

Landscape and Visual impact Assessment.

Upper Culham Farm, Culham Lane, Henley, Berkshire,
RG10 8NR.

On behalf of DS Equine.

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Document Management.

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Contents.

- 1. Introduction..... 1
- 2. Planning Policy and Baseline.....3
- 3. The Site and Proposed Scheme 13
- 4. Effects upon the Site and Landscape Character 19
- 5. Effects upon Visual Amenity.....25
- 6. Summary and Conclusions47

Appendices contents.

Appendix 1 LVIA Methodology.

Figures contents.

- Figure 1 Site Location and Context Plan.
- Figure 2 Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility Plan.
- Figure 3 Site Context Photos

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Pegasus Group have been commissioned by DS Equine, acting as agent on behalf of the applicant, to prepare this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ('LVIA') in support of a full planning application for the construction of Polo grounds, an Outdoor Arena, and ancillary facilities ('the proposed scheme') at Upper Culham Farm, Culham Lane, Henley RG10 8NR ('the site') – refer to **Figure 1 Site Location and Context Plan**. Wokingham Borough Council is the relevant Local Planning Authority ('LPA' / 'the Council').
- 1.2. The purpose of this LVIA is to review and evaluate the baseline condition of the site and its surrounding landscape, analyse the potential landscape character and visual effects, and consider whether any mitigation measures are necessary to avoid, minimise or mitigate any of the identified effects. In doing so, this LVIA also considered whether such measures would be appropriate to the local landscape character.
- 1.3. The site and local landscape fall within open countryside and are not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. The site falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and is subject to Policy CP12 of the adopted *Core Strategy* (January 2010), but this is spatial policy and does not relate to landscape value or natural beauty.
- 1.4. The site is best described as visually self-contained and discreet parcel of land associated with the existing equine facilities at Upper Culham Farm and comprises several small scale field enclosures used for grazing and training horses, and medium to large scale arable fields historically used during the Second World War as a relief landing ground known as RAF Henley-on-Thames.

Consultation

- 1.5. Given the discreet nature of the site, and the general lack of any inter-visibility or views towards the site, no consultation with the LPA has been carried out in relation to this LVIA. The scope of work and viewpoint selection are based on Pegasus' knowledge of the local landscape and experience working on similar developments elsewhere in the country.

Approach and Methodology

- 1.6. The LVIA assesses the operational stage of the proposed scheme only, as the construction stage would be of short and temporary duration. Any potential effects brought about by the construction stage are likely to be lower or similar to those assessed post construction. The effects are therefore assessed as Year 1 post-completion. Where relevant, residual effects at Year 10 are also assessed taking into account proposed landscaping.
- 1.7. Given the proposed typology this LVIA represents a light touch yet robust analysis of the proposed scheme and identifies the scale of effects and opportunities for mitigation and enhancement planting.
- 1.8. This LVIA has been undertaken with regards to the best practice guidelines within the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* Edition 3 (hereafter referred to as *GLVIA3*). The *GLVIA3* states in paragraph 1.17 that when identifying landscape and visual effects there:

“...is a need for an approach that is in proportion to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of the likely effects. Judgement needs to be exercised at all stages in terms of the scale of investigation that is appropriate and proportional.”

- 1.9. GLVIA3 also recognises in paragraph 2.23 that:

“...professional judgement is a very important part of LVIA. While there is some scope for quantitative measurement of some relatively objective matters much of the assessment must rely on qualitative judgements”

- 1.10. All effects are taken as adverse unless otherwise stated. This LVIA should be read in conjunction with the application documents submitted as part of the planning application.
- 1.11. The detailed methodology for this LVIA is provided at Appendix 1. The site photography has been carried out with regard to the Technical Guidance Note 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals, published by the Landscape Institute on 17 September 2019.
- 1.12. Given the relatively limited complexity of this LVIA, derived through the character of the site and proposed typology, the site photography is embedded in the main body of the report rather than being presented as separate figures.

Study Area

- 1.13. A preliminary review of the Council’s adopted *Core Strategy* adopted in January 2010 and on-line planning policies and constraints map has not identified the presence of any national and local landscape designations or constraints within the site itself.¹ The Chilterns National Landscape lies to the west of Henley-on-Thames and extends onto the higher ground north of the River Thames. It was considered prudent to review the level of inter-visibility between the site and publicly accessible locations within this National Landscape. **A Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility Plan (Figure 2)** has been prepared to inform the viewpoint selection. In addition, the landform rises to the south east of the site with the higher ground cloaked in woodlands and this area has been visited as part of the on-site visual survey. In summary, the higher ground within the Chilterns to the north and undulating landscape around Crazies Hill and Warren Row to the south east define the extent of the study area.

Limitations to the Assessment

- 1.14. The site visit, photography, and assessment were carried out in late July 2024, when and the level of vegetative screening was at its highest. The identified viewpoints have been selected in situ, based on the level of inter-visibility across the local area. The potential increased level of inter-visibility across the local landscape in ‘winter months’ is explored in Section 5 of this LVIA.

¹ <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d76c713282874f3da74b3e46bc473d3f>

2. Planning Policy and Baseline

Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework

2.1. The main documents which form the Development Framework for Wokingham Borough Council include the *Core Strategy* adopted in January 2010² and *Managing Development Delivery* (February 2014).³ Neither the host Wargrave Parish nor the adjacent Remenham Parish have started their Neighbourhood Plans.

2.2. The site falls within open countryside and is subject to Policy CP 11 'Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)' – refer to Plate 1, which states:

"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; and

3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; ..."

2.3. The supporting text at paragraph 4.57 clarifies that: ***"Restricting development outside of development limits also helps protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the borough's environment..."***.

2.4. As confirmed on the Council's on-line planning policies and constraints map, the site is not covered by any nature conservation designations and none of its vegetation is subject to any Tree Preservation Order (TPO) – refer to Plate 2.

2.5. The hamlet of Upper Culham also subject to Policy TB26 'Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character' of the adopted *Managing Development Delivery* (February 2014), and which states:

"1. Areas of Special Character are shown on the Policies Map.

2. 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 <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Final%20adopted%20Core%20Strategy%20inc.%20cover.pdf>

³ <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Adopted%20MDD.pdf>

3. Proposals that involve the demolition of a Building of Traditional Local Character will require strong justification."

- 2.6. This Policy, however, is contained to the hamlet itself and does not extent into the site and the supporting text at paragraph 3.128 clarifies:

"3.128 Where development affecting either an Area of Special Character or a Building of Traditional Local Character is proposed, this should protect the architectural integrity of the building and its setting or the special character of the area. Special regard should be given to the historical context, outbuildings, scale, form, massing and materials together with retaining key architectural features or detailing which contribute to the character of the building or the area."

- 2.7. The A4130, which abuts the site to the north, is identified as 'Green Route Enhancement Area' under Policy CC03 'Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping' (within the *Managing Development Delivery* (February 2014)), with the Policy wording referring to:

" (...)

2. Development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieved the following criteria within scheme proposals:

- a) Provide new or protect and enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development***
- b) Promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green corridors including public rights of way such as footpaths, cycleways and bridleways***
- c) Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside***
- d) Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features***
- e) Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.***

3. Development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable. (...)"

- 2.8. In addition, Policy CP3 'General Principles for development' is informative and states: ***"Planning permission will be granted for proposals that: (...) c) Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses."*** The supporting text at para 4.19 states: ***"All development can impact on the overall character of the area. Consequently, it is vital that the Council minimises any adverse impacts. Each town and village, together with the areas between them has their own unique character which is illustrated in Village Design Statements. Proposals for development must acknowledge this to ensure that the distinctiveness of different parts of the borough is maintained in line with PPS1 (paragraph 13 iv). The authority through the designation of Conservation Areas will recognise the distinctive character of parts of the borough. Proposals should also take account of the results of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment and the***

vegetation in the area. Areas that are important to the Borough's landscape include Areas of Special Landscape Importance and Sites of Urban Landscape Value. These areas will be reviewed through the Managing Development Delivery DPD."

- 2.9. With regards to biodiversity / ecology issues Policy CP7 'Biodiversity' of the Core Strategy puts emphasis on statutory protected nature conservation designations. Policy TB23 'Biodiversity and Development' of the *Managing Development Delivery* (February 2014), is more prescriptive and states:

" (...)

2. Planning permission for development proposals will only be granted where they comply with policy CP7 – Biodiversity of the Core Strategy and also demonstrate how they:

- a) Provide opportunities, including through design, layout and landscaping to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing**
- b) Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation**
- c) Ensure that all existing and new developments are ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network."**

- 2.10. With regards the landscape character, Policy TB21 'Landscape Character' states:

"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."

- 2.11. The supporting text refers to the Council's *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment* (November 2019) and *Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document* (SPD) (June 2012),⁴ and these reports are discussed in Section 3 and 5 of this LVIA.
- 2.12. Neither the Council nor the Chilterns National Landscape appear to have any equestrian related guidance documents. For this reason, to inform the analysis and design the *Equestrian Development Technical Advice Note* (July 2023) of the South Downs National Park has been reviewed.⁵

⁴ <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/CD13.03%20Borough%20Design%20Guide%20Interactive%20SPD%20%281%29.pdf>

⁵ https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SD_Equestrian_TAN_2023_06.pdf

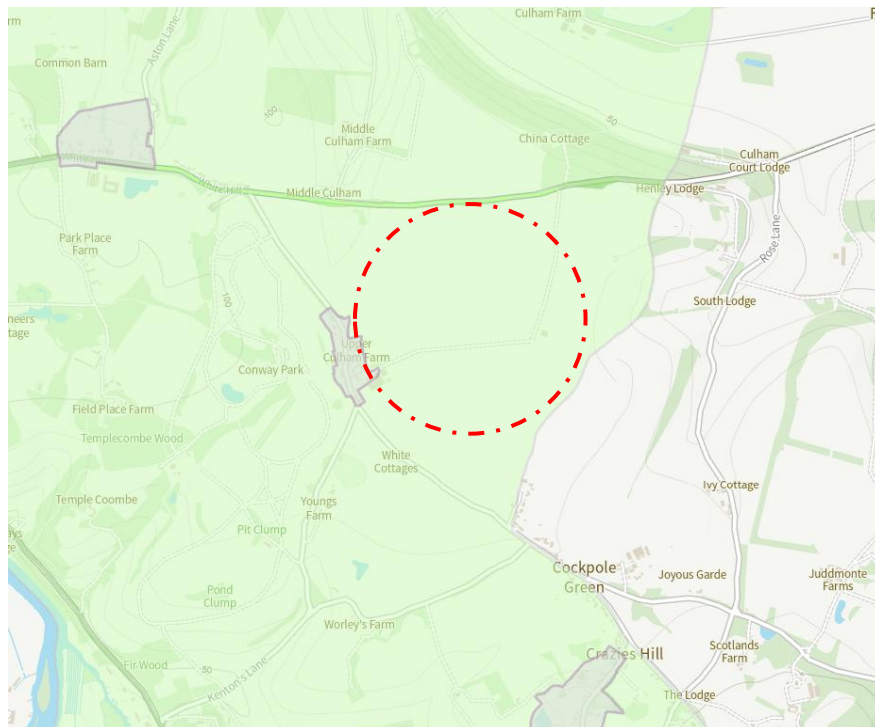


Plate 1 Extract from the Council's constraints map, showing Policy TB26 'Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character' within Upper Culham, and Policy CP11 'Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)' (green wash). Site is marked with red dashed circle (approximate).

