

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Section 78 Appeal

Proof of Evidence on Landscape and Visual Matters

Produced by Stuart Ryder BA (Hons) CMLI
on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council.

July 2025

Appellant: Mactaggart and Mickel Strategic Land

Appeal Site: Land to east of Lodge Road, Hurst

LPA Reference: 242067

PINS Reference: APP/X0360/W/25/3364304



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The following appendices are bound in a separate Appendix Report.

- A – Ryder Landscape Consultants' LVIA/LVA Methodology
- B – Character Assessment Information
- C – TGN 2/21 –Table I – Valued Landscape Assessment
- D – Supporting Figures
- E – Panoramic Photography of Representative Viewpoints
- F – Single Plate Illustrative Photography

1.0 Introduction, Authorship and Instruction

- 1.1 My name is Stuart Ryder and I am a Chartered Landscape Architect and Director of Ryder Landscape Consultants Ltd (RLC). I have been a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute since 1995.
- 1.2 I hold an Honours Degree and Post Graduate Diploma with Distinction in Landscape Architecture from Leeds Metropolitan University and I have been working in private practice since 1991 completing numerous Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA) and design proposals for housing, commercial, mixed use and major infrastructure projects.
- 1.3 During my career I have been seconded into Development Control Teams of Local Authorities and also within the Environment Agency National Environmental Advisory Service.
- 1.4 I have sat on the Landscape Institute's Technical Committee reviewing and guiding technical matters that affect the wider profession. I have examined Graduate Landscape Architects as they progress along the Landscape Institute's Pathway to Chartership process. Other education work has included being a visiting lecturer to the Landscape Architecture Department at Manchester Metropolitan University.
- 1.5 I have been a member of the North East Design Review Panel and written design guidance documents for Defra and the Environment Agency including the latter's Landscape and Environmental Design Guidelines and their Access for All Guide.
- 1.6 I have reviewed proposals for residential properties in a variety of different locations around the country and have acted as an Expert Landscape Witness at previous residential Inquiries within Wokingham Borough.
- 1.7 I have been appointed by Wokingham Borough Council (hereafter referred to as WBC) to produce landscape evidence for this Inquiry. After satisfying myself of the nature of the proposals, the application-stage landscape consultation comments and touring the Site both virtually and physically I accepted the commission to produce this Proof of Evidence. My expert's declaration and statement of truth are set below at the end of this introductory section.
- 1.8 I confine my evidence to landscape and visual matters. My evidence should be read in conjunction with that of Mr Mark Croucher, Principal Planning Officer Team Manager with WBC who provides evidence on planning and planning balance matters. Ms Grace Blizard, Associate Director with WSP, presents evidence on the matter of the sustainable location of the proposals.

Expert's Declaration

- I.9 I confirm that insofar as the facts stated in my report are within my own knowledge I have made clear which they are and I believe them to be true and that the opinions I have expressed represent my true and complete professional opinion.
- I.10 I confirm that my report includes all facts that I regard as being relevant to the opinions that I have expressed and that attention has been drawn to any matter that would affect the validity of those opinions.
- I.11 I confirm that in preparing this report I have assumed the same duty that would apply to me when giving expert opinions in a court of law under oath or affirmation. I confirm that this duty to the Inquiry overrides any duty to those instructing or paying me, that I have understood this duty and complied with it in giving my opinions impartially and objectively, and that I will continue to comply with that duty as required.
- I.12 I confirm that I am not instructed under any conditional fee arrangements and that I have no conflicts of interest in this Appeal.

2.0 Scope and structure of evidence

2.1 This Proof of Evidence (Proof) has been prepared to consider the landscape and visual effects of the proposed construction of 99 No. residential properties set to the east of Lodge Road at Hurst in Berkshire. These proposed works are hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development' or 'Proposals' and their location as the 'Site'.

2.2 The description of the works from the planning application reads:

'Outline application for the proposed erection of up to 99 no. dwellings, green infrastructure, open space, pedestrian and cycle links, recreational facilities and other associated infrastructure and access points on Lodge Road and Tape Lane with required improvements. (All matters reserved except for means of access.)'

2.3 There was an Officer Recommendation for refusal that was confirmed in WBC's Decision Notice dated 17th September that gave 11 No. reasons for refusal (RfR). It is RfR 3 that has direct relevance to landscape and visual matters and it is set below with the five identified harms highlighted.

RfR3 - 3. The proposed development will have a **detrimental impact on the landscape and the character and appearance of the area** by **reason of the quantum, scale, parameters and location of the development**. It would result in the **loss of characteristic landscape features** and **erode of the separation between existing villages** and **their rural setting**. The development is contrary to policies **CPI, CP3, CP9 and CPII** of the Core Strategy, **CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21** of the MDD Local Plan, the Borough Design Guide SPD and section **12 & 15** of the NPPF.

Structure of Evidence

2.4 The landscape and visual effects of the proposed development are presented in this Proof across the following sections:

- Section 3 briefly summarises the outline development proposals as proposed by the Appellant, recognising that they are Outline in nature but in the locations defined by the Parameters Plan (CD 1.4) as the basis of what is assessed in the remainder of the Proof;
- Section 4 sets the planning policy context for the proposals and includes a review of landscape comments in Appeal Decision Notice (APP/X0360/W/22/3309202 – March 2023) (CD 7.1) refusing residential development for 200 No. units for the same Site;

- Section 5 summarises key points from existing landscape and character focussed documents including the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment, 2019 and Heritage Topic Papers considering Areas of Special Character within the village of Hurst;
 - Section 6 briefly summarise the WBC's Landscape Officer's application-stage consultation comments (Cd 8.3), the Officer's Report (CD 1.2) and how character and appearance concerns have been expressed in WBC's Statement of Case (SoC) (CD 2.2);
 - Section 7 establishes the landscape baseline for the Site and its contextual landscape that the identified landscape effects of the Proposed Development are then judged against;
 - Section 8 discusses the existing visual baseline for people who would experience visual change and then considers the effects of that change;
 - Section 9 is a review of the landscape orientated planning policies cited in RfR 3 and the SOC and why the proposals in landscape and visual terms are considered in conflict or compliance with them;
 - Section 10 presents my conclusions and is used as my Summary Proof.
- 2.5 Appendices are used for illustrations and bulkier items such as methodology and source landscape character information and are held in a separate Appendix Report. Summary boxes are presented at the end of the more substantial sections.
- 2.6 The scope of the Proof has been assisted by the production of the topic focussed Landscape Statement of Common Ground (LSoCG) (CD 3.2) with Claire Brockhurst whom is the Landscape Witness for the Appellant.

Methodology

- 2.7 I have attended the Appeal Site on the 10th June and 2nd July 2025 walked and drove along the surrounding road routes and along paths near to the Site within its landscape context. The weather and visibility conditions were clear and sunny on both occasions.
- 2.8 Panoramic photography in accordance with the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note TGN 06/19 was taken on the second visit and some of the resulting representative panoramas are contained in my Appendix E. Other single plate photography of features or points of interest are held in Appendix F.

- 2.9 I have also conducted a valued landscape assessment using Table I of the TGN 2/21 to explain why on balance I do not consider the Site a 'valued landscape' as per the NPPF 187 a) use of the term. This assessment is held at RLC Appendix C.
- 2.10 This has provided me with a good understanding of the area's landscape character and views to the Site from publicly accessible locations. I have not taken access onto the Site but have viewed it from around its edges from Lodge Road, Tape Lane and A321 Broadwater Lane that form a rough triangle around the Site.
- 2.11 In addition, I have studied relevant OS Mapping information, WBC's online version of the PRoW Definitive Map, aerial photography and published landscape character information for the area before compiling my Proof as presented.
- 2.12 I confirm that I did not act as a consultee to the original application and did not input to the wording of RfR3 but agree that the cited landscape and visual effects would occur. It was Ms Brigitte Crafer, Landscape Architect with the Community, Heritage & Green Infrastructure Team at WBC whom supplied consultation responses during the determination period for the original application. Ms Crafer's consultation response dated 7th October 2024 is held as CD 8.3.

Subject exclusions

- 2.13 I do not address spatial planning matters or planning balance which is the remit of Mr Mark Croucher as an experienced Chartered Town Planner. I do however consider aspects of planning policy with direct relevance to landscape and visual matters. Likewise I do not consider specific details of building form as this is an Outline application however I have made the assumption that the Illustrative Masterplan by Mosaic Urban Design & Masterplanning (CD 1.3) as reinforced by the Parameter Plan again by Mosaic (CD 1.4) indicates the approximate position of housing and open space across the wider Site.
- 2.14 Finally any reference to historic features is regarding their contribution to landscape character and visual amenity. Their heritage value and any heritage effects they experience because of the proposals is not covered by my professional expertise.

3.0 The proposed development

The Appeal Site

- 3.1 The site comprises a large field that is set between B3030 Lodge Road to the west, Tape Lane to the east with it running to a collection of smaller fields and paddocks to the north and Tape Lane allotments and Martineau Lane housing area to the south.
- 3.2 I consider the landscape elements of the existing Site and its contextual area in greater details in Section 7 of this Proof under the landscape baseline for the Site.
- 3.3 The Site is currently laid to pasture and horse keeping is its primary land use at the time of my visits.
- 3.4 In the following descriptions all figures are given approximately rounded to the nearest 10's of metres.

Context to the Appeal Site

- 3.5 The context to the Appeal Site is mixed and quite convoluted given the scale of the proposals and the distance the main access road travels to reach the proposed twin housing blocks.
- 3.6 At a macro scale the built up areas of Hurst and Whistley Green lie in an arc running from the north, around the east side of the Site and finally to the south forming a 'reversed C' with the Site set as the open ground within the C. This reversed C descriptor was the one coined in the previous Inquiry at the Site.
- 3.7 Staying at a macro scale the open side to the reversed C lies to the west with Lodge Road running between southern Hurst and Whistley Green and the Loddon Valley further to the west again on the opposite side of Lodge Road.
- 3.8 The immediate context to the Appeal Site is mixed and the following features are found around its cardinal points
- **North** – a mix of large dwellings on Lodge Road at Whistley Green, horse paddocks and a menage and a n-shaped pasture field;
 - **East** – lie the properties of Tape Lane which is twin sided with residential house for its first northern 100m before reverting to a single side of houses to the east side of its 370m long single track before it reaches Tape Lane allotments;

- **South** – Tape Lane allotments forms approximately half of the Site’s southern boundary to its eastern end with the turn of the 20th Century detached residential properties of Martineau Lane forming the western half; and
- **West** – Working from its southern end up to the north the Site boundary is near Nursery Close (50m) which is a cul-de-sac of three larger residential properties, it then runs past a large paddock associated with the Badgers Bottom/Poole House property on the east side of Lodge Road for 190m and finally directly adjacent to the hedged Lodge Road itself for 170m.

Appeal proposals

- 3.9 When presented with an indicative layout or masterplan for a larger scale residential scheme such as the proposals shown on Illustrative Masterplan (CD 1.3) I find it easier to ‘work my way into’ the development as if travelling along the main access road and reaching the various parts of the proposals. I recognise that the proposals are outline in nature and only show one arrangement.
- 3.10 **Single site vehicular access** - is from the west directly from Lodge Road approximately 110m south of the last property of Whistley Green. The access road is shown with a swan neck arrangement passing in a curvilinear fashion through a proposed community orchard for an approximate distance of 170m where the first decision point arrives. You can travel straight on east for another 170m to reach the northern housing block or turn right to travel another 100m to reach the southern housing block. The route east to the northern housing block has swales indicated next to the access road.
- 3.11 **Northern housing block** – set to the north end of the Site running up to the central space of the n-shaped field the northern housing block appears to hold 51 No. units as shown on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan by Pegasus (CD 8.2). The houses are laid out in four sub-blocks with looped access routes around three of them. By extending up to the n-shaped field the proposed houses in the northern half of this block are then fringed by the existing boundary trees on Site, the southern half of the block are indicated as receiving a new tree and hedge line as the Site field is currently open to this side. The location of the northern houses are shown on CD 8.2 with a veteran tree buffer to the north eastern flank of this block.
- 3.12 **Southern housing block** – the access road passes by an indicated SuDS attenuation pond. The road then skirts three sub-blocks of containing 40 No units. A tree line is proposed to the block’s more open northern boundary.

