulating rural landscape. Historically used as a garden centre, the Site now presents a degraded brownfield character, marked by derelict buildings, unmanaged scrub vegetation, and ongoing light commercial activity. While the core of the Site lacks significant landscape value, several key natural features remain, including a former pond with ecological potential and mature boundary vegetation that provides visual containment and contributes to a sense of enclosure.

Vegetation on the Site is largely unmanaged, with dense thickets, scattered grassland, and remnants of ornamental planting. Strong vegetative boundaries help visually integrate the Site into the wider wooded landscape, while the A4 / Bath Road corridor to the north offers only intermittent screening, exposing limited views into the Site from this route. Built form is primarily low-rise and scattered, in various states of disrepair, and lacks cohesion, further contributing to the Site's neglected visual appearance.

Despite being located adjacent to the Hare Hatch Area of Special Character, the Site currently makes little positive contribution to local landscape character. It is perceptually affected by its brownfield condition, proximity to the A4, and its ongoing semi-industrial use, all of which reduce its rural or scenic value. Visual influence is localised, primarily restricted to close-range receptors, including users of the A4 and residents of adjacent properties such as The Hollies.

The proposed development seeks to transform the Site into a coherent residential scheme comprising 19 dwellings of varied types and forms, designed to reflect the scale, materiality, and vernacular detailing of the local context. The layout has been carefully considered to ensure integration with the residential grain of Hare Hatch, with generous setbacks from the A4 allowing for new tree planting and a landscaped frontage that will enhance the Site's appearance and reduce its visual prominence. The pond area in the northwest corner is to be retained and enhanced as POS with a LAP, providing a central amenity feature that improves local perceptual quality and ecological function. Existing mature vegetation, particularly along the Site's western and eastern boundaries, will be retained and supplemented where necessary to maintain a strong sense of enclosure and reinforce screening for adjacent receptors.

In terms of landscape effects, the development will result in a positive transformation of a degraded brownfield site into a sensitively designed residential environment. By retaining key features such as the pond and boundary vegetation, and by introducing well-considered landscape enhancements, the proposals will improve the character and quality of the Site and its immediate surroundings. The resultant landscape effects are therefore assessed as Minor to Moderate beneficial.

With regard to visual impact, the proposed development will lead to an improvement in views for both identified receptor groups - users of the A4 (Bath Road) and residents at The Hollies. From the A4, the existing derelict structures will be replaced with a carefully articulated residential frontage softened by new planting, reducing visual discordance and enhancing the approach into Hare Hatch. For adjacent residents, particularly those overlooking the Site, the proposed dwellings will offer a more coherent and appropriate built form that responds to the established character of the area. The visual containment offered by existing and proposed vegetation will ensure that the scheme sits comfortably within its setting. As such, visual effects are considered to be Minor beneficial overall.

10.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed redevelopment represents an opportunity to positively regenerate a degraded and under-utilised Site within a sensitive rural setting. Through a landscape-led approach that respects the Area of Special Character, the scheme will deliver notable improvements in both landscape quality and visual amenity, while preserving and enhancing the most valued existing natural features.

fabrik

Lenten House
16 Lenten Street
Alton
Hampshire
GU34 1HG

First Floor Studio
The Old School
4 Exton Street
London
SE18UE

fabrikuk.com