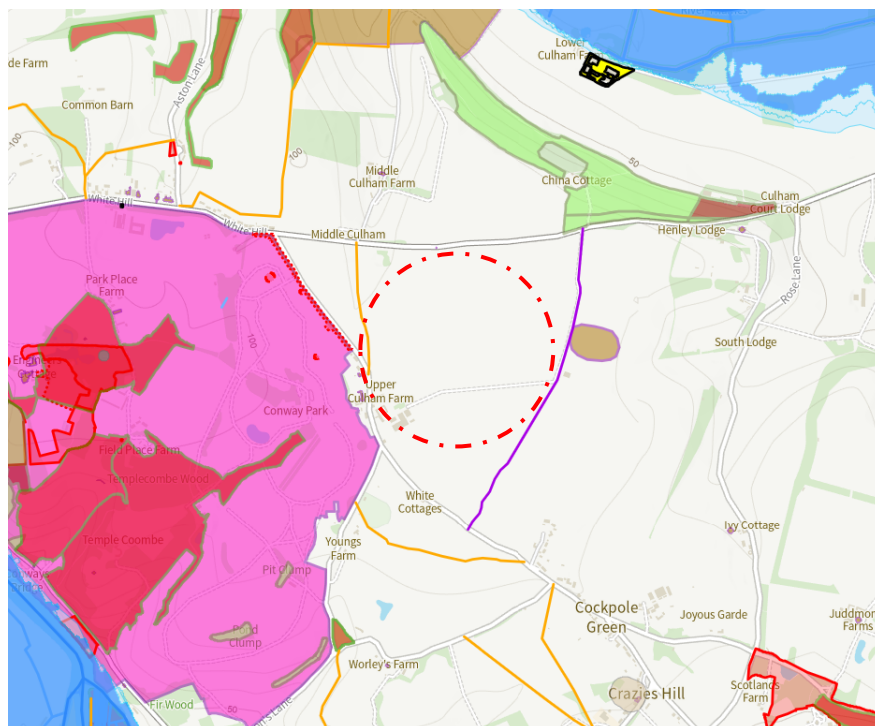


Plate 2 Extract from the Council's constraints map, showing various designations and constraints. Site is marked with red dashed circle (approximate).

Emerging Local Plan

- 2.13. In addition, the review of the Council's Evidence Base identified that a number of 'Valued Landscapes' had been considered as part of the Local Plan update and as evidenced in the *Topic Paper Valued Landscapes January 2020*, and specifically its Appendix A.⁶ The 'Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape' covers the landscape west and north of the site and, in part abuts its boundaries but does not cover the site itself – refer to Plate 3. In comparison, the recently published *Valued Landscapes Assessment September 2024*, identifies the site as part of the proposed 'Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape'⁷ – refer to Plate 4.
- 2.14. It is important to stress that at present this designation is being considered as part of the emerging Local Plan and does not form part of the adopted Development Plan. The proposed scheme therefore ought to be judged in the context of the adopted policies in so far as the landscape character and visual effects are considered, and likely to be determined before the emerging Local Plan has been adopted (currently estimated to be May 2026).⁸

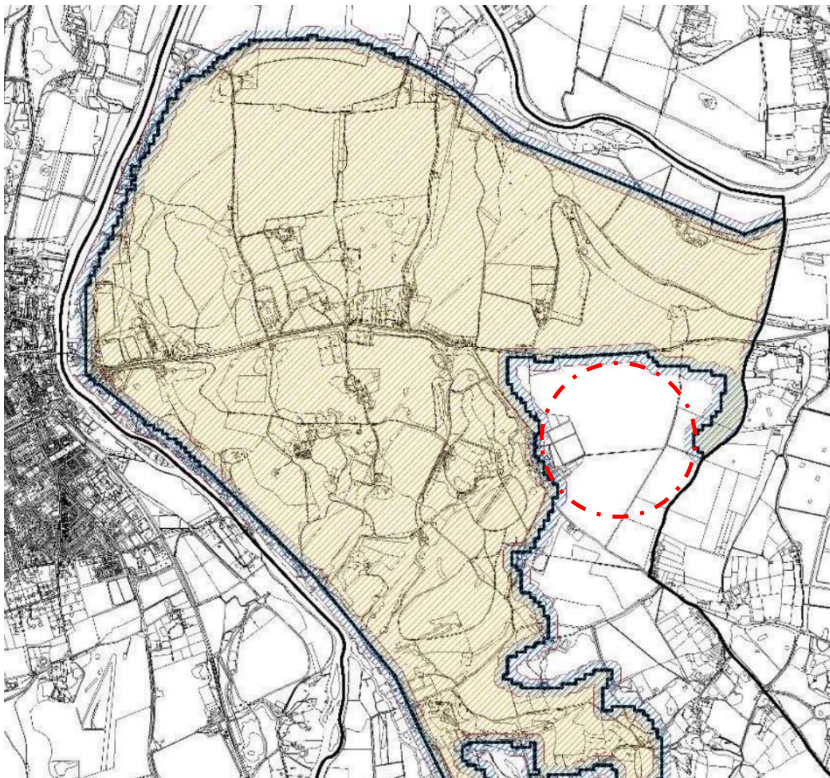


Plate 3 'Chilterns Chalk Valued Landscape', extract from Topic Paper Valued Landscapes January 2020. Site is marked with red dashed circle (approximate).

⁶ <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-07/Valued%20Landscapes%20Topic%20Paper.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2024-09/Valued%20Landscape%20Assessment%20September%202024%20%28reduced%29.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2024-09/WBC%20Local%20Development%20Scheme%202024%20Final.pdf>

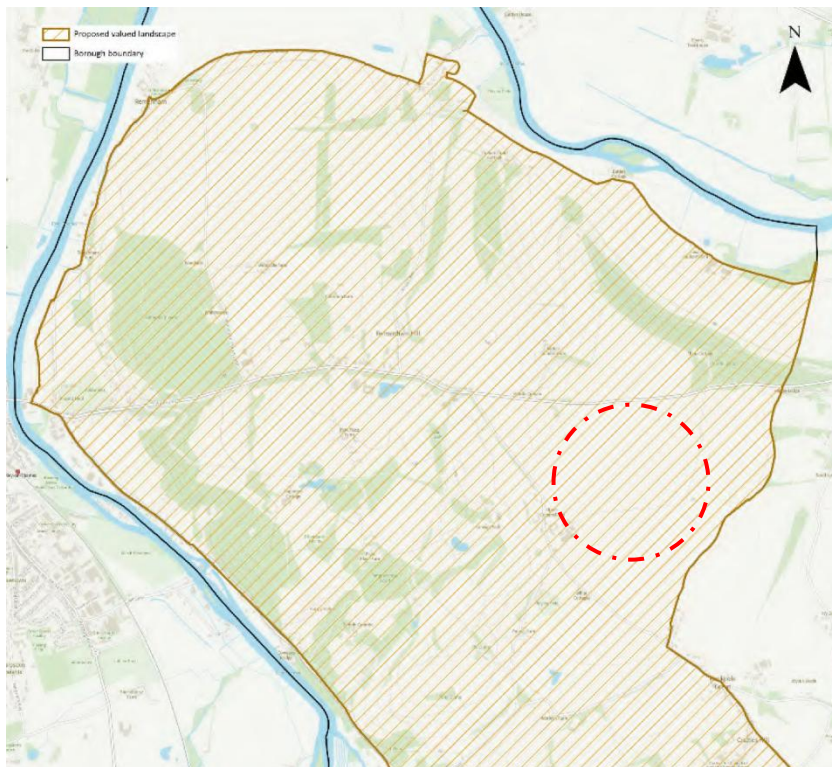


Plate 4 'Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape', extract from Valued Landscapes Assessment September 2024. Site is marked with red dashed circle (approximate).

Chilterns National Landscape

- 2.15. Whilst the site is not located within the Chilterns National Landscape, it can be considered as falling within its setting and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024) provides the following advice:
- "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 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."***
- 2.16. The *Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019–2024*,⁹ extended to March 2025, has not yet been replaced but for the purpose of this LVIA is considered informative. It identifies ***"Panoramic Views from and across the escarpment interwoven with intimate dipslope valleys and rolling fields"*** as one of the Chilterns' 'Special Qualities'.
- 2.17. The 'Plateau and Dipslope' character area covers the southern part of the Chilterns, that closest to the site, and is described as:

⁹ <https://www.chilterns.org.uk/what-we-do/future-proofing-the-chilterns/management-plan/>

“A large proportion of the AONB is covered by plateau and dipslope as the land gradually falls away to the east and Greater London. Though less visible and striking than the scarp, this landscape forms a key part of the classic Chilterns landscape. The topography is complex, with areas of plateau dissected by long, narrow, often dry valleys. Extensive woodlands and arable fields interspersed with commons, villages, scattered farmsteads (often dating from medieval times) and designed parklands characterise the plateau. Commons, heaths and greens would once have been far more extensive. Many Chilterns commons are wooded or former wood pasture, with areas of heathland, acid grassland ponds and other open habitats. Grazed fields can still be found on the steeper valley sides and valley bottoms where settlements often formed around water sources or stretched out along the valley roads.”