- 3.13 **Emergency access** – Secondary accesses are shown to the north end of Tape Lane with them primarily for pedestrian and cyclist access. There is a note on CD 1.3 that indicates it could be used for emergency and bus access.
- 3.14 **Common** – An area of public open space is shown set between the housing blocks. The width of this proposed POS scales at between 110m and 140m and it is crossed by a number of paths with both cycle paths and footpaths shown on the Illustrative Landscape Strategy (CD 8.2). It is indicated as primarily open and put to a tussock forming wildflower meadow grassland apart from an area of amenity grasslands around a proposed Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) set to the south side of the Common space near to the southern housing block. The eastern cycle route in the Common POS is shown curving away from protective areas in the vicinity of veteran trees on Tape Lane.
- 3.15 **Cycle paths** – Three cycle paths are proposed. One from the site entrance through the Community Orchard, across the Common to tie in with Tape Lane near the Tape Lane Allotments. One from a secondary, emergency access towards the north end of Tape Lane running west to intersect the first cycle path from the site access. The third also originates from the emergency access area on Tape Lane, skirting its eastern boundary and veteran tree buffer areas to link with the first cycle path near the Tape Lane allotments.
- 3.16 **Perimeter path and other footpaths** – A mix of footpath routes and the cycle paths form a perimeter path around both housing blocks. There are also footpath crossing between the north and south housing blocks.
- 3.17 **Allotment extension** – A strip of additional allotments is indicated to the immediate north of the existing allotments totalling 0.12 Ha in area (CD 8.2). The new plots are described as varying size with a water supply and secured by boundary fencing and gates. They are set between an existing tree line to the very south of the Site and a proposed new tree line to their north.
- 3.18 **Trees and hedges** - The proposals show the retention of the existing boundary hedgerows and primary tree areas with veteran tree buffers indicated on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (CD 8.2). A short existing break in the Lodge Road hedge would require widening for the site access and associated visibility splay. This is indicated as 56m of existing hedgerow removal on CD 8.2 with replanting of a portion of that behind the visibility lines. In the Arboricultural Assessment it is suggested to be 73m long in Paragraph 3.4 Bullet 1 of the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) (CD 11.6).

- 3.19 **Lodge Road carriageway widening** – The Transport Assessment (CD 10.2) has Image 4.1 on page 20 that indicates carriageway widening to create space for a right turn lane and ghost island. The diagram indicates a number of tree symbols under the widened carriageway to the west of Lodge Road but does not label them for removal even though the carriageway extends up to their trunk positions. Further unmarked trees may exist to the south of the junction on the west side of Lodge Road and these could require felling or reduction works. These trees are part of the Woodland TPO 1869/2022 that runs along the west side of Lodge Road. Their possible removal or retention is not discussed in the summary of tree retention and removal at Paragraph 3.4 of the AIA (CD 11.6).
- 3.20 **Lodge Road footway improvements** – Indicated as leading north from the Site access towards Whistley Green for a distance of 130m to tie in with the end of the existing carriageway footpath. It is unclear whether this path would be lit or require felling of trees or reduction in hedge width along the east side of Lodge Road north of the section cleared for visibility splay reasons.
- 3.21 **Community orchard** – Proposed at the entrance to the Site the swan necked main access would run through the orchard that appears laid out in a random fashion. It is stated to be 0.717 Ha in size with mown grass paths through it to encourage informal recreation. The cycleway through it is presumed to be surfaced.
- 3.22 **Mobility Hub** – Is shown set within the northern housing block marked by a blue coloured star. The Key annotation explains it to include short stay cycle parking, a bike repair/cycle maintenance area, a bus stop and parcel drop-off/pick up lockers. I note it is near to a proposed car club parking space.
- 3.23 **SuDS Elements** - Finally in this summary of the proposals it is noted that there are a series of SuDS swales and attenuation basins indicated on the illustrative landscape masterplan. They are positioned close to the main access road with basins set near both housing blocks. Views can be taken across them but it is presumed that they will not act as POS as ready access cannot be taken into them. They would perform Green and Blue Infrastructure functions but will have any recreational value.

Unknown elements

- 3.24 **Location of any electricity sub-station or pumping station** - The Illustrative Masterplan CD 1.3 does not show the position of these elements that may be required. It is presumed they

would be accommodated within the redline boundary should the proposals progress to detail design.

- 3.25 **Sports pitches and facilities** – Are not shown on the Illustrative Masterplan and are presumed not provided by the proposals.
- 3.26 **Visitor parking** – Parking is indicated for individual dwellings and there is on-street parking on the main access road to the northern housing block but no substantial parking in the southern housing block or further parking at the extended allotments.

Section 3 Summary Box

- The Site comprises a single, large improved pasture field that provides the majority of the open, rural separation between Hurst and Whistley Green;
- The proposals require a long access road taken from the west side of the Site running in a curvilinear fashion before splitting to serve two separate housing blocks, one to the north and one to the south;
- The northern housing block is set towards the north end of Tape Lane with its east side abutting Tape Lane which is Hurst's current largely open, western settlement edge;
- The southern housing block is located adjacent to Tape Lane Allotments and part of the Martineau Lane development;
- An area of grassed open space called the Common is set between the two housing blocks;
- The majority of existing trees and hedgerows are retained by the proposals and veteran trees given buffer space whilst new tree planting is also proposed;
- Cycleways and footpaths are proposed through and around the periphery of the built form;
- SuDS attenuation basins are shown associated with each housing block, along with roadside swales; and
- A community orchard is proposed at the Site entrance and a play area within the Common near the southern housing block.

4.0 Planning policy context and previous Appeal decisions

Development Plan at Hurst

4.1 The development plan is made up of:

- Wokingham Core Strategy (CS) – adopted January 2010; and
- Managing Development Delivery (MDD) – adopted February 2014.

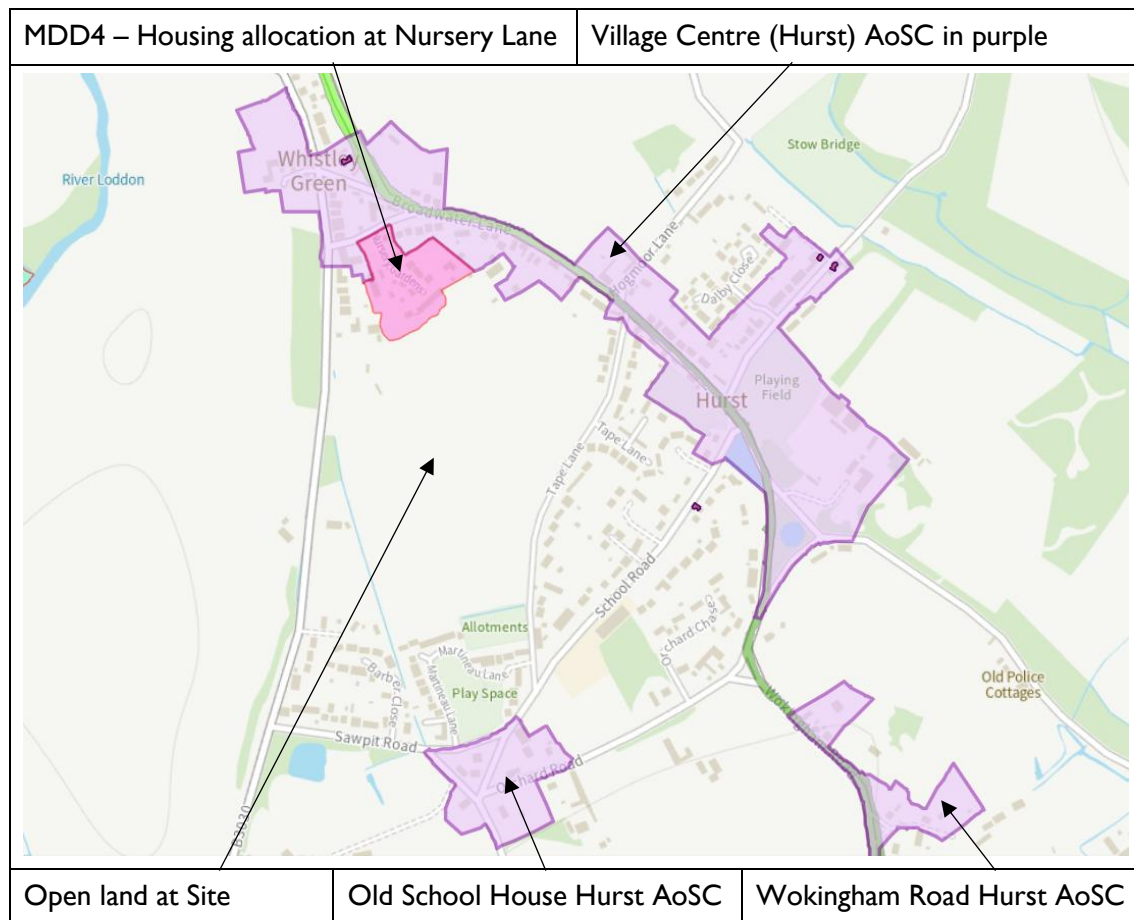
4.2 There is no Hurst Neighbourhood Plan to take in to account at this Appeal.

4.3 There is an emerging Local Plan Update (LPU) – which will put in place a new planning strategy for the period to 2040. Once adopted, it will replace the current CS and MDD.

Planning policies and constraints map

4.4 The digital extract below is taken from the Planning Policies map for around Hurst and Whistley Green. It shows three Areas of Special Conservation (AoSC) near to the Site.

RLC Fig.1 – Extract of WBC Planning Policies and Constraints Map



Core Strategy Policies cited in RfR3

4.5 There were four CS policies included in RfR3 as summarised below;

- **CPI – Sustainable development** – landscape is part of the broader aim of maintaining or enhancing the high quality of the environment but this policy is not considered in detail in this Proof;
- **CP3 – General Principles for development** – with landscape explicitly referenced in sub-point c) which requires ‘*no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses.*’ the important landscape features should not experience detrimental effects. Sub-point f) also requires consideration in terms of the ‘*use of appropriate landscaping*’ in this sense this means planting and hard landscape treatments.
- **CP9 – Scale and location of development proposals** – addresses matters of services within various settlements around the Borough and accessibility to them. Hurst is specifically mentioned in sub-point 3 as a ‘Limited Development Location’ (LDL). Later in the policy’s explanatory text at sub-paragraph C these LDL’s are defined as a settlement type, ‘*... containing a basic range of services and facilities and are physically and socially cohesive. Within the development limits of these settlements, limited development would be acceptable. This includes affordable housing to meet identified local needs. The limits on the acceptable scale of development are based upon the dwelling completion information summarised in appendix 3¹.*’
- **CPII – Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)** – seeks ‘to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment’ with both these objectives have clear landscape and visual dimensions.

Managing Development Delivery (MDD)

4.6 With regard to the MDD four policies were included in RfR3:

¹ MDD Appendix 3 at Page 87 provides the following housing unit and population figures. Estimated population at 2008 = 1,054, estimated number of dwellings at 2001 = 374 and Net dwelling completion between 2001 & 2008 of 32 units.

- **CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development** – with general linking to the NPPF and with reference to the Borough Design Guide SPD. Landscape matters are not explicitly referenced and this policy is not examined further in this Proof;
- **CC02 – Development Limits** – sub-point 2) includes the need for proposals to respect the transition between the built up area and the open countryside by taking account of the, character of the adjacent countryside and landscape, this is considered in this Proof;
- **CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping** – relates to the form of design proposals and sub-parts 2d) & 3) of the policy are pertinent to these proposals; and
- **TB21 – Landscape Character** – is directly applicable to the principal of whether the proposals can be accommodated at this location and both sub-parts of this policy require consideration.

Other documents referenced in RfR 3

4.7 There are other documents referenced both explicitly and by reference to TB21 in RfRs 3 as summarised below:

- **Borough Design Guide SPD June 2012** (CD 8.14) – with both landscape character considerations and detail design matters;
- **Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment, 2019** (CD 8.9) – is relevant because of the reference to Policy TB21 and has been considered in the Appellant's LVIA (CD 8.1); and
- **NPPF Sections 12 and 15** – which amongst other matters includes Paragraph 135 about the quality of design and Paragraph 187 a) & b) on valued landscape and the intrinsic qualities of countryside.

Appeal Decision Notice APP/X0360/W/22/3309202, March 2023 – The 200 unit scheme

4.8 The 200 unit scheme related to the same red line boundary as the current application and an illustrative masterplan for these proposals is held at CD 7.7.

4.9 The scheme was initially refused consent by WBC on 23rd June 2022 which was a determination upheld by Inspector Wildsmith in his Appeal decision of the 9th March 2023 (CD 7.1). He considered this larger scheme's effects on character and appearance as the second main issue before him and presented his findings between paragraphs 43 and 62.

4.10 The first part of the Inspector Wildsmith's Main Issue 2 discussion considered the parts of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment, 2019 LCA C2 Hurst River Terrace in which the Site is located:

- He recognises it to be a landscape of moderate condition and sensitivity, with moderate capacity for change;
- That many of the key characteristics of the LCA C2 clearly relate to the appeal site and its immediate environs and goes on to list them in his paragraph 44:
- He specifically noted the key characteristic of villages located around historic cores including Whistley Green and Hurst:
- Newer linear development within these settlements is noted to be aligned along the existing network of roads and rural lanes;
- There is no strong local vernacular but there are fine early buildings, with building character being unified by the presence of red brick:
- He repeats the LCA C2's stated landscape strategy is "*to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape with its scattered rural farmsteads and small red brick villages connected by narrow rural lanes*".
- He also recognises the LCA C2's strategy point that "*there are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration and management of the hedgerows*",
- Finally for the LCA C2 strategy he includes the quote that "*in terms of development, the aim is to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green*".

4.11 In paragraph 47 Inspector Wildsmith uses some of his observations from Site to explain that he has noted houses and other buildings more or less line the complete length of the A321 Wokingham Road/Broadwater Lane meaning the two former separate villages of Hurst and Whistley Green now read as one. He then goes on to agree with the WBC description of the villages '*lightly touching*', to be more appropriate than any suggestion of full coalescence.