- 2.18. The Strategic Objective NO3 states: ***“Minimise development impacts on the AONB and its setting; where they are unavoidable, ensure they provide net environmental gains.”***
- 2.19. The Strategic Objective DP4 refers to development within the setting of the National Landscape and states: ***“In the setting of the AONB, take full account of whether proposals harm the AONB. For example, development of land visible in panoramic views from the Chilterns escarpment, or which generates traffic in or travelling across the AONB, or which increases water abstraction from the chalk aquifer, thereby reducing flow in chalk streams.”***
- 2.20. The above has guided the visual survey conducted in—situ with a number of Public Rights of Way within the Chilterns visited to ascertain the availability of views towards the site and potential effects – refer to Section 6 for details.

Baseline Landscape Character

- 2.21. The character of the landscape within the study area has been analysed and described on two levels:
- National level assessment provided by Natural England.
 - Borough level in the *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment* (November 2019).

Natural England

- 2.22. According to Natural England, the site and study area fall within the National Character Area (NCA) 110 ‘Chilterns’. This national level assessment, however, is considered too coarse and geographically extensive to provide detailed information that would be relevant to the site and proposed scheme. For this reason, the description of the national level NCA 110 has been reviewed to inform this LVIA, but the NCA has not been assessed as a specific landscape receptor.
- 2.23. It is noted that in Section 5.2 Field Pattern, the description of the NCA 110 notes: ***“Subdivision of fields into horse paddocks is significant in the AONB where approximately 5 per cent of land is under equestrian use.”***

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (November 2019)

- 2.24. According to the Council's on-line 'Constraints Map' the site falls within Landscape Character Type (LCT) 'Wooded Chalk Slopes' and its associated Landscape Character Area (LCA) E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau', as identified in the *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (November 2019)*.¹⁰

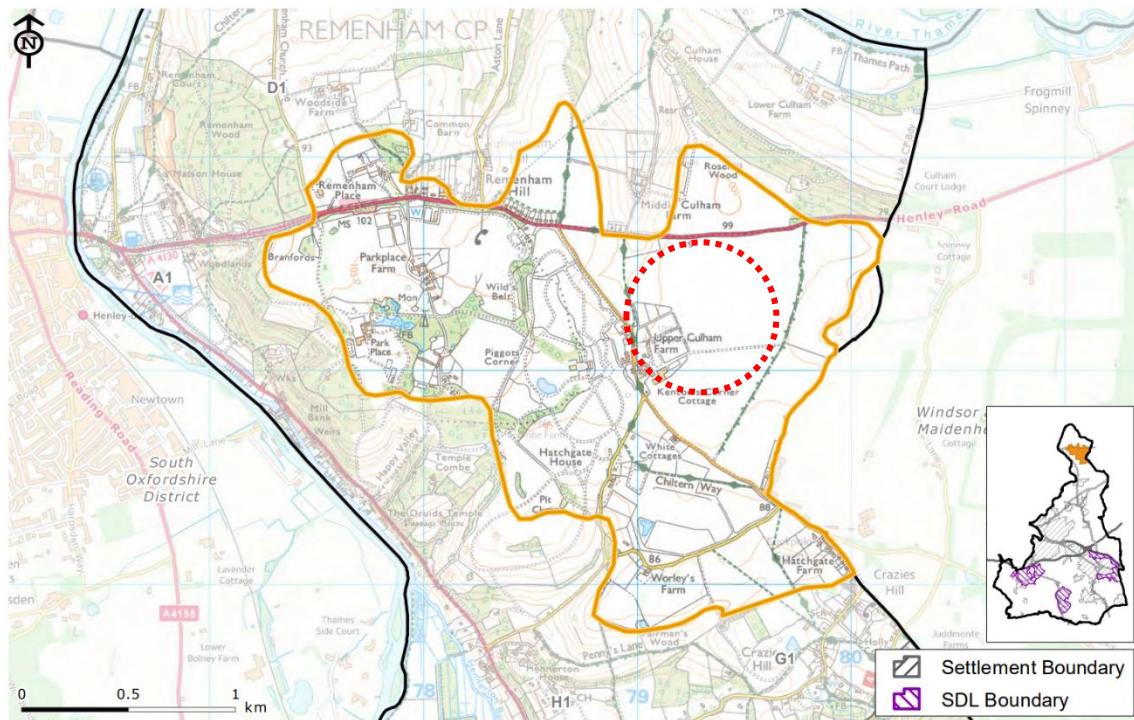


Plate 5 LCA E1 associated with the site and local landscape – extract from *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (November 2019)*. Approximate location of the site is marked in red.

- 2.25. The E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau' is described as:

"A flat, elevated and open landscape dominated by arable farmland. Settlement is restricted to the linear cluster of buildings at Remenham Hill. The designed estate landscape at Park Place results in there being little public access. There are impressive views of the wooded hills of High Knowl and Bottom Boles Wood to the south. Located towards the north of Wokingham Borough, this landscape is largely enclosed by D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes to the north and west where the boundary follows the plateau edge before it falls away towards the Thames. The eastern edge is dictated by the borough administrative boundary, although the character area continues into the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The short, southernmost edge is defined by changes in topography, land cover and land use at Crazies Hill into G1: Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes."

¹⁰ <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-studies> and <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-07/Wokingham%20Borough%20LCA%20Part%202%20Areas%20D-F.pdf>

2.26. The assessment identifies a number of key characteristics associated with this landscape, which are quoted below:

- *“Predominantly flat landform with upland ‘plateau’ character, underlain predominately by chalk with an area of Lambeth Group east of Park Place, clay and flint drifts cap much of the area.*
- *Large scale agricultural landscape intensively farmed for arable production, predominantly cereals and oilseed rape, due to well drained soils generally to the east of the LCA. Some horse grazing in subdivided fields closer to settlements.*
- *Large open fields with relatively few hedgerow trees and sporadic short, flailed, gappy hawthorn hedgerows. Restored hedgerows and shelterbelt planting along the rural lanes and within the Park Place estate reinforced by estate rail fencing.*
- *Generally unwooded, although shelterbelt planting and strips of both mixed and BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland can be found along rural lanes and tracks with larger copses within Park Place estate.*
- *Valuable semi-natural habitats including Park Place School LWS designated for its open water, woodland and grassland and a spur of broadleaved woodland of the Temple Combe Wood LWS.*
- *Designed landscape at Park Place (Grade II* Registered Park and Garden) located along the plateau edge evokes a formal estate character and exploits views over the Thames to the Chilterns. New estates have recently been created to the east of Park Place at Hamilton and Stowdes with new country mansions set in a mature parkland setting.*
- *Largely unsettled characterised by scattered farmsteads and individual houses linked by narrow lanes. Remenham Hill is the only settlement and consists of a ribbon of large detached 19th and 20th century houses.*
- *Tranquil and remote rural area, with a strong experience of dark skies, due to its relative inaccessibility, particularly on the Park Place estate and the new estates at Hamilton and Stowdes. The area is crossed by small estate roads and limited public rights of way including the Chiltern Way. The busy A4130 introduces a corridor of movement, light, and noise across the north of the area.*
- *Strong sense of exposure due to lack of vertical element such as trees hedgerows or buildings, exaggerated by the wooded character of the adjoining DI: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes.*
- *Clear views of the wooded hills of High Knoll and Bottom Boles (F1) provide distant enclosure.”*

Landscape Sensitivity

2.27. The site and study area largely fall within pleasant but ordinary working countryside thus the local landscape is judged to be of medium value. The Chilterns National Landscape, within the northern study area, is taken to be of high value on the basis of its statutory national designation and recognition of its natural beauty. The susceptibility of this

landscape to the proposed scheme is taken as low given its small scale and typology. Overall, the sensitivity of the local landscape (within the core study area and outside the Chilterns) to the proposed scheme is medium.

3. The Site and Proposed Scheme

Site Description and Inter-visibility

- 3.1. The site falls within the open countryside and potentially within the setting of the Chilterns National Landscape. The protection of the countryside is expressed in the Council's Policy CP 11 'Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)', and Policy CP3 'General Principles for development', supported by Policy TB21 'Landscape Character'. In addition, the policies of the *Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019–2024* emphasise the need to protect views in and out of the Chilterns.
- 3.2. The test here is whether the development would affect the 'separate identity' of Henley-on-Thames and maintain the quality of the existing environment, and whether it would have a detrimental impact on landscape and its features, and setting of the National Landscape.
- 3.3. The Design and Access Statement (DAS) prepared by DS Equine discusses the scheme from a planning policy point of view. It is important to recognise, however, that part of the site is currently used for equine facilities, and this influences its character with the remaining part of the site being subject to intensive agricultural practises.
- 3.4. The site is located to the east of Henley-on-Thames, some 2 km away at its closest point. The River Thames and Chilterns are the two defining features, which influence the local landscape, but the site is not associated physically or visually with neither the river valley nor the Chilterns dipslope. Looking north the horizon is wooded and distant with no apparent features.
- 3.5. The site is best described as a large scale triangular parcel of land comprising several small scale field enclosures associated with the equine facilities at Upper Culham Farm, and incorporating the surrounding medium to large scale arable fields. The land historically known as RAF Henley-on-Thames was used as a relief landing ground during the Second World War. Hedgerows bound the site, but internally structural planting is limited to the environs of Upper Culham Farm where it encloses the farm buildings and paddocks, separating the site from the hamlet.
- 3.6. The A4130 crosses the central study area and is one of the main transport corridors in the local landscape. It forms the northern edge of the site and connects Henley-on-Thames to the west with the A404(M) and indirectly with Maidenhead to the east. This introduces noise and movement into the landscape, but these negative qualities are generally not apparent from within the site and are only noticeable from its northern edge. The road is characterised by robust hedgerow planting and scattered hedgerow trees.
- 3.7. Culham Lane leads from the A4130 providing access to the hamlet of Upper Culham, and forms the site's western and south western edge. The roadside hedgerow serves as a visual barrier limiting views in and out. It is noted that limited inter-visibility does exist between the site's north western most field and the neighbouring dwellings: Middle Culham Cottages No. 122 – 125 along the A4130 and Seaforth Cottage and Paddock Cottage in Upper Culham to the south west. A degree of inter-visibility also exists between the southern and eastern arable fields and White Cottages No. 1 – 4 and Kenton's Corner Cottage located along the southern section of Culham Lane.

- 3.8. Beyond Culham Lane lies the Grade II* Park Place and Temple Combe listed historic park and garden,¹¹ segregating the open countryside and the site from Henley-on-Thames. Views into the parkland are not gained and the site does not exhibit any relationship with this historic designed landscape.
- 3.9. The site's eastern and south eastern edge is formed by Restricted Byway WARG38, which connects the A4130 near Rosehill Wood (identified as Ancient Woodland) with Culham Lane.
- 3.10. Topographically the landscape within the wider study area is relatively complex, being influenced by the Chilterns dipslope and the valley of the River Thames. The valley floor sits at c. 30 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) with a relatively convoluted landform of the surrounding wooded chalk slopes either side of the river corridor. The landform steeply rises to c. 95 m – 105 m south of the A4130 and takes the form of a small scale plateau extending across the site and parkland at Park Place and Temple Combe. To the south of the site, the plateau landscape continues for c. 1 km to Crazies Hill before transitioning into the wooded chalk slopes and descending towards the River Thames.
- 3.11. To the east of the site, the landform quickly slopes into a small scale narrow dry valley with Rose Lane following its floor and rises again to reach c. 90 m AOD at Robinswood – a private large scale estate with woodlands, extensive ornamental gardens, and tree avenues. The landform then consistently rises culminating at Ashely Hills (144 m AOD, c. 2.8 km away) and Bowsey Hill (137 m AOD, c. 2.2km to the south east). Both hills are characterised by large scale woodlands and, in parts, are visible from within the site. The lower and upper slopes are wooded and cloak the dispersed settlement pattern of isolated dwellings and farmstead, and clusters of properties in Cockpole Green, Crazies Hill, and Warren Row.
- 3.12. The landform within the site is simple and largely level, reflecting the plateau landscape of the core study area. This foreshortens the views across the site and largely prevents from gaining views of the adjacent fields and medium range landscape around it. In other words, the site is largely seen in isolation and views are generally internally. The wider surrounding landscape appears as distant wooded horizons. There is a detectable slope with a localised fold present in the north western part of the site. Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way follows its alignment and leads from the hamlet of Upper Culham to the A4130 at Middle Culham Cottages, but lacks any continuity further north.
- 3.13. The available historic maps indicate the presence of a small scale chalk pit near the northern end Public Footpath WARG39, and this small depression is now enclosed by a stand of trees, understorey, and rudimental vegetation.
- 3.14. There are a number of other Public Rights of Way (PROWs) in the local landscape, but they tend to be located across the wooded chalk slopes towards Henley and the River Thames, or are associated with the wooded landscape around Crazies Hill, Bowsey Hill, and Ashley Hill.
- 3.15. The small scale field enclosures associated with Upper Culham Farm are characterised by hedgerows and frequent trees, some of which are mature and tall. The existing character is very much that of equine facilities. The existing facilities include a manège, various sheds of

¹¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000588?section=official-list-entry>

varying scale and mass, and stables. These are in parts enclosed by trees along their perimeter with the upper part of some of the taller built form visible across the site.

- 3.16. The existing arable fields are large scale and open with virtually no internal boundary vegetation, except for those abutting the equine facilities. The boundaries within the site are largely consistent with the field pattern illustrated on the historic maps from the late 19th Century with large scale fields historically dominating the plateau and encroaching onto the upper wooded chalk slopes.¹²

Proposed Scheme

- 3.17. The general layout of the proposed scheme is shown on a schematic plan prepared by Equus Design and Build – refer to Plate 6.
- 3.18. The proposed vehicular access would be from the A4130 to the north, with a new internal estate road leading immediately east to a small scale parking / yard located in the site's north eastern corner. To the east of it, centrally within the northern part of the site, would be the Stick and Ball Field and Grass Schooling Field. The site's north western part would be left undeveloped.
- 3.19. The new access would require a small hedgerow breach as identified in the 'Tree Constraints Plan Overview' prepared by Wright Landscape and Arboriculture Ltd. According to the 'Arboricultural Survey Report' paragraph 10.9 this existing hedgerow ***"... is a mix of native species, including hazel, maple, hawthorn, and elm"***.
- 3.20. The closest surveyed trees TG 13 and T14 are located a considerable distance away and would not be affected – refer to the 'Tree Constraints Plan (Entrance & Estate Road)' plan.
- 3.21. The proposed estate road would lead south and then, past the Grass Schooling Field, branch out east and west to provide access for management of the land, and to connect with the proposed equine facilities around Upper Culham Farm. The existing barns would be utilised as Staff Day Facility and Storage Barn.
- 3.22. It is understood that the existing commercial tenants at Upper Culham Farm would not be affected by the proposed scheme.
- 3.23. Centrally within the site would be the Polo Field and associated small pavilion, with a parking area (constructed of grasscrete or similar) to its west, contextually being closest to the existing and proposed built form.
- 3.24. Around the Farm, the proposals include the construction of three American Barns (60 m long and 25.5 m wide). These would be of low profile with shallow roof pitch (approx. 6.8 m ridge height) and would replace the existing manège with an existing privet hedge removed. A Rehabilitation Pool, two Horse Walkers (c. 20 m diameter), Pump House and Wash Down facilities and Sand Corrals would be located opposite, replacing the existing fenced off paddock. Access into these facilities would be from the existing internal tracks and via the

¹² For example: OS Six-inch Map, Berkshire Sheet XXIII, surveyed between 1875 to 1878 and published in 1883.

existing field access gates. This area benefits from substantial vegetative cover, which ensures the visual amenity of the residents at Upper Culham hamlet is not affected.

- 3.25. To the east of the proposed American Barns would a Truck Parking area (constructed of grasscrete or similar), which would fall within the site's southern most arable field with a grasscrete track leading east providing access to a Muck Heap. An Exercise Track would be located in its central part with a Reservoir /Attenuation Pond located in its southern corner. Typically, the proposed Exercise Track would only be used twice a day for the quiet exercise of horses and only during the polo season – between early March to the end of September. Therefore, any activities in this part of the site would be very infrequent and temporary. With regards the Reservoir /Attenuation Pond, it would be enclosed by woodland and copse planting to reduce evaporation with gaps in tree canopies to allow cross flow and reduce mosquitoes and midges developing in abnormal quantities. This would help reduce the risk of horses contracting sweet itch.
- 3.26. The existing agricultural track that leads east from the farm and connects with Restricted Byway WARG38 on the site's eastern edge is proposed to be removed.
- 3.27. With regards the proposed planting, it would comprise native species with the focus on low pollen species and avoiding tree species that are poisonous or harmful to horses such as Sycamore, Field Maple, and Yew. Other tree species such as Cherry and Oaks would be planted away from exercise areas and grazing fields, and controlled either through buffer planting or light touch and low-profile fencing, which would not be visible from outside the site.
- 3.28. It is noted that a number of Balsam Poplar trees (c. 7 m height) are present within the site. These are identified as tree group TG2 – refer to the 'Tree Survey Plan – Site Wide' prepared by Wright Landscape and Arboriculture Ltd. The associated 'Arboricultural Survey Report' states:

" 10.2 A row of mature balsam poplars edge an access road to the fields, separating the yard and arena from paddocks to the north. These poplars have been heavily pruned in the past and whilst the regrowth is healthy, these trees should not be allowed to grow full and open canopies; the regrowth will have weak attachment points and will be prone to branch failure if left unmanaged.

10.3 Future management should include pruning every five years. This won't affect the tree's lifespan but will reduce the risk of tree or branch failure, ensuring safety irrespective of future development plans."
- 3.29. At this stage, these high pollen trees are proposed to be retained.