4.12 He also in paragraph 47 confirms that development in the area is '*characterised as being in the shape of a 'reversed C', wrapping round the appeal site and other adjacent, undeveloped land, from Sawpit Road in the south to Whistley Green in the north.*'

- 4.13 Paragraphs 48 and 49 provide Inspector Wildsmith's considerations on the topic of valued landscape status as argued applicable by the WBC Landscape Witness. He concludes that the Site should not be considered as a valued landscape for the meaning of the then NPPF Paragraph 174 a). He states in Paragraph 49, *'None of the features referenced are unusual or special, and in my assessment they do not elevate the land into the category of a valued landscape.'*
- 4.14 Also in paragraph 49 he concludes that the Site as open space is *'locally valued'* and that it seemed to him, *'its value arises more from its current condition as undeveloped land and from the setting it provides for this western side of the settlement, than from any specific features or physical attributes it may possess.'*
- 4.15 Between paragraphs 50 and 55 he considers the LVIA submitted by the Appellant's for the 200 unit scheme and the evidence of the two landscape witnesses. I do not dwell on his comments on either witnesses' evidence as that is for a different scheme, albeit at the same Site. I do however note the Inspector's conclusions at the end of paragraph 55 that he considered it reasonable to, *'ascribe a moderate or medium baseline value to the appeal site.'*
- 4.16 The development description the Inspector gives at his paragraph 56 for the 200 unit scheme in front of him could be ported over to this Appeal with the exception of the provision of a tennis court. The proposed elements are not substantially different but the quantum of housing is.
- 4.17 Paragraph 57 provides a summary of the locations where the Inspector considered the proposals would be visible from, effectively the visual receptors he considered affected. They consisted of:
- Tape Lane, through gaps in the roadside vegetation;
 - Tape Lane through the gated access close to the site's north-eastern corner;
 - Martineau Lane - areas of public space;
 - Lodge Road walkers, drivers and vehicle occupants; and
 - Permissive path users – that I take to be the path to the west of Lodge Road.
- 4.18 The Inspector refers to these views as *'glimpsed views'* which I take to mean sections of the proposals and for a short duration given the generally moving nature of the listed receptors. He concludes in the last sentence of paragraph 57 that, *'These visual receptors will currently experience the open, undeveloped nature of this landscape within the 'reversed C', predominantly comprising the appeal site, which makes a significant contribution to the rural setting of Hurst.'*
- 4.19 The Inspector starts Paragraph 58 by concluding that given residential development already exists close to the appeal site the proposal would not introduce an alien form of development

into this settlement edge area. He goes on to conclude that the 200 unit scheme would *'transform the appeal site from an undeveloped field of medium/ moderate landscape value, outside the settlement boundary, to a relatively densely-developed residential area'*.

4.20 He goes on to reference a set of wire-frame representations Accurate Visual Representations (AVR's) submitted with the 200 unit application and how they indicate to him *'that the new dwellings would be very noticeable in glimpsed views from the surrounding roads and the Martineau Lane open space, despite the proposed landscaping.'* As a point of clarification there are updated AVR's submitted as part of the application material for the current scheme and held at Appendix 4 of the LVIA (CD 8.1).

4.21 In Paragraph 58 he further concludes that, *'This would appreciably change the experience of users of these nearby roads and open spaces and would inevitably lessen the rural feel of the overall area.'* He agreed with the WBC's case when he concluded the 200 unit scheme *'would be particularly noticeable in the vicinity of the proposed vehicular access on Lodge Road.'*

4.22 Paragraph 59 sees Inspector Wildsmith drawing his conclusions on the appearance of the 200 unit scheme's proposed modifications to the Lodge Road corridor to create the proposed Site access for that scheme. He concluded that:

- This road joins the 2 ends of the 'reversed C', from the existing houses fronting Lodge Road close to Sawpit Road in the south, to those at Whistley Green in the north;
- The general absence of development in between means that this linking section of Lodge Road has a strong rural feel and appearance;
- Widening the road to provide a ghost right-turn lane into the site, introducing a new junction and new northbound footway on the eastern side, and having to remove and replace existing hedging to provide necessary visibility splays would all serve to introduce a much more urban feel to this stretch of road; and
- This would be compounded by the presence of new dwellings which, although set back into the site behind existing and new vegetation and behind the new access road, would still be visible as shown on the submitted AVRs for the 200 unit scheme. These dwellings are not shown on the current AVR's.

4.23 The highway proposals for this 99 unit scheme are similar to the 200 unit scheme with regards to the Lodge Road site access. The arrangement at Tape Lane for the proposed emergency access, bus, cycleway and footpath accesses is shown modified.

4.24 As raised above at paragraph 3.19 there is not clarity as to whether the current proposals creates the additional carriageway width from the east or west side of Lodge Road,

4.25 Paragraphs 60 and 61 is where Inspector Wildsmith draws his proceeding points together and reaches his overall conclusions on landscape and visual harm that would be brought about by the 200 unit scheme. They are:

- He considered it, *'self-evident that the appeal proposal would have an adverse impact on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site,'*; that
- This would, *'inevitably have an adverse impact on the visual experience of users of Tape Lane and Lodge Road by bringing a more developed feel to the whole area.'*
- He considered, *'Because of the scale of the proposed development and the fact that its impact would be experienced from many different locations',* whilst acknowledging , *'albeit within fairly close proximity to the site itself,'*
- He explained that he shared, *'the view of my colleague Inspector who determined an earlier appeal at Lodge Road, that the harm caused in landscape character and visual terms should be categorised as being at the upper end of the moderate scale.'*
- Footnote 21 set within this paragraph references Appeal APP/X0360/W/18/3194044 that was held by Inspector Major in January 2020 considering the erection of 5 dwellings and garages with creation of a new vehicular access and pedestrian access to Lodge Road and footway provision. This Appeal decision is touched upon below.
- In Paragraph 61 he reiterates his conclusions, *'that the appeal proposal would have a moderate adverse impact, at the upper end of the scale, on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site and surrounding area'*; and
- The proposals, *'would fail to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green as set out in the C2 LCA landscape strategy.'*

4.26 In planning policy terms his final paragraph on character and appearance matters concludes that given the identified harms the 200 unit scheme was;

- In conflict with CS Policies CPI and CP3 recognising that *'these policies do not fully accord with the Framework'*, and finally he concluded

- *‘Moreover, as I do not consider that the appeal proposal would retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape, I also find it to be at odds with MDDL Policy TB21’* which is the Landscape Character policy from the MDD.

Appeal Decision Notice APP/X0360/W/18/3194044 January 2020 – the 5 unit scheme

- 4.27 The five units referred to in this Appeal were proposed for the vegetated paddock to the south of Badgers Bottom/Poole House set to the east side of Lodge Lane. This Appeal’s southern block of house is set to the immediate east of this refused development’s location.
- 4.28 Inspector Major who heard the Appeal considers character and appearance matters between his paragraphs 22 and 28 and in his conclusions at paragraph 49 with the following points appearing of note to me.
- 4.29 With regards to the importance of the paddock Site to the rural gap between Hurst/Whistley Green:
- Paragraph 23 – *‘In my judgement the site is an important component of the open space which separates the northern and southern arms of the identified settlement of Hurst/Whistley Green.*
 - Paragraph 23 – *‘..cannot be regarded as a valued landscape for the purposes of NPPF paragraph 170.’*
 - Paragraph 23 – *‘When travelling between the northern arm (Whistley Green) and the southern arm on the approach to Sawpit Road, the clear character is that of a rural and largely undeveloped tract of land to the east of Lodge Road.’*
 - Paragraph 23 – *‘The presence of Badgers Bottom² to the north of the [5 house] appeal site is no more than a minor intrusion into the rural scene,’*
 - Paragraph 24 – *‘The Old Lodge ... does not register as having any significant impact on the character of that open space’* – meaning the gap between settlements.
 - Paragraph 24 – *‘Nursery Close to the south, and the houses beyond that, are the first real sign of the ‘built up’ area proper, and it is here that they delineate the settlement boundary as set out in the development plan.’*

² Now understood to be called Poole House

4.30 My interpretation of the above is that Inspector Major found the gap along Lodge Road to be important for the separation of the two settlements, rural in nature and not unduly changed in character terms by the presence of occasional large country properties such as Badgers Bottom and The Old Lodge.

4.31 With regards to the landscape effects of the 5 house scheme on that appeal site and to the rural gap between settlements the following remarks are made at Paragraph 25:

- *'It is not disputed that development of the site would change its character. Housing, the access road, gardens and realignment of hedgerows would be a fundamental change.'*
- *'As I have observed the site is an important component of the rural open space between northern and southern arms of the village. It serves a purpose in retaining the rural character along Lodge Road, and in my judgement it therefore has a moderate degree of susceptibility to change.'*
- *'The magnitude of the change if development were to take place would be at a similarly moderate level, leading to an overall moderate and adverse impact on the character of the landscape in this location.'*
- *'...given that the appeal site is important to the gap between the developed areas the impact in the immediate locality would be more keenly felt.'*

4.32 My understanding of these points is that the Inspector in this appeal recognised the fundamental change in landscape character that these proposals would bring about. He also recognised more subtle changes such as the realigned hedgerows at the proposed entrance, For the paddock site he concluded it would be a Moderate, Adverse landscape impact and the importance of the gap means the Moderate level, landscape effect would be more keenly felt.

4.33 Visual effects conclusions are provided in Paragraphs 26 & 27 including:

- *'In visual terms the site also performs a function in clearly forming part of the gap between developed areas. It is visible from the permissive path to the west, particularly when leaves have fallen from the trees.'*
- *'Users of the permissive path can be regarded as sensitive to visual change since many of them will be using the path for recreational purposes.'*
- *'The change which would ensue from the development would be locally significant and would be perceived as the extension of built development into the open countryside.'*

- *'The new access would be a particularly urbanising feature with direct views into a cul-de-sac of large houses'*
- *'Furthermore, the proposed dwellings would be seen from Tape Lane, albeit across the intervening open field.'*
- *'Nonetheless the houses would project above and between existing vegetation, again emphasising the extension of built development into the countryside.'*
- *'I accept that a landscaping scheme could address this to a degree over time, but 5 houses on the site are unlikely to be wholly hidden.'* and
- *'Taken overall I consider that the visual impact of the proposal would result in moderate harm.'*

4.34 For me the Inspector is recognising the visual element that the paddock site plays in forming the gap and the change of just five houses at this location would be perceived as an extension into the open countryside. He draws particular attention to the new access albeit views to it would also take in the proposed five large houses.

4.35 He also recognises that even in more distant views from Tape Lane approximately 240m to the east visual harm will occur from the five houses taking into account intervening field boundaries. He considers the ameliorating effects of the proposed landscaping scheme but considers this relatively limited 5 unit scheme would result in a moderate, adverse visual effect.

4.36 Inspector Major draws his character and appearance points together in Paragraph 28 making the following specific points and his conclusions:

- *The net result of the proposal would be that there would be a harmful impact to both the character and appearance of the area*
- *The development would not respect the transition between the built up area and the countryside.*
- *The fact that an area of open land would be retained to the north of Badgers Bottom is not sufficient to ameliorate this harm.*
- *The harm would be at the upper end of the moderate scale.*

4.37 His conclusions lead him to find conflict with:

- *The 'most important policies CC02 and CPI I, and this attracts significant weight.*

- *I also find conflict with Policies CPI and CP3 of the Core Strategy in so far as the proposal would fail to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment, would be detrimental to the landscape and would not be of appropriate character.*

4.38 From these concluding remarks I take it that the Appeal Site next to Lodge Road was deemed to have effects on the transition between the built form of Hurst and the countryside, that retained open land to the north of that Site did not fully reduce, or ameliorate harm to that transition and he gave a grading of moderate harm considering it to be at the upper end of the scale.

4.39 This grading at the upper end of the moderate scale is reiterated in the Decision Notice's Paragraph 49 where the Inspector refers to the top of the moderate scale.– '*... harm to the character and appearance of the landscape at the top of the moderate scale.*'

Section 4 Planning Policy and Previous Appeals Summary Box

- The policy references in RfR3 appear appropriate and applicable.
- That Hurst as a village has three Areas of Special Character (AoSC) and small Conservation Area which marks it as a settlement with good local value and architectural interest.
- The only AoSC that might be affected by these proposals is the Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC that is set along the A321 – Broadwater Lane approximately 50m north of the Site.
- Inspector Wildsmith who considered the recent 200 unit scheme at this same Site found it, '*self-evident that the appeal proposal would have an adverse impact on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site,*'; that
- This would, '*inevitably have an adverse impact on the visual experience of users of Tape Lane and Lodge Road by bringing a more developed feel to the whole area.*';
- That he shared of Inspector Major, '*who determined an earlier appeal at Lodge Road, that the harm caused in landscape character and visual terms should be categorised as being at the upper end of the moderate scale.*'
- In turning to Inspector Major who heard the 5 unit Appeal for the paddock to the south of Badgers Bottom (now Poole House) he concluded that the paddock '*performs a function in clearly forming part of the gap between developed areas*'.

- He also commented that, *'The change which would ensue from the development would be locally significant and would be perceived as the extension of built development into the open countryside.'*
- *'Nonetheless the houses would project above and between existing vegetation, again emphasising the extension of built development into the countryside.'* and
- *'Taken overall I consider that the visual impact of the proposal would result in moderate harm.'*

5.0 Landscape and Character Assessments

5.1 The following six character documents have been considered during the preparation of this Proof when describing existing landscape character, its value, strategies and guidelines for the Site and around the wider village of Hurst and the countryside it is located in:

- NCA 115 – Thames Valley by Natural England March 2018;
- Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003;
- Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment, 2019 (CD 8.9)
- Wokingham Valued Landscape Assessments, September 2024 (CD 8.10)
- Historic Environment Topic Paper - Appendix C: Areas of Special Character pro-forma assessments (CD 8.11)
- A Design for Hurst Incorporating The Parish Design Statement 2005 as updated in 2009 (CD 8.12).

5.2 Not all of the above have been reviewed to the same depth in this Proof with the following list a summary of their usefulness and applicability to this Appeal:

- **NCA 115 Thames Valley** – useful at describing broader landscape characteristics but too broad to be of use in this Appeal and no further reference to it is made;
- **Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, 2003** – useful to set landscape character types (LCT) across the whole of the county and defining the Site within the Open Clay Lowlands landscape character type. No further reference is made to it;
- **Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment, 2019** – the most detailed landscape character assessment considering the contextual area to the Site with characteristics described, landscape strategy defined and guidelines given. This document forms the main focus of empirical landscape character information for the Site;
- **Wokingham Valued Landscape Assessments, 2024** – that defines 13 areas of valued landscapes across the Borough through systematic assessment and provides an evidence base for the LPU that is currently emerging. The Site is not one of the 13 No. Valued Landscape Areas (VLA) but the River Loddon VLA does run up to the western edge of Lodge Road. As the Site, nor Hurst or Whistley Green are specifically mentioned within the WVLA it is not referred to again in this Proof;

- **Historic Environment Topic Paper - Appendix C: Areas of Special Character** pro-forma assessments considers Areas of Special Character (AoSC) across the whole Borough. It provides descriptors, list of designated and undesignated built assets and extracts from an earlier 1994 assessment of the AoSC. It is a useful source of information explaining the three AoSCs that exist at Hurst and is reviewed further in this section.
- **A Design for Hurst** Incorporating The Parish Design Statement 2005 as updated in 2009 reads as a village design statement. It is briefly reviewed in this section as it makes observations about landscape setting and character in its Section 5 and settlement form in its Section 11.

Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (WLCA), 2019 (CD 8.9)

- 5.3 This is the current LCA for the Borough and is explicitly referenced in landscape policy TB21.
- 5.4 It was produced by external Landscape Consultants Land Use Consultants (LUC) and was published in 2019. It builds upon an earlier 2004 LCA for the Borough and aligns with the landscape character types identified in the Berkshire LCA 2003. It is split into a number of volumes with the first explaining the purpose and context to the study and then Volume 2 (in parts) that considers the individual Landscape Character Areas (LCA's) around the Borough.
- 5.5 The purpose of the WLCA is explained at paragraph 1.9 on page 4 of Volume 1. A digital snip of the paragraph is set below in its entirety.

The purpose of Landscape Character Assessment

- 1.9 This Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) forms the most up to date evidence base for planners, developers and land managers to take account of the character and valuable attributes of Wokingham's landscape when considering new development or land uses – and to pursue opportunities to enhance and strengthen landscape character whenever possible. The need for this evidence base is all the more apparent in the context of continual pressures to accommodate new development and land uses, primarily the need for new housing, and accompanying infrastructure within the borough.
- 5.6 The Site is located within a LCT River Terrace and specifically LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace which is just one of the two LCA's in the Borough within this landscape type.
- 5.7 Each LCA in WLCA Volume 2 is initially mapped to show where it is located and then described under a series of consistent headings as set below:
- Summary

- Key Characteristics
- Natural Landscape
- Cultural Landscape
- Perceptual Landscape

5.8 It then moves onto to a series of points born out of evaluation of desk based and site based analysis looking to the future management of the individual LCA:

- Valuable Landscape Attributes
- Landscape Condition
- Key Issues
- Landscape Strategy
- Landscape Guidelines.

5.9 Finally it presents a further three maps of the individual LCA illustrating:

- Topography and Watercourse features;
- Cultural and Natural History Designations; and
- Forestry which includes information on Ancient Woodlands.

5.10 The LCA C2 like most landscape planning documents should be read as a whole and applied to the individual Site and set of development proposals. I do this under the same set of headings as presented between §5.7 and §5.9 drawing out the pertinent parts that I find are applicable to the Site and which information is useful as this Appeal is determined.

5.11 **Summary** – I consider that the starting summary is reflective of the Site with its relatively flat lowland agricultural landscape lying to the east of the floodplain of the River Loddon. Arable fields tend to be large, with areas of horse and pony grazing. A network of rural roads connects farms and the small settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst. The Hurst River Terrace is defined to the west by the boundary with LCA B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water which abuts LCA C2 to the west side of Lodge Road. The summary states, *‘The area has a strong connection to the river valley, with water-filled ditches and ponds throughout’* but the Site less so given the tree cover along Lodge Road, but it does have the western boundary ditch.

5.12 **Key Characteristics** – There are eight bullets listing out what the LCA C2 characteristics are and I find all are applicable to the Site and surrounding area bar one and that is reference to a

regular pattern of river terrace farmsteads and modern barn structures. Of note is Bullet 5 that is titled '*Villages located around historic cores*' specifically listing Whistley Green and Hurst and going onto explain that '*Newer linear development within these settlements is aligned along the network of roads and rural lanes.*' To me this indicates that the existing village form is intrinsic to the overall character of LCA C2, it is part and parcel of it.

- 5.13 **Natural Landscape** - This section reports on the form of soils, predominately impervious leading to waterlogging and the need for ditch systems, typically following roads such as the one on the Site's western boundary to Lodge Lane. Both arable and pasture land use are set within large geometric fields of variable shape. Woodland is generally lacking from the LCA C2 but it still appears verdant 'borrowing' woods in views to neighbouring character areas such as the Loddon Valley or with the hedgerow trees and hedges. Hedges are considered infrequent in parts and generally kept low through mechanical flailing. This description of the natural landscape can be readily applied to the Site with its large geometric shape, horse grazing and treed field boundaries. The hedges are not currently kept at a low height but they have been in the past.
- 5.14 **Cultural Landscape** – There are no physical traces of Romano-British habitation or a former deer park that is known to have existed. Clues of formation are derived from the place names of 'ley' and Hurst that link the area to the Royal Forest of Windsor. This section explains pattern of closely spaced hamlets and farmsteads sited on the edges of the floodplain, linked by narrow lanes and gives Lodge Road as an example of where clusters of houses are associated with the edge of the floodplain. The road network has a winding and peaceful character which in rural areas results from a lack of kerbing, roadside ditches and banks. Within more settled parts such as the villages wide roadside verges add to this character. There is a recognition that there are very few footpaths in the area.
- 5.15 **Perceptual Landscape** – LCA C2 is described as an open area with long views over the Loddon flood plain to the west which are not actually present from the Site given the wooded edge to Lodge Road. The Loddon Valley lies just to the west and will be evident from the permissive path in winter and spring. The trees fringing the Loddon valley are described as forming a dark horizon to the west emphasising the open nature of LCA C2. The area is described as largely quiet and rural '*which feels far removed from the nearby heavily settled areas of Wokingham, Winnersh and Woodley.*' Only in the south, e.g. Little Hill Road and Green Lane areas, is the noise and movement of traffic on the M4 and A329 (M) apparent. Hurst and Whistley Green stand to the north end of LCA C2 and are not affected by these major transport corridors.

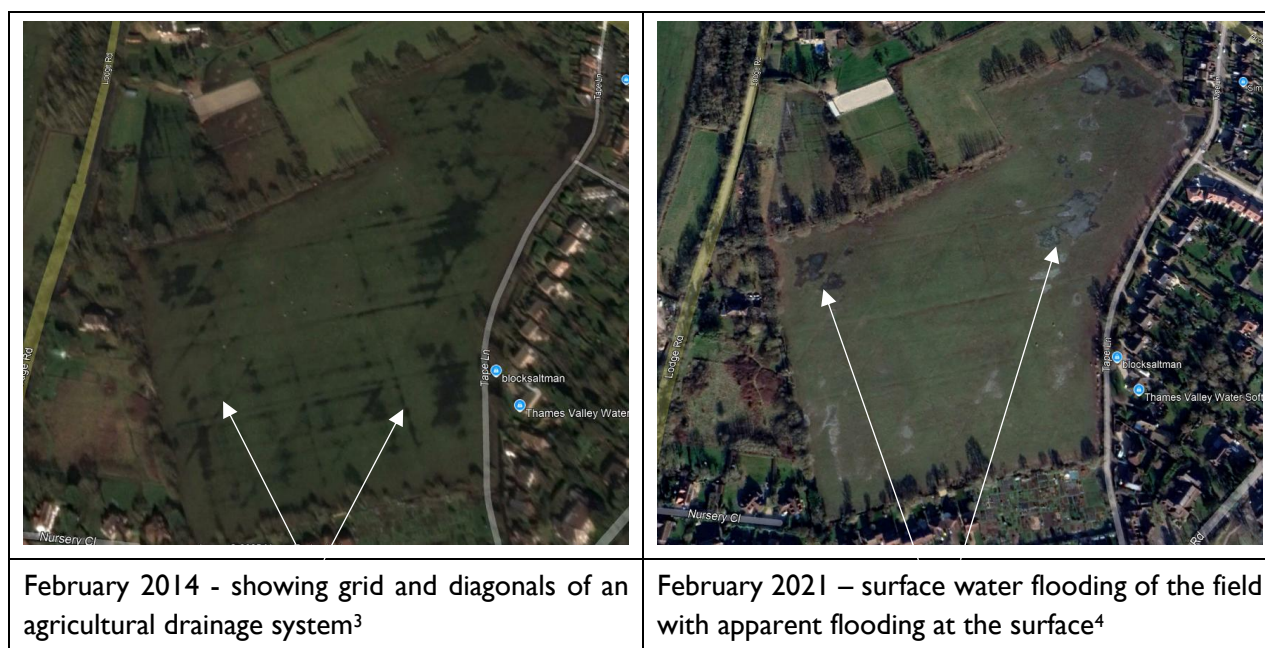
- 5.16 **Valuable Landscape Attributes** – There are five of these given for LCA C2 set in a shaded box which is set below as a digital extract for ease of reference

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- **Peaceful and open character** of the undeveloped arable and pastoral landscape when removed from the intrusion of major roads to the south, which provides an escape in close proximity to the urban population.
- **Rural settlement pattern** of small villages with historic cores and farmsteads unified by the cohesive use of redbrick which provides a cultural record of the past and adds local distinctiveness.
- **A network of narrow rural lanes** with characteristic roadside ditches which contribute to scenic quality.
- **Small wetland habitats**, including drainage channels and numerous farm ponds which are valued for flora and fauna.
- **Gently undulating terrace landform provides open and clear views** to the wooded backdrop of the adjacent Loddon Valley.

- 5.17 I found the Site and the landscape context that it is judged within to clearly display the first two attributes with it being peaceful and open in character and set between Whistley Green and Hurst with their rural settlement pattern. Likewise the fifth attribute is evident with the views to the western, apparently wooded side of Lodge Road that marks the edge of the Loddon Valley.
- 5.18 The network of narrow rural lanes (third attribute) is partly evident with Tape Lane being very narrow for traffic and Lodge Road wider but with road side ditches and only occasional stretches of roadside footpaths.
- 5.19 Considering the fourth attribute aerial photography indicates that there are no permanent small wetland habitats or farm ponds on the Site. This is most probably due to a field drainage system evident on the February 2014 aerial images as a series of regular grid and diagonal lines in the field. However the field drainage system appears to be overwhelmed in later aerial images from February 2021 with standing water pooling. This is typical of high water tables, possibly combined with poorly draining soils and a series of ephemeral seasonal pools can be seen on the Site's surface.

RLC Fig 1 – Drainage system and surface water flooding at the Site



5.20 Taking all five attributes together I consider the landscape at the Site and within the contextual area clearly display three of the valued landscape attributes, partly displays narrow rural lanes and seasonally displays small wetland habitats. It can be safely concluded that the landscape at the Site and with the contextual area displays more of the permanent LCA C2 valued landscape attributes than those that it only partially or seasonally demonstrates.

5.21 **Landscape Condition** – LCA C2 is judged to be in a moderate condition and the reasoning behind this conclusion is given in a shaded box reproduced as a digital extract below.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is in **moderate condition**. The physical landscape, particularly the gently shelving landform, rural settlement pattern and openness of the rural landscape are intact. However there has been loss of hedgerows and replacement with post and wire fencing, as well as field amalgamation. Linear development along roads has occurred, and there is a suburban character to buildings in villages. An increase in traffic has led to the creation of informal passing places on the rural road network, and increased disturbance due to motorway noise from the M4 and A329 (M).