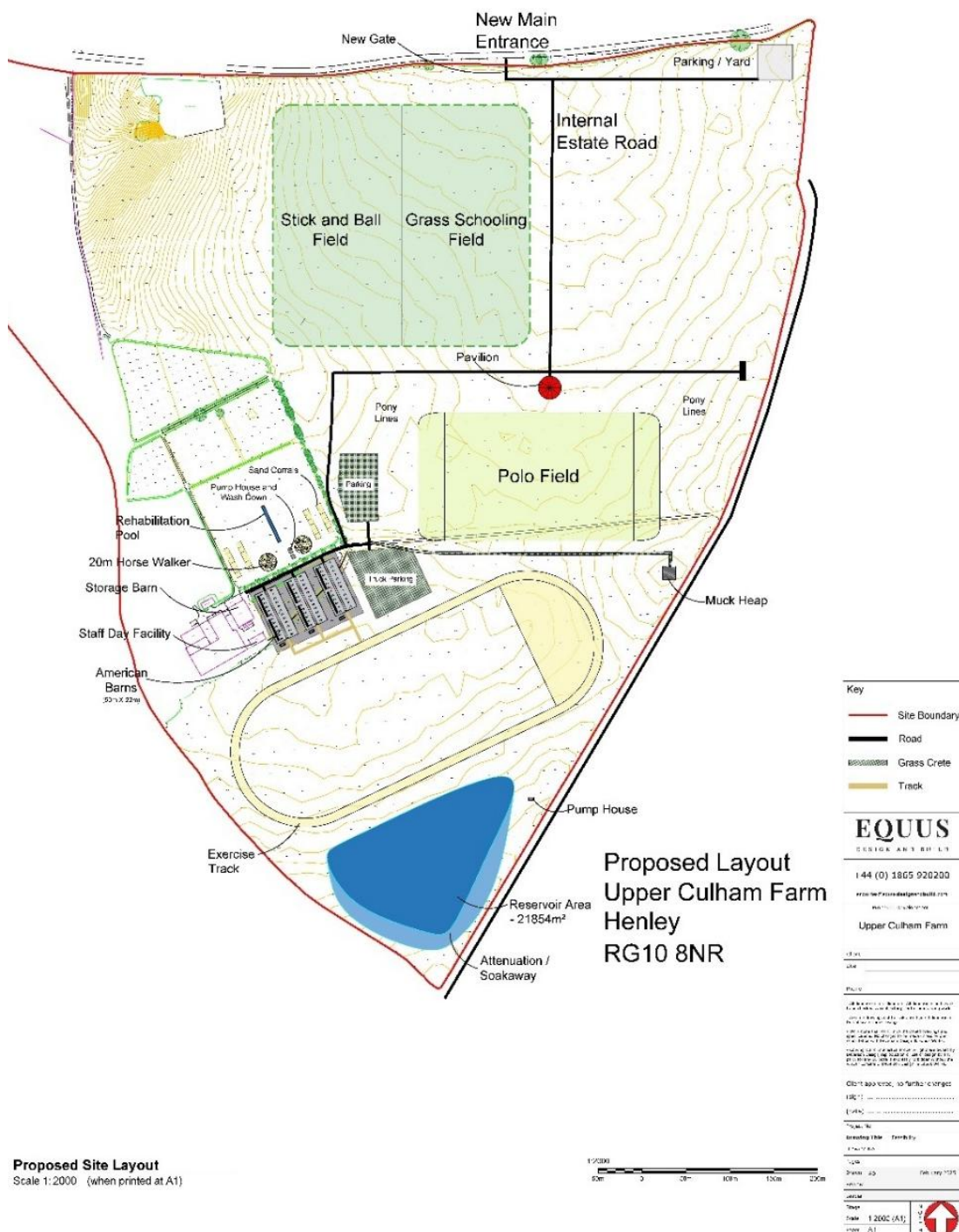


Plate 6 Proposed Schematic Layout – extract.

Site Analysis

- 3.30. Based on the on-site analysis and above description it is evident that the proposed scheme has been sensitively located within the wider landholding, utilising the land that is already partly developed and characterised by the lack of any evident inter-visibility with the surrounding landscape and very limited opportunities for public views.
- 3.31. For this reason, the desktop studies and on-site analysis has not revealed any specific visual receptors in the local area that would be of concern.
- 3.32. The proposed materials and colours are considered appropriate given the proposed typology, context, and local landscape.
- 3.33. As part of the proposed scheme, the applicant is committed to maintaining and enhancing the existing vegetation in order to improve its condition and increase the level of screening. In addition, the LVIA identifies a number of mitigation measures and planting proposals. A detailed planting plan could be conditioned to secure the proposed mitigation and enhancement measures.

4. Effects upon the Site and Landscape Character

- 4.1. This Section seeks to establish how the Proposed Development would have a bearing upon those landscape elements that help characterise the site and provide the structural integrity of its environment, and upon the landscape character locally.
- 4.2. The effects on landscape character consider how the introduction of new landscape elements and built form alter the landform, landcover, landscape pattern, and perceptual attributes of the Site or how visibility of the Proposed Development changes the way in which landscape character is perceived. Landscape character is defined in GLVIA3 as the:

“Distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.”¹³

- 4.3. As illustrated at Plate 6 the proposed scheme would be located within an area currently characterised by the existing equine facilities or would fall within intensively managed arable land.
- 4.4. In the context of the emerging Policy NE6 ‘Valued Landscapes’, it is noted that the site would form part of the ‘Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape’ with the policy wording stating:

“2. Development proposals located within or affecting a valued landscape should have particular regard to the following attributes:

a) Landscape quality (condition);

b) Scenic quality;

c) Rarity;

d) Representativeness;

e) Conservation interests;

f) Recreation value;

g) Perceptual aspects; and

h) Associations.

3. Development proposals affecting valued landscapes will only be supported where they protect and, where appropriate, integrate with and/or enhance the special features, characteristics and qualities of the landscape, unless the benefits of the development in that location clearly outweigh the harm.”

- 4.5. As stated before, the above quoted policy is an emerging one and does not form part of the Development Plan. To inform the decision-making process the below assessment aims to provide evidence of the inconsequential visual effects of the proposed scheme and its

¹³ Glossary, Page 157, GLVIA3

benefits in landscape character and ecology terms as expresses in the narrative supporting this non-statutory designation – for details refer to the description of the ‘Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape’.¹⁴

Landscape Features

- 4.6. With regards the ground levels, a degree of levelling would be required to create suitable building platforms and level ground for the Polo Field and Exercise Track. These facilities have been purposely located in the central and southern part of the site which is characterised by near level ground with the topographical survey indicating c. 1 m difference. The remaining facilities would utilise the existing ground levels.
- 4.7. It is noted that the proposed American Barns partially fall within the existing manège, which is characterised by levels ground and extend into the adjacent arable field. The manège is currently enclosed by a an approx. 2 m high bank and as part of the proposals this man-made feature would be removed. It is worth noting that, based on the available aerial images the bank was constructed in late 2010 following the construction of the manège. Therefore, it is a recent addition and does not reflect the historic field pattern thus is of no consequence in landscape character terms. Around the same time, the bank was planted with various tree species currently present including Ash, Pine, and Lime.
- 4.8. It is accepted that the proposed American Barns, Estate Road, and other facilities would affect the existing land cover. As described in the preceding paragraphs, this is either a previously developed land or comprises ephemeral arable crop, which is replaced annually. In addition, the combined footprint represents a minute proportion of the grassland within the wider landholding. Overall, the proposed scheme is considered to result in a low degree of change and minor effects upon the medium value arable land cover.
- 4.9. With regards the Exercise Track and Arena, these would be constructed of permeable natural aggregate and enclose a large area of grassland which, coupled with the surrounding grassland would dominate the space.
- 4.10. A Reservoir / Attenuation water feature is proposed in the southern most low-lying part of the site. This has been designed to have an organic outline, reading as natural feature and would be enclosed by woodland and hedgerow planting. Gaps in the vegetation would allow inter-visibility with the Exercise Track to provide visual amenity and sense of place.
- 4.11. The existing perimeter hedgerows appears to be in good condition and, at the time of site visit in July 2024, was maintained relatively high – breaking the line of sights. It is envisaged that the existing hedgerows would continue to be managed in accordance with agricultural best practise and their function as a landscape feature would be strengthened with native tree planting and copse planting strategically placed along the Site’s perimeter.
- 4.12. With regards the Polo Field, the associated activities are inward looking, and their visual amenity does not rely on views out. It is noted that the wooded Ashley Wood and Bowsey Hill are visible from this part of the site. From a design point of view, and to create a sense of place, it was considered valuable to retain the visual connectivity with the surrounding landscape. For this reason, vistas towards the wooded hills have been retained with the

¹⁴ <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2024-09/Valued%20Landscape%20Assessment%20September%202024%20%28reduced%29.pdf>

site's eastern and south eastern edge partially enclosed with new woodland planting with gaps in the canopy cover allowing for views out. This new planting would act as a stepping stone, linking the Ancient Woodland habitat at Rosehill Wood and in the valley to the north with the wooded landscape around Crazies Hill. It is noted that Rosehill Wood and much of the landscape north of the A4130 is identified as 'Biodiversity Opportunity Area' in the Council's *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment* (November 2019) and the proposals would contribute to this objective.

- 4.13. Similarly, the existing hedgerow and mature trees that mark the northern edge of the site, along the A4130, would be planted with trees and woodland copse planting. This vegetation is identified on the Council's constraints plan as 'Green Route Enhancement Area' – refer to Plate 1. The proposed planting would increase Biodiversity Net Gain, would result in net gain in the overall tree resource across the site, and most importantly would strengthen their function, in line with the Council's expectations outlined through Policy CC03.
- 4.14. With regards the PRoWs, the existing Public Footpath WARG39 would be retained and would not be affected by the proposed scheme.
- 4.15. As illustrated on the 'Tree Constraints Plan Overview' and 'Tree Constraints Plan (Entrance & Estate Road)' plan, prepared by prepared by Wright Landscape and Arboriculture Ltd., the proposed scheme would not cause any material direct effects upon any of the identified structural vegetation within or around the site with the exception of a small hedgerow breach (less than 3 m)¹⁵ along the A4130 to accommodate the proposed vehicular access and tree group TG15 removed to accommodate the proposed American Barns. This represents fraction of the overall hedgerow and tree resource within the site, and would be offset by the proposed planting with a considerable net gain to the overall resource.
- 4.16. Overall, the underlying largely level topography of the site would not change with the proposed scheme in place and any localised ground works required as part of the scheme would be inconsequential – judged to be negligible with effects also negligible.
- 4.17. The existing tree and hedgerow resource would substantially increase with new hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and copse / woodland planting proposed across the site.

Summary

- 4.18. In summary, the proposed scheme would bring about the following effects:
 - Major beneficial effects upon the tree and hedgerow / hedge resource within the site.
 - Negligible effects upon the landform.
 - Moderate beneficial effects upon the grassland with the wider landholding.
 - No direct physical effects upon PRoWs.
 - No direct physical effects upon the existing water features as none are present within the site.

¹⁵ 'Arboricultural Survey Report' paragraph 16.5.

Effects upon the Character of the Site

- 4.19. It is acknowledged that the existing arable character of the site would change. The proposed scheme, however, is in part, associated with the existing equine facilities at Upper Culham Farm. As part of the landscape design and mitigation strategy the character of the site has been deliberately changed from open arable to a well treed landscape where the sense of enclosure is higher, and the proposed trees form the dominant landscape feature in character terms. The underlying sense of openness and rural character would prevail with very little built form proposed in this area. The ephemeral arable crop, which required intensive agricultural practises, would be replaced by grassland and structural planting benefiting biodiversity. The internal subdivision within the site does differ from the existing field pattern, but this is not considered to be material with effects limited to the site itself, not visible beyond the site's boundaries, and necessary to implement the proposed landscape framework within the site. Most importantly none of the historic perimeter boundaries would be altered and the existing internal sub-division across the site is the result of modern agricultural practises. Overall, the effects are judged to be negligible in character terms.