5.22 The elements of the physical landscape that are intact and contribute positively to the overall moderate condition are all present at and around the Site, namely:

- Gently shelving landform;

³ Google Earth Professional Image from 16 February 2014 as accessed 8th July 2025

⁴ Google Earth Professional Image from 12 February 2021 as accessed 8th July 2025

- Rural settlement pattern; and the
- Openness of the rural landscape.

5.23 There has been some loss of hedgerow at the Site and more would occur with the formation of the Site access, albeit a net gain in hedgerow planting could readily be provided by the proposals. Whilst other hedgerow in the area shows symptoms of decline with some dead stock in their length (see single Plate 7 in Appendix F). Linear development has taken place in part along Lodge Road either side of the rural gap between settlements. Small parts of the Whistley Green around Nursery Gardens look more suburban in building form than traditional village form and architectural styling. Overtly busy, or a high quantum of traffic did not affect the area during my visits, nor was noise from the M4 or A329 (M) audible in the area.

5.24 It can be concluded the existing characteristics of the Site contribute positively to the Moderate condition of the wider LCA C2 and the area displays minimal factors that adversely affect landscape condition.

5.25 **Key issues** – There are 12 No. key issues listed for LCA C2. Of these I consider the following five are applicable to the Site and its contextual landscape, they are Bullets 2, 5, 6, 7 & 8 from the long list:

- Hedgerow loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture;
- Despite the presence of pasture there are no areas of species-rich grassland in this area due to increasingly intensive grassland management and conversion to arable land or pony grazing;
- Increasing pressure for horse/pony paddocks and grazing, particularly at settlement edges, leading to a decrease in rural intactness and affecting landscape condition;
- Drainage operations associated with development and agriculture affecting small wetland habitats; and
- Demand for residential development increasing linear development along rural lanes and continuing to push towards the amalgamation of close settlements Whistley Green and Hurst impacting rural character. Incremental suburbanisation of buildings.

5.26 It is the last of these key issues that appears the most relevant to this Inquiry.

5.27 **Landscape Strategy** – the overall landscape strategy for LCA C2 is presented in a shaded box that again is set as a digital extract below.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Hurst River Terrace* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape with its scattered rural farmsteads and small red brick villages connected by narrow rural lanes.

The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the open views overlooking the adjoining floodplain of the Loddon. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration and management of the hedgerows. Opportunities also exist to restore lost wetland and grassland habitats and reinstate woodland planting, which may mitigate the influence of the M4/A329 (M).

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green.

- 5.28 The strategy is one based on ‘*conserve and enhance*’ with specific reference to the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape with its scattered rural farmsteads and small red brick villages connected by narrow lanes. These elements echo the valuable landscape attributes that the Site and its contextual landscape have been shown to demonstrate.
- 5.29 The open views overlooking the Loddon floodplain are the key visual aspects the strategy seeks to conserve and actively manage and as already established these do not exist from the Site area.
- 5.30 Opportunities to enhance the landscape through the restoration and better management of the hedgerow network are generally ubiquitous to most landscapes in the Borough where hedges remain as field boundaries. Restoration of lost wetland is less common as appropriate ground conditions, or proximity to water sources are required. The reinstatement of woodland planting in a small scale way e.g. field corner copses would retain the area’s key characteristic of peaceful openness and would enhance landscape character. However any woodland planting in this part of LCA C2 would have no ameliorating effects on the M4/A329(M) corridors so is not applicable to the Site.
- 5.31 However what is clearly applicable to Site and these proposals is the landscape strategy’s last paragraph which has a stated aim of conserving the ‘*low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green*’. It is recognised that the greatest quantum of houses in LCA C2 are located at these two villages but the pattern of the villages themselves is also low-density and the landscape strategy seeks to retain this arrangement.
- 5.32 **Landscape Guidelines** – is the final written section of each of the LCA descriptors. For LCA C2 there are 17 No. bulleted points presented as a way for ‘*planners, developers and land managers to take account of the character and valuable attributes of Wokingham’s landscape when considering new development or land uses.*’⁴

5.33 I found the majority of the guidelines to be appropriate to the Site. However rather than list out the 12 No relevant guidelines in full I set below the ones that I find the most applicable:

- **Bullet 2 - Conserve the open and rural qualities of the 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.
- **Bullet 7 - Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of villages** and dispersed farms through control of new development, avoiding further linear spread of development.
- **Bullet 9 - Conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the open landscape** between adjacent village centres, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining between Hurst and Whistley Green.
- **Bullet 10 - Conserve the scenic value and rural character of the villages** and the listed and historic buildings throughout the area, including within Hurst Conservation Area.
- **Bulet 12 - Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements** e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.
- **Bullet 13 - Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes** resisting unsympathetic highways modifications, road widening, passing bays, infrastructure and signage.
- **Bullet 15 - Maintain views to the wooded backdrop of the Loddon valley.** Consider the impact of any development on the views to the wooded horizon. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts, other vertical elements, and very large agricultural or domestic buildings which have the potential to be highly visible.

5.34 **Final three maps** – These figures can be viewed at the end of the LCA C2 descriptor document (CD 8.9) and are useful to understand the wider arrangement of watercourses, historic buildings and woodland across the character area.

Historic Environment Topic Paper - Appendix C: Areas of Special Character (CD 8.11)

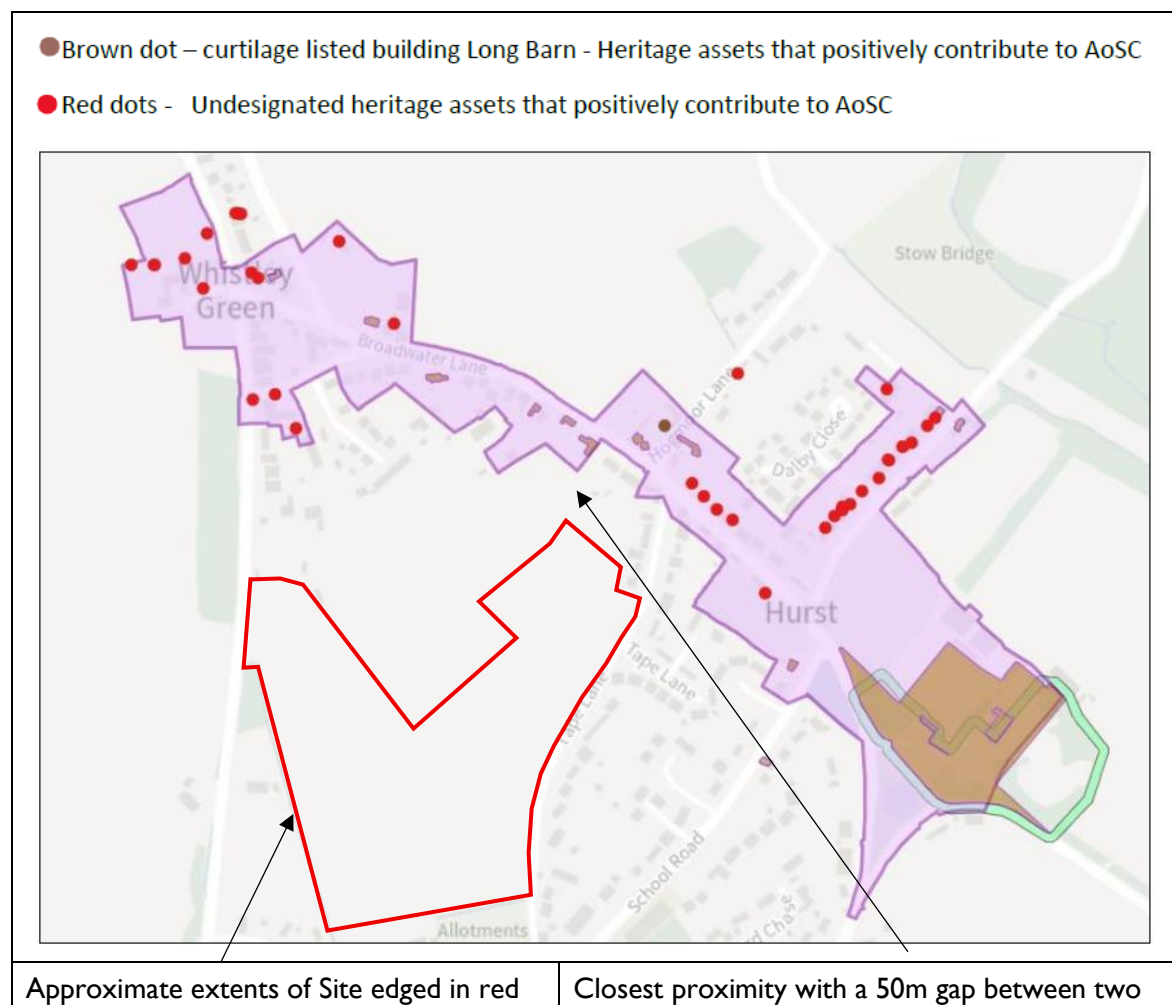
5.35 The Historic Environment Topic Paper has been produced as part of the evidence base for the emerging LPU and forms CD 12.3. This appendix provides evidence on the Borough's AoSC.

The current MDD explains AoSC at paragraph 3.126 on page 65 as, 'There are areas or groups of buildings where there is a consistent period or character reflecting the areas past but where a Conservation Area designation may not be justified. These are known as Areas of Special Character.'

5.36 As already explained at §4.4 above there are three AoSCs in the villages of Whistley Green and Hurst as well as the Conservation Area centred on St Nicholas Church to the south of Hurst. I take this as a general reflection of its wider quality as a rural settlement with recognisable time depth and collection of traditional buildings.

5.37 The Site has a relationship with the larger of the three AoSCs which is the Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC that its proforma assessment in CD 8.11 explains as centred on Broadwater Lane, encompassing part of Whistley Green to the north and extending south to include Hurst Lodge and Hurst Cricket Club. The location map from page 97 of CD 8.11 is set below as RLC Fig 2 with the approximate extents of the Appeal Site marked by the red line.

RLC Fig 2 – Location of the Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC and the Appeal Site



5.38 The AoSC were initially assessed in 1993 with WBC producing hand drawn survey sheets to record character and matters of setting (CD 8.13). Extracts of these earlier assessments were included in the later Historic Environment Topic Paper (CD 8.11). They also provided characterisation information for the AoSC classification under six headings:

- Settlement Development
- Legibility
- Special Character
- Negative Features
- Uses – which really provided a list of public amenities in the village at the time; and
- Potential Improvements. I have set an extract from the hand drawn character assessment sheet below as RLC Fig 3. It concentrates on the area of the Site and draws out features of interest that the assessors identified at the time.

RLC Fig 3 – Extract from Village Centre (Hurst) assessment CD's 8.11 and 8.13

Clear identification of views across Site from Tape Lane	Setting of settlement on the Site itself	Village style to Tape Lane cul-de-sac
		
Trees along Lodge Lane are in place	New housing Site is noted and taken into account	Classes Tape Lane as a narrow country lane

5.39 Other points of note regarding character from the original 1993 assessment include under the various written sections:

- Settlement Development – Development of the village has been linear;
- Settlement Development – Village is an attractive residential area in a countryside location;
- Legibility – With it being a dispersed village the location of a centre is sometimes confusing but the A321 and the then commercial activity means it is generally taken as the village centre.
- Legibility – Most of the village is served by wooded rural lanes which lend a distinct rural feel to its character.
- Special Character – The vast majority of the village could be said to display ‘special character’ as an attractive village.
- Special Character – It has kept a good relationship to the surrounding countryside and suffered only minor infill and modern development;
- Special Character – The backdrop to the village, especially the approach from the south, is well wooded.
- Special Character – From the list of five special features I consider Bullet 4 - wooded and rural setting and Bullet 5 – Limited unsympathetic modern development to be pertinent to the Appeal Site and how it functions in relationship to the AoSC.
- Negative Features – as listed do not apply to the Site and its relationship with the AoSC.
- Uses - as stated above is really a list of local amenities and it is interesting to note it has reduced with only the Primary School, Village Hall and bakery still remaining.
- Potential Improvements – the list supplied is not applicable to the Site, or its relationship with the AoSC.

5.40 In looking at the more recent Appendix 3 pro-forma review of the Village Centre (Hurst) it does not add many new points of character description other than reinforcing references to the village’s linear form and the fact that the A321 is heavily vegetated between Whistley Green and Hurst. It makes reference to ‘*many matures trees and open fields on the northern side of the street.*’ This northern side is the opposite side to the Appeal Site side but mature trees, including those on Site are evident to both sides of the road.

5.41 With regards to the relationship I found between the Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC and the Site it is formed from glimpsed, part views of the Site's northern end and in particular the mature trees it contains when viewed between houses on the south side of the A321 in the central section of the AoSC.

5.42 The ability to look between the properties to the undeveloped space and mature trees beyond gives the perception that:

- The village form along its main street remains as linear;
- That the rural landscape is not far away and runs right up this part of the village; and
- That the village is located within a rural setting.

A Design for Hurst Incorporating The Parish Design Statement 2005 (updated 2009) (CD 8.12)

5.43 The final characterisation document reviewed in this section was initially produced by Hurst Parish Council and as explained before reads as a design statement for the villages and rural setting. Its incorporates Whistley Green, the village of Hurst and the wider parish. The update in 2009 is formed from the inclusion of the then new Wokingham local plan policies.

5.44 In reviewing these documents I concentrated on two sections – Section 4 – History and Village Context and Section 5 – Landscape Setting and Character.

5.45 **Section 4: History and Village Context** - provides a good overview to the parish's formation and its final two paragraphs illustrate the recognition that there will be development pressures placed on the village. The penultimate paragraph makes reference to macro eastward expansion of Reading butting up to the Loddon valley. Whilst the final paragraph of this section concludes, *'The conflicts between the need to accommodate people who want to live in this desirable village and the rural nature of the environment must be resolved if Hurst is to retain its rural identity in the 21st century.'*

5.46 **Section 5: Landscape Setting and Character** – reinforces a number of landscape character points already provided in the WLCA and the AoSC descriptive text:

- The village itself is in the north of the Parish, and is open in character;
- The area is generally flat but with the land rising very gently from the Loddon Valley towards the village;

- Hurst enjoys several wide-open vistas across substantial stretches of cultivated farmland, dotted with small groups of farm buildings and private residential properties;
- The main through routes, Forest Road, Davis Street and the A321 Wokingham to Henley roads, have had a considerable influence on settlement patterns outside the village envelope, with ribbon development, usually on one side of the road only, a typical local feature;
- Most of the roads within the Parish have soft verges, which help to retain their rural nature. This is especially noticeable with the single-track lanes, many of which are tree lined or have hedges, enhancing pleasant views; and
- In summary, the essential characteristic of Hurst is of a small, recognisable, but scattered village set within an open agricultural landscape.

5.47 Two points that struck me from this document are its reference to one sided development along roads forming a local characteristic and recognition of the village form as being scattered and set within an open agricultural landscape.

5.48 Section 5 goes on to set a series of objectives for the Parish accompanied by six design and development objectives. I list those that I consider relevant to this Appeal:

- Maintenance of the rural and 'green' aspects of Hurst are essential both for the inhabitants and for the local population in general;
- The preservation of an open, agricultural landscape is vital to the setting of Hurst as a village within a rural Parish. It is important that the rural aspects of the area are preserved;
- The green gaps and rural vistas between buildings and settlements need to be preserved;
- To this end, further development within the rural areas surrounding the village, such as extensions of existing ribbon development along Davis Street, Forest Road and the A321 Wokingham Road are likely to be inappropriate;
- Infill of gaps between existing settlements creates urban intrusion;
- The protection of important open land between settlements and the boundaries, set by the Loddon and the motorways is essential to the protection of the rural character of the Parish; and
- The open views and vistas need to be retained as far as possible

Section 5 Landscape Character Information Summary Box

- The Site and surrounding contextual landscape are in the LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace Area
- The Site is not considered as one of the Borough's 13 No Area of Landscape Value (ALV) but the B1 Loddon River Valley to the west of Lodge Road is.
- The Site displays 3 out of 5 valuable landscape attributes and partly or seasonally the other 2.
- The WLCA judges the LCA C2 to be in a Moderate condition.
- The landscape strategy for the LCA C2 is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural agricultural landscape.
- The three Areas of Special Conservation (AoSC) and Conservation Area within the village indicate that it has positive character.
- The AoSC assessment identifies the open space of the Site as part of the setting to the Settlement.
- The A Design for Hurst Incorporating The Parish Design Statement 2005 (updated 2009) seeks to protect the rural setting to the village and identifies single sided development down lanes as being a characteristic of the village.

6.0 Review of landscape consultations and officer's report

- 6.1 This section primarily reviews the consultation response of Ms Brigitte Crafer, Senior Landscape Officer with WBC (CD 8.3). It also considers how the landscape and visual comments were presented in the Officer's Report (CD 1.2) and how they have been carried forward to WBC Statement of Case (SoC) (CD2.2).

WBC Landscape consultation comments – 7th October 2024 (CD 8.3)

- 6.2 Landscape consultation comments were provided during the determination period by Ms Brigitte Crafer. Her note runs to 11 sides and I found it to be comprehensive and balanced in terms of the landscape and arboricultural matters it addresses:
- 6.3 At the start of the consultation response Ms. Crafer states her 'in principle' objection to the proposals as they are set within the countryside, outside of settlement boundaries, adjacent to an Area of Valued Landscape and for a Site that forms the backdrop to an AoSC.
- 6.4 She then describes the Site making reference to the WLCA C2 character area descriptors, Landscape Strategy and Landscape Guidelines. She also touches upon WLC BI – Loddon River Valley characteristics and considers there to be a seamless connection between the two along Lodge Road.
- 6.5 Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) are identified by Ms Crafer for the Site and the immediate treed area along Lodge Road consisting of:
- Tree planting to the west and north of the Site are included in an area TPO Ref. 1781/2021;
 - There are 2 individual Oak trees within the site adjacent to Tape Lane protected by TPO 525/1990; and
 - Opposite the site boundary on the west side of Lodge Road is TPO 1869/2022 as a woodland TPO.
- 6.6 Ms Crafer observes that there are few PROWs and recreational routes in the area and goes on to identify the STNH34 (Loddon Long Distance Path) that runs to the west side of Lodge Road connecting via a timber bridge over the roadside ditch opposite Sawpit Road.
- 6.7 In her capacity as a Landscape and Tree Officer Ms Crafer reviewed the application's arboricultural information noting the losses and the range of effects on the eight veteran trees she considered to be on Site. This was highlighted as a potential area of arboricultural

disagreement with the application tree survey considering that there were two less with six in total. She reminded readers that veteran trees are an irreplaceable habitats referred to in the NPPF 186c.

- 6.8 Ms Crafer also discusses effects on hedgerows noting 73m of removal from Hedge H1 for the Site entrance on Lodge Road and 15m of G38 (a group of trees) cleared to form the emergency access from Tape Lane. These figures are those that are given in the AIA at paragraph 3.4 (CD 11.8).
- 6.9 Ms Crafer considers the landscape and visual elements of the submitted LVIA separately noting its production in May 2024 means that there are no winter views included and there was no prior agreement of viewpoints. She also queries the lack of evidence of how the findings from the LVIA had influenced the stated landscape-led approach to the proposals.
- 6.10 Given the importance of the veteran trees Ms Crafer disagrees with some of the stated landscape effects on page 8 of her note and offers up her own assessment for two landscape receptors finding a greater adverse effect on the character of the Site and the elements that it contains.
- 6.11 Likewise Ms Crafer arrives at a different conclusion with regards to visual effects for the majority of visual receptors with views to the Site considering they *'will have Medium/High susceptibility and sensitivity and a high magnitude of change resulting in a Major/Adverse visual effect at year 1 to Medium to Low/Adverse at Yr. 15⁵,*
- 6.12 Within her summary the recent appeal decisions at and around the Site are touched upon with her agreeing with Inspector Wildsmith that the landscape effects are at the upper end of the Moderate, Adverse scale.
- 6.13 Finally within her summary she states that, *'The proposals are contrary to Policy CP3 of the CS, as they are not of an appropriate scale, do not create a sense of place. ... they conflict with Policy TB21 of the Local Plan. As it stands the proposals are contrary to NPPF 2023 paragraph 180b) as they fail to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside...'*

Officer's Delegated Report, 27th November 2024 (CD 1.2)

- 6.14 The Planning Officer who prepared the Officer's Delegated Report was Mark Croucher. He considers landscape and visual matters between pages 20 and 26 of his report. I do not seek to

⁵ CD 8.3 Pdf page 9 of 11

repeat the bulk of these remark but set down below the salient points that struck me as I read them.

6.15 Mr Croucher sets the policy background first and makes a clear and unambiguous recognition that the Site is not valued landscape in terms of NPPF 180 a) but rather is a 180 b) location where the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside needs to be recognised.

6.16 He reports on the WLCA LCA C2 character area picking out applicable key characteristics, valued landscape attributes, key issues and some of the guidelines included in CD 8.9. He also conducts a similar, but shorter exercise for LCA B1 River Loddon Valley given its location to the west of Lodge Road. The matters he highlights from these LCA descriptors appear appropriate to the Site.

6.17 Mr Croucher starts his discussion of landscape and visual effects at Page 23 of CD 1.2 and includes the following matters:

- Significant erosion of the transition between built-up areas and the limited remaining gap between the historic villages of Hurst and Whistley Green;
- The proposals are not within the villages' settlement limits, nor respect the transition between built-up areas and the open countryside;
- Introduces urban character into the village due to scale and quantum of development;
- The visual and intrinsic setting of the village will be severely compromised and acknowledges that the effect will diminish over time but will still be a harmful effect on the village's setting and special characteristics;
- Light pollution and the need for light columns on the main access road;
- Reports the WBC's Landscape Officer's comments and their objection to the proposals;
- Highlights change to Lodge Road from the site access works and concludes, *'the access in this undeveloped section of the road and isolated road would appear as an alien and incongruous feature to this section of Lodge Road.'*

6.18 In his final summary on landscape matters he identifies a series of planning policy conflicts that are carried over to RfR3.

6.19 I found the comments made by Mr Croucher on landscape matters in his Delegated Officer's Report to be fair and reasonable and the concerns he has about adverse effects recognisable.

Wokingham Statement of Case (SoC) (CD 2.2)

- 6.20 WBC's SoC (CD 2.2) was submitted to PINS and considers character and appearance effects as Main Issue 2 in its Section 6 titled '*Main Issue 2: Harm to the character and appearance of the landscape and countryside*'. It runs over pages 19 & 20 of the SoC and highlights the following harms:
- 6.21 **Paragraph 6.1 - Urbanisation of countryside** - Detrimental urbanising and negative impact on the landscape;
- 6.22 **Paragraph 6.2 – Policy Conflict** - With Development Plan policies TB21, CC03, CPI, CP3 and CPI1 the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment requirement for maintaining or enhancing the quality of the environment as acknowledged in the Application LVIA (CD 8.1);
- 6.23 **Paragraph 6.3 – Adverse Visual Effects** - Application LVIA identified a range of adverse impacts from a variety of viewpoints which would result in medium magnitude of change and moderate adverse impacts;
- 6.24 **Paragraph 6.4 – Loss of countryside setting to Hurst** - By reference to Inspector Wildsmith's decision notice for the 200 Unit scheme with its landscape effects being assessed as a '*moderate adverse impact, at the upper end of the scale*'. Inspector Wildsmith gave detailed justification that the site makes a strong contribution to Hurst's countryside setting and the appeal scheme would still cover the same geographical area and have the same access road from Lodge Road.
- 6.25 **Paragraph 6.5 – Adverse landscape effects** - Acknowledges that landscape effects do not have to have a visible component before explaining that the negative and urbanising impact on the landscape will be seen by numerous receptors across different viewpoints.
- 6.26 **Paragraph 6.6 – Village character** - With harmful impact on the character of the village of Hurst by reason of the disproportionate scale of development, suburbanisation of its rural fringe and the disruption of the organic settlement pattern.
- 6.27 **Paragraph 6.7 – Erosion of settlement separation** - The development would erode the 'reverse C' gap and further diminish the separation between historic settlements.
- 6.28 **Paragraph 6.8 – Reduction in scheme units** – from the 200 unit scheme to the 99 unit scheme has not successfully addressed the sense of landscape change and still has the same site area and access road.
- 6.29 **Paragraph 6.9 – Summing up** of paragraphs 6.1 to 6.8

- 6.30 The topics raised in the WBC SoC can chart their origin from the comments of the Landscape Officer (CD 8.3), through the Delegated Officer Report (CD 1.2) to how they are presented in the Council's SoC (CD 2.2). I consider them to be fair, recognisable and consistent in their approach to the topic of landscape and visual effects.

Section 6 Summary Box

The following character and appearance harm have been identified consistently by the WBC Landscape Officer, Ms Crafer who reviewed the application proposals and Mr Croucher as Planning Officer, who determined to refuse the application;

- **Urbanisation of countryside** with a detrimental urbanising and negative impact on the landscape;
- **Policy Conflict** - With Development Plan policies TB21, CC03, CPI, CP3 and CPI1
- **Adverse Visual Effects** - Application LVIA identified a range of adverse impacts from a variety of viewpoints which would result in moderate adverse impacts;
- **Loss of countryside setting to Hurst** - with reference to Inspector Wildsmith's decision notice for the 200 Unit scheme as a '*moderate adverse impact, at the upper end of the scale*'.
- **Village character** - With harmful impact on the character of Hurst by reason of suburbanisation of its rural fringe and the disruption of its current settlement pattern.
- **Erosion of settlement separation** – Given erosion to the 'reverse C' gap and diminish the separation between Hurst and Whistley Green as historic settlements
- Ms Crafter echoed Inspector Wildsmith's terminology and found the landscape effect at the '*upper end of moderate*' scale and the Year 15 visual effect as Medium to Low/Adverse.
- Mr Croucher reflected these comments fairly in his Officer's Report (CD 1.2) and carried them forward to form Main Issue 2 in the WBC SoC (CD 2.2).