Effects upon the Character of the Local Landscape

- 4.20. The magnitude of change upon the landscape can only be established by analysing various factors that collectively define and characterise the local area. These would include such factors as landform, land cover, land use, scale, pattern, sense of enclosure / openness, field pattern, quality, and condition but also perceptual qualities of the landscape and movement. These factors broadly align with the description of the LCA included in the Council's Assessment.
- 4.21. Effects on landscape character will arise either through the introduction of new elements during the construction and operational stage, that alter the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements in a particular type of landscape, or through visibility of the proposed built form, which may alter the way in which the pattern of elements is perceived.
- 4.22. At the outset it is important to acknowledge that equine land use is already established on site, with the existing facilities concentrated around Upper Culham Farm with paddocks present in the western part of the site.
- 4.23. The published *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment* (November 2019) identified that one of the 'Key issues' is ***"Intensification of estate land for other uses such as polo"*** and ***"Increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings leading to visual intrusion of these elements."***
- 4.24. With regards to the proposed built form, the three American Barns would be of low profile and shallow roof pitch, which would help reduce their visibility. They would read as forming part of the existing cluster of farm buildings associated with Upper Culham Farm, thus contextually would be justifiable and would benefit from screening provided by these buildings. The roadside hedgerow along the southern section of Culham Lane has not been surveyed, as no development is being proposed that would affect it. During the site visit, however, it was confirmed that the roadside vegetation is in good condition, hedgerows are dense and tall, breaking the line of sight and screening the existing facilities. The same would be true for the proposed three American Barns, and the remaining facilities which would be of low-profile.

- 4.25. It is noted that “... **impressive views of the wooded hills of High Knowl and Bottom Boles Wood to the south**” are identified as being one of the characteristics of the host landscape LCA E1 ‘Remenham Arable Chalk Pasture’ and this quality of the landscape would not change with the proposed scheme in place. Public access within the site is very limited with views from Public Footpath WARG39 enclosed by roadside vegetation along Culham Lane with views north curtailed by the hedgerow and trees that mark the A4130. It is worth reiterating that the PRoW sits in a localised fold in the landscape and when looking east and south east views terminate on the rising ground in the foreground. In terms of views from Restricted Byway WARG38, this PRoWs skirts the eastern edge of the site and views towards High Knowl and Bottom Boles Wood are largely uninterrupted but are not co-visible with the site, which is screened by its tall perimeter hedgerow.
- 4.26. It is acknowledged that arable land use within the site would cease but such land management requires intensive agricultural practises, fertilisers and herbicides etc, which have negative effects on the natural environment. This is partially recognised in the ‘Landscape Guidelines’ for the LCA E1, which states: “**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.**”
- 4.27. Whilst the landscape is ‘generally unwooded’ there are pockets of woodland habitats within the host landscape including the historic parkland at Park Place and Temple Combe, which is characterised by a patchwork of pastures and woodlands, and estate managed grassland. In addition, woodlands are present in the adjacent LCA D1 ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’, which extend towards the edges of the site. This has been used as a desing cue for the development of the landscape masterplan, which is based on the concept of woodlands around the perimeter of the site with and tree belts dissecting the scheme and linking the various ‘Biodiversity Opportunity Areas’ in the adjacent LCA D1 with the woodlands at Park Place and Temple Combe, and those in the southern part of the host landscape.
- 4.28. The proposed planting would, with time, contribute to increasing biodiversity locally and could be managed to support the existing BAP Priority Habitat Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland through active management in consultation with the applicant’s ecologist. The general lack of woodland planting is also noted in the ‘Landscape Condition’ description of the host LCA: “**There is a lack of semi-natural habitats, particularly woodland which is relatively sparse in comparison with other rural areas of the borough.**”
- 4.29. With regards to cultural and historic landscape, the site does not exhibit any functional or visual association with the historic parkland at Park Place and Temple Combe, thus this key characteristic of the local landscape would not change.
- 4.30. The settlement pattern would also be unaffected with the scheme not introducing any residential development, the proposed built form being located and majority of activities taking place near the existing facilities at Upper Culham Farm, with the proposed scheme being associated with rural landscape, in character terms.
- 4.31. It is accepted that the current ‘strong sense of exposure’ would change with the proposed landscape masterplan introducing woodland and copse planting, and hedgerow tree planting. This in itself is not considered to be negative or out of place, given the characteristic of the parkland at Park Place and Temple Combe and woodlands in the adjoining LCA DI ‘Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes’ and visibility of the wooded hills in the

LCA F1 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls'. This heightened sense of enclosure is already recognised in the published Assessment: ***"Around and within Park Place and its wider estate the land use is more wooded, and contains varied parkland with some pasture providing variation in landscape character. Strips of both mixed and BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland can be found along rural lanes and tracks, and new hedgerows have been planted within the estate land. This woodland greatly influences the sense of scale and changes the degree of perceived enclosure. Beech woodland is prominent close to the A4130 between Remenham Hill and Remenham Place, and connects to the core of Remenham Wood. This provides both physical and visual connectivity to the neighbouring character area D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes."***

- 4.32. It is also worth noting that tree and woodland planting is recognised as being one of the 'Valuable Landscape Attributes' of the host landscape, and the proposed planting would reinforce this attribute: ***"Small woodland copses and linear deciduous woodlands are ecologically important BAP priority habitats and provide continuation with adjoining character area D1."***
- 4.33. With regards to the perceptual qualities of the landscape, the description of the host LAC notes: ***"Unmanaged, gappy hawthorn hedgerows create a sense of neglect, which contrasts with the ordered formal landscape created by the Park Place estate."*** This, however, does not necessarily apply to the site itself with its perimeter hedgerows appearing to be in good condition, well managed, and of considerable height with gaps largely present to accommodate farm access.
- 4.34. It is evident that the proposed scheme would respond well to the above identified issues and 'Landscape Strategy' for the LCA E1: ***"The key aspects to be enhanced and strengthened are field boundaries and hedgerows and the parkland woodland and trees while maintaining the views to Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls. In particular there are opportunities for the re-creation of chalk grassland habitats that have been lost."*** Indeed, it would also directly address its 'Landscape Guidelines': ***"Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland and hedgerows with hedgerow standard trees, using locally occurring native species in order to link existing woodland, within and outside the area, without the loss of significant views. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts."***
- 4.35. Evidently, the proposed scheme would not exacerbate, or indeed cause, and change to the perception of the surrounding open countryside and the proposed facilities whilst physically present would not manifest themselves in the local landscape.
- 4.36. The proposed scheme respects the existing historic field boundary hedgerows and trees and is judged to be compatible with the current landscape pattern. It would not affect any views across the surrounding countryside due to the highly enclosed character of the site and the characteristics of the proposed scheme.
- 4.37. In summary, the proposed scheme is considered to respond well and not to be in conflict with the identified policies of the *Core Strategy* and *Managing Development Delivery*.
- 4.38. Based on the assessment outlined in the preceding paragraphs the proposed scheme would bring about a negligible magnitude of change being of small scale, sensitively located, does not materially affect its openness and ruralness, and with the proposed tree and woodland vegetation reflecting the character of the landscape in the wider area.

5. Effects upon Visual Amenity

- 5.1. The effects on visual amenity consider the changes in views arising from the proposed scheme in relation to visual receptors including residential properties, highways, PRoW, and recreational areas, and the effect on representative viewpoints or specific locations within the study area. Visual amenity is defined in GL VIA3 as:

“...the overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area.”

- 5.2. The assessment was carried out in late July 2024 as part of on-site survey. Site photographs were taken to record the character and nature of views, and the existing visibility of the site. Where relevant the seasonal changes to the vegetative cover have been considered as part of the visual assessment.
- 5.3. The construction stage would be of relatively short duration, at this stage assumed to be 12 months, and although relevant any potential visual effects would be similar or lower to those identified during the long term operational phase of the proposed scheme. Therefore, this assessment focuses on the operational stage of the proposed scheme.

Sensitivity of Receptors

- 5.4. With regards to the sensitivity of visual receptors this is established by cross referencing the value of views gained and their inherent susceptibility to change brought about by the proposed scheme. In terms of value, it is taken as medium with the local landscape being pleasant but ordinary countryside. In terms of receptors located within the Chilterns National Landscape the value of their views is taken as high to reflect the presence of the statutory landscape designation.
- 5.5. In terms of their susceptibility, this will vary with users of PRoWs and those exercising their right to access considered to be of high susceptibility. This is on the basis that the surrounding landscape forms a strong component of their visual amenity. The same approach is taken for residential receptors. Overall, the sensitivity of PRoW users and residential receptors is assessed as high.
- 5.6. In comparison, road receptors driving along A class, B class and local minor unclassified roads travel across different parts of the local landscapes and are influenced by a variety of views, building typology, and elements of infrastructure. On that basis their susceptibility is taken as low to medium.

Visual Receptors and Viewpoints

- 5.7. A site visit was conducted in late July 2024 with a number of visual receptors / public vantage points identified and visited, in order to obtain views towards the site. Given the undulating topography of the Chilterns landscape, plateau like landscape of the site, coupled with blocks of woodland and tree belts in the core study area, the actual visual envelope of the proposed scheme is expected to be extremely limited and highly localised.

- 5.8. Views from within the site often terminate on the immediate or perimeter vegetation with the mature tree canopies around the Upper Culham Farm and in the hamlet enclosing the nearby residential properties. The wooded edge of Park Place and Temple Combe terminates views looking west. Views north towards the Chilterns are foreshortened by the plateau landform of the site and are always restricted by the tree canopies along the A4130 and woodlands behind. The wooded upper slopes are visible, but the distance and lack of visual connectivity with the valley landscape, somewhat reduces their positive influence and they form an attractive backdrop rather than the main focus. This is recognised by the Council's own landscape character assessment, which does not identify views towards the Chilterns as a key characteristic of the host E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau'.
- 5.9. Instead, it recognises "**Clear views of the wooded hills of High Knoll and Bottom Boles (F1) provide distant enclosure**" and these wooded hills form an attractive near constant feature in views from the open plateau and indeed form within the site. The site, however, is private land with virtually no public access except for Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way, which crosses the site's north western part.

Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way

- 5.10. Travelling south to north towards the A4130, views from this PRow are initially enclosed by the hedgerow and tree planting that encloses the paddocks at Upper Culham Lane – refer to Plate 7. Views open up as one enters the site's north western part where the PRow follows a localised depression. Looking north, the vegetation along the A4130 heavily restricts views towards the Chilterns and these remain heavily screened as one crosses the site. No. 122 – 125 Middle Culham Cottages are visible but views are limited to their upper storey with the ground floor windows screened by the roadside hedgerow – Plate 8. Looking east and south east views towards "... **the wooded hills of High Knoll and Bottom Boles...**" are not gained due to the tree vegetation around the Farm screening views out – Plate 9. Further north along the PRow the land within the site gently rises to form the characteristic plateau and this terminates the views – Plate 11.
- 5.11. Views from the northern end of Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way are equally screened with the disused historic chalk pit enclosed by tree and scrub vegetation. The plateau landscape across the central part of the site screens views towards the wooded hills east and south east – Plate 12. Looking south the Farm is almost completely screened with the farm buildings just visible amongst the tree canopies. The view is rural with landscape managed for agriculture. The existing equine facilities at Upper Culham Farm are not necessarily evident. In other words, this PRow has no visual relationship with the wooded slopes of High Knoll and Bottom Boles.



Plate 7 View from Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way around Upper Culham Farm. Roadside hedgerow frames the view to the left.



Plate 8 View from Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way near Upper Culham Farm, looking north. The site's north western most field forms the foreground. No. 122 – 125 Middle Culham Cottages are visible behind the roadside vegetation. Wooded Chilterns form the distant backdrop.



Plate 9 View from Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way near Upper Culham Farm, looking north. Tree belt extends along the PRow screening views out. Telegraph poles mark the PRow route.



Plate 10 View from Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way past Upper Culham Farm, looking north. Telegraph poles mark the PRow route.



Plate 11 View from Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way past Upper Culham Farm, looking east. Hedgerow to the right encloses paddocks at Upper Culham Farm.

- 5.12. As part of the proposed scheme this part of the site would be left undeveloped with the western edge of Stick and Ball Field, located some 170 m away at its closest point, enclosed by a new hedgerow with hedgerow trees. The activities associated with Stick and Ball Field would not be apparent given the distance and rising land and movement and human presence would be expected in this agricultural landscape. The proposed American Barns would effectively replace the existing built form, which is already heavily screened, and such typology would not be out of context in this agricultural landscape. The remaining elements of the proposed scheme would be more distant and would not be visible.
- 5.13. In addition, as an enhancement measure the PRoW would be enclosed by a new hedgerow, which would follow its alignment and would echo the historic field pattern, which is still apparent in the alignment of the tree belt that extends north from Upper Culham Farm and visible in Plate 9.
- 5.14. At Year 1 the degree of change is judged to be negligible at most. Once the proposed planting has matured at Year 10, the degree of change is judged to be medium beneficial with effects major beneficial, on the basis that the proposed planting is in keeping with the more wooded / treed character of this particular area, and with the lost historic field boundary reinstated and character of the local landscape 'repaired'.



Plate 12 View from the northern end of Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way, looking south east. Wooded chalk pit can be seen to the left. Views terminate on the foreground.



Plate 13 View from the northern end of Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way, looking south towards Upper Culham Farm. Dwellings in the hamlet are visible above the roadside hedgerow.

Restricted Byway WARG38

- 5.15. Views from Restricted Byway WARG38 have also been appraised with the route walked in both directions. As recognised in the preceding paragraphs, views from this route include “... **the wooded hills of High Knoll and Bottom Boles...**” but the PRow skirts the eastern edge of the site, which is enclosed by a tall (c. 3 m high) and dense hedgerow. At the northern end of the PRow, views into the site land can only be gained through the existing agricultural access. Views are gained in different direction and are not simultaneous, and are substantially restricted – Plate 14 and Plate 15.
- 5.16. Such views continue along the whole of the route with the wooded hills and large scale manor house at Cayton Park House visible on the upper slopes. Some of the dwellings in Cockpole Green are also visible but they sit low and are substantially screened by tree canopies – Plate 16.
- 5.17. The nearby Second World War pillbox forms a feature in the foreground – Plate 17. Views into the site can be gained through the exiting field gate, which would be planted up as part of the proposed scheme – Plate 18. Views from the southern section of Restricted Byway WARG38 into the site are equally screened – Plate 19.
- 5.18. It is evident that the proposed scheme would be inconsequential to the users of this PRow and to their understanding of the local rural landscape. The existing gaps would be planted up and it is envisaged that views would be quickly screened. The degree of change and effects are judged to be negligible at Year 1, at most, and diminishing to a ‘no change’ scenario at Year 10.



Plate 14 View from the northern end of Restricted Byway WARG38, looking south. The site's eastern perimeter hedgerow can be seen on the right hand side.



Plate 15 View from the northern end of Restricted Byway WARG38, looking south west into the site through an existing field gate.



Plate 16 View from the southern section of Restricted Byway WARG38, looking south east.



Plate 17 View from the southern section of Restricted Byway WARG38, looking east with Pillbox visible in the foreground.



Plate 18 View from the central section of Restricted Byway WARG38 looking north west into the site. The site's perimeter hedgerow frames the view.



Plate 19 View from the southern end of Restricted Byway WARG38, looking north. The site's eastern perimeter hedgerow can be seen on the left hand side.

Cockpole Green

- 5.19. As illustrated by the SZTV plan (Figure 2) the southern section of Culham Lane and landscape around Cockpole Green and Crazies Hill may theoretically offer views of the proposed scheme.
- 5.20. Views from the north western part of Cockpole Green, at Ashley Hill Place, are screened by the roadside and garden vegetation. Looking towards the site, one can identify the distant tree canopies within the site but none of the existing buildings are visible – Plate 20. The same would be true for the proposed scheme.
- 5.21. Travelling out of the hamlet, views temporarily open up with the road verge relatively open, with post and wire fence and rudimental vegetation partially interrupting the views – Plate 21. The site's perimeter vegetation is just identifiable, and this vegetation would screen the proposed scheme and associated activities.
- 5.22. As one approaches Restricted Byway WARG38 views again become screened with the focus on the highway itself and views channelled by the roadside hedgerows – Plate 22. The roadside hedgerow forms the site's perimeter vegetation and views into the site are screened. None of the existing buildings at Upper Culham Farm are visible, and the same would be true for the proposed scheme.



Plate 20 View from the north western part of Cockpole Green, near Ashley Hill Place, looking north west along Culham Lane.



Plate 21 View from Culham Lane at the north western edge of Cockpole Green, looking north west.



Plate 22 View from Culham Lane, at Restricted Byway WARG38, looking north west. The site's southern perimeter hedgerow / roadside hedgerow screens views into the site

Public Footpath WARG22

- 5.23. The nearby Public Footpath WARG22 coincides with the Chilterns Way, and it was considered important to test the inter-visibility with this receptor. The PRoW has been walked in both directions between Cockpole Green and Cockpole Cricket Ground to the west. Views from the PRoW continue to be screened with the roadside hedgerow along Culham Lane screening the site land and associated built form. The site's perimeter hedgerow, visible behind, is taller and gives evidence that the proposed scheme would not have any visual effects, or the effects would be inconsequential – Plate 23, Plate 24, Plate 25. Views from this route do not include the distant wooded Chilterns – there is no visual relationship with this statutory protected landscape. As part of the scheme, the perimeter of the site would be strengthened with woodland and tree planting, and this is considered to be a positive change bringing about a low residual degree of change and moderate beneficial residual effects at Year 10.



Plate 23 View from the eastern end of Public Footpath WARG22 / Chilterns Way, looking west towards Youngs Farm (visible on the left hand side).



Plate 24 View from the central section of Public Footpath WARG22 / Chilterns Way, looking north west towards the site. White Cottages are visible in the middle ground.



Plate 25 View from the central section of Public Footpath WARG22 / Chilterns Way, looking north towards the site. The roadside hedgerow screens Culham Lane. The site's taller perimeter hedgerow is seen behind.

Crazies Hill

- 5.24. With regards to Crazies Hill, views from this hamlet have also been appraised with the following receptors analysed: Restricted Byway WARG16 at the entrance to Cayton Park House, and Chilterns Way at: Highfield Lane at Public Footpath WARG26, Crazies Hill at Public Footpath WARG26, and Public Footpath WARG25 near The Lodge. Due to the levelling landform the northern section of Public Footpath WARG25 has not been appraised with the previously assessed Public Footpath WARG22 / Chilterns Way serving as a proxy view.
- 5.25. In summary, none of the visited locations offer views towards the site. The local landscape is wooded and strongly enclosed, and the proposed development would not have any effects upon this area and associated visual receptors.



Plate 26 View from Restricted Byway WARG16 at the entrance to Cayton Park House, looking north west. The site is screened.



Plate 27 View looking south east along Restricted Byway WARG16 illustrating its strongly enclosed corridor.



Plate 28 View from the eastern end of Public Footpath WARG26 / Chilterns Way at Highfield Lane.



Plate 29 View from the western end of Public Footpath WARG26 / Chilterns Way at Crazies Hill.



Plate 30 View from the south eastern end of Public Footpath WARG25 near The Lodge. Youngs Farm is visible in the far distance.

Rose Lane

- 5.26. The SZTV plan (Figure 2) also illustrates a very small patch of theoretical visibility along Rose Lane in the eastern study area. The SZTV plan is based on the full extent of the application boundary therefore views of the proposed built form are not expected to be gained, given the proposed layout. For completeness, however, views from this road have been appraised and the site survey confirmed that the proposed scheme would not be visible due to the screening provided by the woodlands and change in ground levels – Plate 31.



Plate 31 View from Rose Lane, near South Lodge, looking west.