7.0 Landscape baseline and resulting effects

Landscape designations and valued landscapes

- 7.1 The Site is not covered by any national or local landscape designations.
- 7.2 The Site does not form part of one of the 13 No. local Areas of Landscape Value as defined in the WBC Valued Landscape Assessment of the Borough (CD 8.10) published recently in September 2024. It does however form the immediate setting to the River Loddon Area of Landscape Value which extends to the west side of Lodge Road opposite the Site.
- 7.3 It is common ground that the Site does not form part of a valued landscape as per NPPF 187 a) use of the term but it's intrinsic character and beauty as countryside in accordance with NPPF 187 b) should be recognised in the decision making process.

Other designations

- 7.4 I consider that there are two further designations that are not landscape designations per se that should be taken into account when considering the landscape character of the Site and the contextual area in which it is judged. These are;
- The series of TPO's protecting mature and veteran trees on and around Site (CD's 8.2 & 11.6); and
 - The Village Centre (Hurst) Area of Special Character (AoSC) as discussed at my paragraphs 5.35 To 5.42.
- 7.5 The TPO designations mark the amenity value of the trees on Site, the two mature oak trees on Tape Lane and the woodland to the west side of Lodge Lane. Of the trees on Site there are between six to eight that meet the veteran tree definition.
- 7.6 The Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC is one of three AoSC's in the village that I take as a mark of its general quality and interest of built form. The villages of Hurst and Whistley Green contribute to the character of the local rural landscape and vice versa.

The landscape baseline

- 7.7 This section initially establishes the landscape baseline for the Site and its contextual landscape to allow the effects of the Proposed Development to be judged against them.
- 7.8 The description of the landscape baseline in RLC Table 1 is split into two parts;

- Describing the individual landscape elements of the Site; and
- Describing the landscape character areas of the context around the Site.

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RLC Table 4 – Landscape elements at the Site and within its context

Element	At the Site	In the surrounding landscape context	Indicative photographs
Topography	Generally flat with a barely perceptible fall from east to west with the slightly sloping ground running down towards the River Loddon side of the Site. There are no dramatic topographic features, or sudden changes of level apparent on Site.	To the north, east and south the gently shelving land form continues helping to link the Site with its contextual landscape, To the west there is a more complex topography with the dip slope running down to the River Loddon and the gently raised ground of the capped landfill site.	
Land-Use	As horse pasture at the time of my site visits and as referenced in other documents.	Built residential form arcing around the Site in the reversed C arrangement. Immediately to the north is the pasture of the n-shaped field, the eastern side has the houses of Tape Lane leading onto the houses of A321 – Broadwater Lane. To the south are the Tape Lane allotments and more recent houses of Martineau Lane whilst to the west is a part-wooded paddock and Lodge Lane itself.	

Element	At the Site	In the surrounding landscape context	Indicative photographs
Land pattern	There is not a pattern from a number of interconnecting fields as the Site reads as a single, large pasture field. Patterning comes from its generally straight geometric sides.	The overarching pattern is the reversed C pattern of built form with the Site acting as its open centre. The paddocks and menage area to the north is also geometrically aligned with regular sized and sided field units.	
Vegetation	The ground plain of improved grass provides limited vegetative interest but the series of mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees that fringe parts of the Site including 6 to 8 veteran trees do. They are an attractive feature with large, open field form and add to the Site's time depth and sense of rurality.	To the north there are similar mature boundary trees fringing the fields running up to Whistley Green and parts of the A321. To the east are large domestic gardens of Tape Lane, to the south a mix of crops and produce being grown at the Tape Lane allotments. To the west there is the part treed Poole House paddock that was subject to the 5 unit Appeal and the mixed TPO protected woodland set along the west side of Lodge Road within LCA BI – Loddon River Valley.	
Water and drainage	No surface water features noted on Site at the time of these summer visits other than the field ditch set to the side of Lodge Road that the Environment Agency has raised queries about. As explained with RLC Fig I above there appears to be a regular, modern grid of field	The River Loddon to the west is the dominant watercourse in the area. Associated with it are a series of gravel workings, now flooded and put to recreational use e.g. Dinton Meadows. There is also a string of ditches and ponds within Hurst that is highlighted in the AoSC character information as	

Element	At the Site	In the surrounding landscape context	Indicative photographs
	drains within the Site but this does not necessarily stop seasonal waterlogging.	adding to visual quality and interest in the village. Road side ditches are crossed by timber bridges.	
Boundaries	Native hedgerows with hedgerow trees appear to be the predominant boundary on Site. There are sets of high twin leaf metal gates set at the Tape Lane and Lodge Road entrances that are not characteristic of traditional agricultural gates.	Similar hedge boundaries to the north with domestic boundaries to the east along Tape Lane. The boundary to the allotments to the south is marked by a tree line and then domestic fencing and hedges to the houses along Martineau Lane. To the west boundaries are made up of woodland and scrubby verges .	
Built form	No built form on Site.	Range of residential architectural styles and materials with no specific vernacular but as reported in the WLCA C2 red brick tends to tie the various building styles and arrangements together. There has been recent house building in Nursery Gardens in Whistley Green and re-building of houses to the south side of the Tape Lane cul-de-sac.	
Openness	There is a definite sense of openness when looking across the Site field with varying degrees of connectivity to the adjacent land parcels dependent on where mature trees are located.	The reversed C village form encloses the adjacent area to the north, east and south of the Site field. The more open side is the west but there is limited long distance views in this direction given the mature woodland belt along the west side of Lodge Road. Further to the west there is a sense of openness leading up the reclaimed landfill but more so in the longer views across the Loddon valley.	

Element	At the Site	In the surrounding landscape context	Indicative photographs
Linkages – Physical and Visual	The Site is devoid of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and has no public access. As the Site is private there are no public views to take from it. Visually it allows a rural visual connection from Tape Lane towards the woodland that fringes Lodge Road and towards Whistley Green.	There is a heavily screened view from the new Nursery Garden in Whistley Green to the canopy of some mature trees to the north side of the Site. There are also views between houses on the south side of the A321 Broadwater Lane again looking towards mature tree canopies. There is a clear visual link from Tape Lane across the Site to the north and west and from the Tape Lane allotments looking north.	
Historical landscape assets	The veteran trees and other mature boundary trees are valuable historic landscape assets adding visual interest, time depth and irreplaceable habitat. The current tree assets on Site appear in the same location as planting indicated on the 1873 OS Map Edition.⁶	The older dwellings in the reversed C all combine to add historic built form interest in the landscape context to the Site. The woodland to the west of Lodge Road is protected by TPO and planting is shown along the route on the 1873 OS Map Edition but that could also be an avenue of trees. Field patterning to the north of the Site is relatable to the same 1873 OS mapping.	
Accessibility	There is no public access onto the Site. There is sight over parts of it from many locations around it – Tape Lane, Tape Lane Allotments, Martineau Green, Lodge Lane and between houses on the A321 – Broadwater Lane.	There is a scarcity of PRoW in the contextual landscape. However Tape Lane is used as an informal path with people walking down the middle of the single track section of the road, The Loddon permissive path weaves on and off Lodge Road on permissive routes through the woodland and past the former land fill site before allowing longer views across the Loddon.	

⁶ CD 8.11 – Historic Topic Paper Appendix 3 – page 96

Element	At the Site	In the surrounding landscape context	Indicative photographs
Perceptual characteristics	There is a sense of relative tranquillity at the Site with limited activity taking place on it other than horse grazing which may be removed when ground conditions are too wet. At the edges there will likely be an appreciation of traffic noise and movement from adjacent roads.	There is a limited sense of rural tranquillity around the Site with the A321 being the busiest road in the vicinity. Traffic noise and depending on path position is detected from the permissive paths next to Lodge Road. The southern part of Tape Lane given its narrowness and general lack of traffic has a greater sense of tranquillity with it restricted for access only traffic.	
Detracting features	The uncharacteristic metal access gates on Tape Lane and Lodge Road are localised points of detracting. The limited state of hedgerow management around the Site and particularly along Tape Lane was noted with some tree dieback possibly of ash, or remnant elm.	The speed of traffic along Lodge Road was at times a distraction when walking the road as a pedestrian.	
Lighting	There is no lighting on the Site. It forms a dark pocket of land between the two settlements and the various clusters of housing on Lodge Road. It is not however a candidate site for dark sky status given nearby domestic lighting and urban glow from Reading/Twyford.	Around the Site there is the domestic light sources from the reversed C of houses with no street lights noted on A321 Broadwater Lane, Tape Lane, Lodge Road and on the road called Whistley Green. There are however street lights in the more modern Martineau Lane and Barber Close parts of Hurst.	

Landscape character areas in the context to the Site

- 7.9 The landscape context is the area surrounding the Site that it contributes to and is judged with. I have produced an aerial photograph with the contextual areas marked upon it and this is Plan I set in Appendix D. It shows six character areas around the Site that are listed in a clockwise order in RLC Table 2 below along with a summary description of each and an indicative photograph.

RLC Table 2 – Character areas in the Site context

Contextual Area & Description	Indicative Image of Area
Area 1 - Whistley Green and Northern Fields Comprising both small, regular shaped paddock, fields and a menage this area is not as open as the Site. It has recently undergone development of a small residential scheme at Nursery Gardens but the majority of housing stock is older. The openness of the Site assists in providing the settlement with a rural setting. The openness of the Site and its mature trees is appreciable from the rear of Whistley Green's southern houses and neighbouring fields.	 <i>View south down Lodge Road</i>
Area 2 - A321 – Broadwater Lane Is generally made up of older, highly characterful properties of different styles and eras of build. The road is reasonably well vegetated and like many in the wider Hurst is one sided in part allowing fields and open space to run up to the building lines and add to the sense of rurality and lower density of development. This section of Broadwater Lane apart from one or two more contemporary dwellings is part of the Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC. The Site and more particularly the mature trees upon it assist in providing a rural backdrop to the south side of parts of Broadwater Lane.	 <i>View west between properties to the south side of the A321 – Broadwater Lane</i>
Area 3 - Tape Lane Has three distinct characters with houses set to both sides of its northern end for approximately 100m. This then becomes a single line of houses set on the east side of the lane directly opposite the Site's eastern boundary. The houses all tend	<i>Image overleaf.</i>

Contextual Area & Description	Indicative Image of Area
to stand in large well maintained gardens. The third Tape Lane character area is a cul-de-sac that runs in a west to east direction and consists of apparently social, or former social housing. The Site has a limited relationship with the upper, twin sided stretch of Tape Lane but forms the focus of the single sided stretch on the opposite side of the lane and at the west end of the Tape Lane cul-de-sac which aligns on the proposed northern housing block	 <i>View south down single track section of Tape Lane.</i>
Area 4 - Tape Lane Allotments A relatively small character area compared to the others but distinct given its specific land use. It is accessed off Tape Lane into a small car park and runs approximately half way along the Site's southern boundary. The allotments run up to butt against the more contemporary houses of Martineau Lane. There is an irregular line of field trees set on the Site's boundary to the north side of the allotments. The plots appear popular and well maintained. The Site forms the only open side to the allotments with their east side flanked by properties on Tape Lane and their southern and western sides by houses in the Martineau Lane development.	 <i>View west across the allotment area with its various plots and growing structures.</i>
Area 5 - Martineau Lane and Barber Close These twin residential areas are more contemporary than the majority of houses in Hurst and as such look modern even though they were built at the turn of the 21st Century. They generally present rear elevations and back gardens to the Site with the Martineau Lane properties built to face inwards onto a central green of POS with a play facility set within it. There are occasional glimpsed views through the Site between houses or over lower features such as the sub-station (see Viewpoint 8 in Appendix E). These developments have turned in on themselves and have lesser visual or perceived relationship	 <i>View from central green space looking outwards to houses that are set around Martineau Green</i>

Contextual Area & Description	Indicative Image of Area
with the Site given their more contemporary layout.	
Area 6 - Lodge Road Is the more or less straight country road that provides the open ground of the reversed 'C' and provides a recognisable rural break between the perceived edge of Hurst once past Nursery Close before travelling approximately 470m to reach the short row of house on the Whistley Green side of the gap. There are a low number of larger, rural properties set off this rural section of Lodge Road but they appear as large properties set in ample grounds. The road corridor is generally wooded, unlit and has grass verges that were overgrown during my visit. The openness of the Site is evident from Lodge with glimpses at field entrances and through the tall roadside hedgerow.	 <i>View north up Lodge Road towards Whistley Green from near proposed Site access</i>

Valued Landscape Assessment

- 7.10 It is common ground between parties that the Site is not a 'valued landscape' as per the NPPF Paragraph 187 a) meaning of the term. However this does not mean that the Site is without value. In 2021 the Landscape Institute published Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 2/21 on establishing value outside of National Landscapes to help landscape practitioners establish the value of certain landscapes.
- 7.11 I have conducted a TGN 2/21 Table 1 assessment adopting the nine factors identified in that note and applying them to the Site. The purpose of this exercise is to determine which, if any of the nine factors have an elevated or reduced level of value at the Site. The grading applied is on a five-point scale using the following word descriptors – Excellent, Good, Ordinary, Poor and Degraded. Any factors that are above Ordinary indicate an elevated value for that particular factor.
- 7.12 The overall TGN 2/21 assessment is set with Appendix C and graded the nine factors for the Site's landscape judging it with its immediate context as the guidance directs practitioners to do and arrived at the following value assessments for the individual factors:
- Natural Heritage – Good;
 - Cultural Heritage – Ordinary;
 - Landscape Condition – Ordinary;

- Associations – None known;
- Distinctiveness – Good;
- Recreational – Poor;
- Perceptual (Scenic) – Ordinary/Good;
- Perceptual (Wildness & Tranquillity) – Ordinary/Good; and
- Functional – Good.