Public Footpath REME5

- 5.27. According to the SZTV plan (Figure 2) theoretical views might also be available from Public Footpath REME5, which also coincides with the Chilterns Way. Whilst no built form is being proposed in the north western part of the site it was considered prudent to confirm the level of inter-visibility given the proximity, presence of the promoted long distance Chilterns Way, and emerging policies on 'valued landscape'. The route was walked in both direction between Aston Lane, in Remenham Hill, and towards the woodland near Middle Culham Farm. During the site visit some of the Balsam Poplar trees and paddocks at Upper Culham Farm have been identified. The proposed American Barns might come into the view, but would be seen behind the aforementioned Poplar trees some 950 m away. Such typology is not out of context in this rural landscape and its visibility is expected to be limited to the rooftops only. Similarly, the proposed Horse Walkers, Sand Corrals and Rehabilitation Pool, which would be located in one of the existing paddocks would be partially visible. These would fall within the land that is already characterised by equestrian facilities therefore such change would be inconsequential. The proposed Stick and Ball Field would not be visible and the same would be true for the proposed car parking, Polo Field and other facilities in the central, eastern, and southern part of the site. The closets north western part of the site is proposed to be left undeveloped. Overall, the degree of change and effects are judged to be negligible. It is noted that **"... the wooded hills of High Knoll and Bottom Boles..."** are partially visible, and this contributes to the perception of a well treed / wooded landscape with the receptor located within the D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes. As part of the proposed scheme, the internal boundaries would be planted up with new hedgerows and hedgerow trees, reinforcing this characteristic of the local landscape. This, in residual terms, is expected to bring about a low degree of change and moderate beneficial residual effects at Year 10.



Plate 32 View from Public Footpath REME5 / Chilterns Way, some 160 m away from the A4130. Trees at Upper Culham Lane are visible.



Plate 33 View from Public Footpath REME5 / Chilterns Way, some 260 m away from the A4130. Trees at Upper Culham Lane are visible – marked with a red dashed circle.

Chilterns National Landscape

- 5.28. The elevated Chilterns National Landscape falls on the periphery of the wider 3 km study area. Its distant wooded upper slopes are partially visible from within the site and given the statutory protection afforded to this landscape, it was considered important to ascertain the reciprocal views towards the site. Views from low-lying Public Footpath HAM/34/1 to the west of Mill End (c. 35 m AOD) and elevated Public Footpath HAM/29/1 to the south of Burrow Farm and near Chalkpit Wood (c. 100 m AOD) have been investigated but the interior of the site is screened. The A4130 roadside hedgerow can be just identified on the elevated horizon, merging with the woodlands behind. The sloping arable field, seen on the higher ground, is located to the north of the A4130 thus outside of the site. Rosehill Wood traverses the slope descending towards Culham Court seen on the valley floor. Middle Culham Farm can be identified mid slope with Middle Culham Cottages just identifiable amongst distant tree canopies. None of the features or built form within the site are visible, and the same would be true for the proposed scheme.
- 5.29. It is evident that the proposed scheme would not affect the 'Special Quality' of the Chilterns National Landscape: ***"Panoramic Views from and across the escarpment interwoven with intimate dipslope valleys and rolling fields"*** and its setting would not be affected either. The planting proposed within the site might be visible and would add to the overall canopy cover in the landscape, but such change is judged to be inconsequential with effects negligible at most.



Plate 34 View from Public Footpath HAM/29/1 to the south of Burrow Farm, looking south.



Plate 35 View from Public Footpath HAM/29/1 to the south of Burrow Farm, looking south.

Residential Receptors

- 5.30. With regards to the closest residential receptors: No. 122 – 125 Middle Culham Cottages, Seaforth Cottage and Paddock Cottage, No. 1 – 4 White Cottages, and Kenton's Corner Cottage their visual amenity would be partially altered but this is not considered to be adverse in nature. The north western part of the site would remain open and undeveloped with the western edge of the proposed Stick and Ball Field enclosed with a new hedgerow and hedgerow trees. This would control views of the activities within the site. Further perimeter trees would be planted along the edge of the site to ensure privacy of the residents is protected. The proposed scheme would bring about a negligible change and negligible effects at most at Year 1, reducing to nil effects at Year 10.
- 5.31. With regards to the residents at No. 1 – 4 White Cottages, their first floor windows are visible across much of the central and southern part of the site, at variable distance and varied degree of visibility. It is accepted that views from their upper windows, likely to be bedroom windows, would include the facilities and activities associated with the Exercise Track and Polo Field. The sense of rurality would be, however, preserved with the activities in this part of the site infrequent and associated with equine land use. The overall nature and rural character of the view would remain materially unchanged. Views of the American Barns would be peripheral and recognised as being part of the existing facilities – thus their introduction would be inconsequential. On balance, the degree of change is judged to be low with effects moderate adverse at most –as a precautionary approach. To protect the privacy of these residents it is proposed to introduce various tree planting along the south western edge of the site. At Year 10, the residual effects are expected to diminish to negligible effects with views from the residential properties largely screened or substantially filtered. The proposed planting would aim to retain a degree of openness and

views across the local landscape, as gained from these dwellings, whilst controlling views of the proposed scheme.

- 5.32. With regards to Kenton's Corner Cottage, the currently open edge of its curtilage allows for views along the site's south western perimeter hedgerow. It is noted that its southern elevation includes small scale fenestration and a small balcony on the first floor. As part of the proposals this section of the site's boundary would be enclosed with a small scale copse planting, and views towards the dwelling from the Exercise Track eventually screened. At Year 1 it is expected that the proposed activities associated the Exercise Track would result in a low degree of change and moderate adverse effects, and with time these would diminish to nil effects.

6. Summary and Conclusions

- 6.1. This LVIA has been prepared by Pegasus Group to provide landscape planning services in support of a full planning application for the 'Change Of Use Of Arable Land To Equestrian Use, Construction Of Polo Field, Levelling Of Land For Stick & Ball And Schooling Fields, 3 X American Barns, 2 X Horse Walkers, Exercise Track, Irrigation Pond, Pump House, Sand Turnout Corrals, Horse Rehabilitation Pool, Conversion Of Existing Barn Into Staff Day Facilities, Construction Of Pavilion, Construction Of Estate Tracks, Creation Of New Main Access With Entrance Gates, Creation Of Open Storage Yard And Associated Works' at Upper Culham Farm, Culham Lane, Henley, Berkshire, RG10 8NR.
- 6.2. This LVIA has been undertaken with regards to the best practice guidelines within the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Edition 3 (2013) and the associated 'Statements of clarification'.

The Site – overall character and visual context

- 6.3. The site and local landscape fall within open undesignated countryside and is characterised by limited inter-visibility with the statutory designated Chilterns National Landscape. The closest visual receptors are the road users associated with Culham Lane and Public Rights of Way: Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way located within the site and Restricted Byway WARG38, which skirts the site's eastern and south eastern perimeter.
- 6.4. The LVIA has identified that the location of the proposed American Barns and equine facilities is characterised by a degree of physical and visual enclosure, contextually being associated with the existing built form at Upper Culham Farm.

Effects on Landscape Elements

- 6.5. The proposed scheme has been judged not to cause any direct effects upon any of the identified structural vegetation within or around the site with the exception of a small section of the northern perimeter vegetation being removed to accommodate the proposed site access form the A4130. This has been judged to represent a fraction of the overall resource with the proposed planting bringing about substantial net gain to the hedgerow and tree resource. With regards the arable land cover, the scheme has been judged to result in minor adverse effects, taking into account the footprint of the proposed facilities and change from ephemeral arable to grassland (permanent pasture).
- 6.6. The proposed scheme has been assessed as not causing any evident change to the topography of the site with no direct physical effects upon the PRow resource.

Effects on Landscape Character

- 6.7. The site and the surrounding area have been identified as falling within the Landscape Character Area E1 'Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau'.
- 6.8. The site has been analysed in terms of its character and inter-visibility with the surrounding landscape, and the assessment has concluded that the site is best described as a discreet parcel of land not exhibiting any visual or functional relationship with the wooded Chilterns National Landscape. Whilst being of large scale and open it benefits from a localised sense

of enclosure in its western and north western part, with its perimeter vegetation effectively blocking view in and out.

- 6.9. This is evident around the site, particularly as one travels along Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way and Restricted Byway WARG3.
- 6.10. In summary, the proposed scheme has been assessed as being compatible with the existing landscape character due to its equine typology and proposed facilities which would preserve the ruralness and openness of the landscape.
- 6.11. In character terms, the proposed scheme has been judged to bring about negligible effects upon the surrounding landscape.

Effects on Visual Amenity

- 6.12. The site visit and on-site assessment were carried out in late July 2024 and site photographs taken to record the character and nature of views, and the existing visibility of the site.
- 6.13. Given the level plateau topography across the site, coupled with the undulating landform around it and blocks of woodland and tree belts, it has been determined that the actual visual envelope of the proposed scheme would be highly localised. Views from within the site have been identified to largely terminate on the immediate vegetation within the landholding with views of the wooded hills to the south east controlled by the site's perimeter hedgerow.
- 6.14. In summary, the LVIA has concluded that views from within the site – Public Footpath WARG39 / Chilterns Way are largely short to medium range, restricted and highly localised. The assessment has concluded that views from this particular PRoW are unlikely to include the proposed scheme or it would be inconsequential.
- 6.15. Views towards “... **the wooded hills of High Knoll and Bottom Boles...**” – recognised as one of the key characteristics of the host landscape would not be affected as views are gained in different direction and not simultaneous.
- 6.16. With regards the Chilterns National Landscape, the proposed scheme has been judged not to affect its setting and 'Special Quality' “**Panoramic Views from and across the escarpment interwoven with intimate dipslope valleys and rolling fields**”.

Conclusion

- 6.17. The proposed scheme utilises the least visually sensitive part of the site to accommodate the proposed American Barns and equestrian facilities, protecting the visual amenity of the neighbouring residential receptors, and retaining the perception of the rural landscape. Its introduction would not have any unacceptable effects on the character or perception of openness associated with the local landscape. The introduction of the proposed scheme would not materially change or redefine views gained by any of the visual receptors associated with this area.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
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