7.13 The Site does not display enough elevated ratings to amalgamate to form an overall valued landscape judgement. Nor does it hold any Excellent ratings that could justify the assessment of valued landscape based solely on a single value factor. One of the higher value rating is the functional role it plays in preventing the coalescence of the two settlements and the effects of the proposals on this factor need to be carefully considered. The natural heritage value is elevated because of the veteran and mature trees whilst distinctiveness is formed from the 'reversed C' shape.

Identification of landscape receptors

- 7.14 The following is a list of landscape receptors that have been identified to judge the effects of the proposals against. They are listed in a geographical hierarchy with the larger National Character Areas (NCA) not included as the scale of this development, even though large in terms of area and housing numbers in the context of Hurst, is not when judged against the wider NCA.
- 7.15 They contain the same six landscape receptors as identified by Pegasus in the Application LVIA to allow a direct comparison of that assessment's judgement with my own. I have however added the six contextual areas to the Site to explain the foreseeable landscape effects on them.

Landscape receptors in Application LVIA

- Landcover
- Topography
- Tree Resource
- Hedgerows
- Site Character
- LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace

Landscape receptors in context to Site

- Whistley Green and Northern Fields
- A321 – Broadwater Lane
- Tape Lane
- Tape Lane Allotments
- Martineau Lane and Barber Close
- Lodge Road

Landscape sensitivity

- 7.16 A landscape receptor's sensitivity is defined by considering two factors – its susceptibility to the type of change brought about by the particular type of development and the value associated with the landscape. This definition of landscape sensitivity is summarised in RLC Table 3 below. The fuller methodology is explained in my Appendix A.

RLC Table 3 – Landscape sensitivity of landscape receptors

Landscape Receptor	Susceptibility	Value	Receptor sensitivity
Landcover	High	Medium	MEDIUM/HIGH
Topography	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM
Tree Resource	High	High	HIGH
Hedgerows	Medium/High	Medium/High	MEDIUM/HIGH
Site Character	Medium/High	Medium/High	MEDIUM/HIGH
LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM
The following landscape receptors are the contextual areas to the Site			
Whistley Green and Northern Fields	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM
A321 – Broadwater Lane	Medium	Medium/High	MEDIUM
Tape Lane	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM
Tape Lane Allotments	Medium	Medium/High	MEDIUM
Martineau Lane and Barber Close	Low	Medium	MEDIUM/LOW
Lodge Road	Medium/High	Medium/High	MEDIUM/HIGH

- 7.17 My sensitivity assessment indicates the land cover, tree resource and Lodge Road have a higher landscape sensitivity, the majority of receptors have a Medium sensitivity and that just one area, namely the Martineau Lane and Barber Close receptor have a lower sensitivity with a Medium/Low rating.
- 7.18 The next stage in assessing landscape effects is considering the magnitude of change experienced by each of the landscape receptors.

Magnitude of landscape effects arising from the proposals

- 7.19 My assessment of the magnitude of landscape effect on the various identified landscape receptors is set overleaf in RLC Table 4. It considers the magnitude of the Year 0 effects at the point of completion and then again at Year 15 when the indicated mitigation planting would have established and started to have ameliorating some effect even if not at a point of maturity. Notes at the end of the table summarises the comments on magnitude.

RLC Table 4 – Magnitude of effects on the landscape receptors at the Site and in the contextual area

Landscape receptor	Geographical extent	Contrast or Integration	Reversibility	Year 0 Magnitude	Potential Mitigation	Year 15 Magnitude
Landcover	The majority of the Site will be changed to either housing, roads or Public Open Space.	Contrast with the housing blocks and roads, some similarity with Common.	Not reversible	LARGE – wholesale change to the type and appearance of landcover on Site.	Re-establishing grass on the Common area.	MEDIUM/LARGE – Built form and roads remain with some lessening of loss of grasslands and hedges.
Topography	Across the whole Site but concentrated on house platforms and SuDS areas.	Contrast with housing platforms but presence of SuDS similar to water in area	Not reversible	MEDIUM – two housing blocks and associated SuDS features particularly basins.	Greening SuDS features and planting to make housing platforms less stark.	SMALL – Given the generally flat nature of the Site there is minimal topographic change.
Tree Resource	Around the whole Site's boundaries with strong tree lines to the north and west boundaries.	Contrast with existing open field trees and rural hedgerows.	Not reversible	MEDIUM – trees, even though not felled will be perceived within the new housing context rather than their rural setting.	Planting of further trees on Site to ameliorate the landscape character change and add structure to the external realm.	MEDIUM/SMALL – The former field trees and veterans would still have a housing context but there would be more trees on Site.
Hedgerows	Breaks are required for the Site entrance on Lodge Road and the pedestrian/cycle/bus/emergency accesses onto Tape Lane.	Contrast with their former purpose to define a rural field and keep stock safe rather than as a boundary to a housing area.	Not reversible	MEDIUM/SMALL – highly notable effect on Lodge Road with the removal of 73m to form the access and sightlines in a high existing hedge, less so around Site	Re-planting of hedge behind the sightlines allowing room for hedge growth outwards. New hedges planted elsewhere on Site.	SMALL/NONE – after 15 years hedges should have re-established behind the sightlines but will still have access gap and angled inwards. Improved management elsewhere.
Site Character - including the four elements above as well as other factors such as openness, distinctiveness and function.	The whole of the Site	Contrast with urban development set in two blocks and the road and path network running through it. Also contrast with proposed POS.	Not reversible	LARGE – with the houses causing the greatest magnitude of change, combined with the roads and the public open space being dominated by the new houses and increased sense of activity & light.	New planting around the Site giving structure and ultimately maturing with the built form, roads and external realm features such as the paths, SuDS assets and play area.	MEDIUM/LARGE – the Site character is still fundamentally altered from rural pasture to a large residential development set within a public realm that is subservient to the housing that it accommodates.
LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace	The northern area of the LCA around the villages of Hurst and Whistley Green.	Contrast between the wider rural form character and contemporary built form and access road.	Not reversible	MEDIUM/SMALL – Effective removal of all existing open field character and replacement with new built form and associated POS.	Tree planting and other external works to attempt to assimilate it into LCA C2.	SMALL – with the reduction of the important gap between the two villages and resulting harm to the wider LCA remains.
Contextual areas to Site						
Whistley Green and Northern Fields	The northern housing block would generate more housing to the south side of Whistley Green.	Contrast with the intervening rural fields reducing the sense of openness and the setting to the village.	Not reversible.	MEDIUM/LARGE – The northern housing block reduces an open gap of approximately 300m to one that is 130m.	Additional tree planting to the retained northern boundary trees to reinforce their screening value.	MEDIUM/LARGE – The gap will still remain reduced and new planting as indicated would not screen out the works fully.
A321 – Broadwater Lane	The northern housing block will present a built edge approximately 80m in length set at a similar distance from the rear of the properties on the A321.	Contrast with the existing backdrop of mature trees and rural fields and current sense of openness perceived between the houses.	Not reversible.	MEDIUM TO SMALL – With the greater magnitude of effect in winter and spring when the mature trees are bald and a sense of new housing is gained.	Additional tree planting to the retained northern boundary trees to reinforce their screening value.	SMALL – Depending on the final width and success of screen planting the ability to perceive the eastern edge of the northern housing block would reduce.

Landscape receptor	Geographical extent	Contrast or Integration	Reversibility	Year 0 Magnitude	Potential Mitigation	Year 15 Magnitude
Tape Lane	Change would be experienced from a point at the southern end of the twin sided houses down to the Tape Lane Allotments taking in the Tape Lane cul-de-sac.	Contrast with the open rural field as currently experienced.	Not reversible.	MEDIUM/LARGE – Given the proximity and extent of the proposed housing along a large part of Tape Lane. Setting development to both sides of lane and removal of openness at the western end of the Tape Lane cul-de-sac.	Tree planting within the proposals and possibly within the Tape Lane hedgerow.	MEDIUM/LARGE – Tape Lane's rural edge context remains lost, as would the sense of peacefulness and open character, coupled with the twin siding of housing down parts of the lane reducing its appeal as a narrow rural lane.
Tape Lane Allotments	Runs the full length of the north side of the allotments in their current and proposed extended form.	Contrast, with the closing off the open rural north to the allotments.	Not reversible.	MEDIUM/LARGE – The loss of the only remaining open side to the allotments and links to the rural landscape beyond will turn them to a more urban space enclosed by development on all sides.	Tree retention, further tree and possible hedge planting and management.	MEDIUM – The allotments would still have lost their open aspect and connectivity to the rural landscape and the ability to see the new housing to their north side would be reduced but not removed.
Martineau Lane and Barber Close	More so for Martineau Lane that has a greater connecting boundary than Barger Close.	Contrast in terms of rural openness beyond houses but Integration with adjacent housing area.	Not reversible.	MEDIUM/SMALL – The rural edge to this existing housing area would be lost.	Hedge retention & management, further planting along boundary.	SMALL – The rural edge context for these housing areas remains lost but their internal character would not fundamentally alter.
Lodge Road	New urban development introduced to west of Lodge Road with more notable change around Site entrance and running north into Whistley Green with new footpath.	Contrast with existing rural gap character of the area.	Not reversible.	MEDIUM with loss of openness and change of land use evident beyond road side planting to the south end, and MEDIUM/LARGE – in the vicinity of the Site entrance with a new urban entrance away from existing settlement set mid-way on a rural route. Hedge removal for sightlines and possible tree felling in the woodland TPO to the west side of Lodge Road. The perception of a gap between the villages will be significantly reduced.	Hedge replacement where possible e.g. sightlines and tree planting on Site helping to screen the northern housing block through layering vegetation.	MEDIUM for the general route with the loss of perceived openness permanently removed and the appearance of a contemporary housing area replacing it. MEDIUM – with hedge regrown but still appreciation of the reduction in the sense of a gap between Hurst and Whistley Green and the sense of an uncharacteristic urban estate entrance road in a rural location.

7.20 In summing up the magnitude of landscape effects section it is plain to see those landscape receptors with a greater physical interface with the proposed Site (and the Site itself) will experience a greater magnitude of change. Sometimes the magnitude of change will be reduced through the indicated or foreseeable mitigation measures, on other occasions where change such as the loss of openness are key, it will not.

7.21 The establishment of anticipated magnitudes of change for the various receptors allows the final step in the landscape impact appraisal process to take place. This is the combining of the individual receptors' sensitivity with the magnitude of change they would experience to arrive at an overall assessment of the significance of that landscape change.

Landscape Significance of Effect

7.22 This large amount of landscape receptors reflects the scale and complex shape of the Appeal Site meaning that it is associated with many existing areas and routes in this part of the Borough.

7.23 For the immediate Year 0 effects it assumes that all buildings and estate infrastructure has been completed, grass established with new trees and hedges planted but not yet established.

7.24 For the permanent landscape effect at Year 15 post construction and beyond this takes into account mitigation measures and better reflects the permanent appearance of the proposals. For the purpose of the assessment it is assumed that;

- Tree planting would have established and grown to an early semi-mature size e.g. 5-7m but not with a full canopy structure;
- That new hedgerows and hedgerow management works have been undertaken and the hedges are in sustainable order;
- That diversification of grassland sward has taken place in the Common, the Orchard holds recognisable small fruit trees and that SuDS features have lost any engineered rawness; and
- That building materials, including boundaries and fences have toned down and lost their sense of newness.

7.25 The assessment of significance is derived from combining the sensitivity of the various landscape receptors with the magnitude of effect they would experience at Years 0 & 15. The consistency of these assessments is aided by using a 'look-up' table as included at Appendix A – Table 7.

- 7.26 The outcome of the significance assessment is given on a five point scale of Major, Major/Moderate, Moderate, Moderate/Minor or Minor. A sixth rating of No Effect is used to record where there would be no discernible effect. The type of effect is also considered as effects can be either Beneficial, Adverse or on occasion Neutral when a landscape element or characteristic is replaced by a similar one. Effects can also be Temporary or Permanent.
- 7.27 Where a duration of effect is described this is generally provided in terms of short, medium, long term effects or permanent. The definition of these as set down at 4.7.8 in the LVIA Methodology held in Appendix A and are as follows:
- Short-term 0 to 5 years;
 - Medium term 5 to 10 years;
 - Long term 10 to 25 years; and
 - Permanency is considered anything above 25 years as this can be taken as a change that will last as long as a generation.

RLC Table 5 – Landscape effects table

Receptor	Sensitivity	Yr 0 & 15 Magnitudes	Significances of effect	Narrative on effects
Landcover	Medium/High	Yr 0 - Large Reducing to Yr 15 - Medium/Large	MAJOR, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MAJOR/MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	The Site's landcover and form would effectively change from rural pasture usage to residential land use. Built form does not cover the whole Site but its presence influences the character of the open space between. The Common is set as the main open space with the two housing blocks book ending either side so that it will appear as part of the development rather than as rural landcover. Likewise the long access road influences the western side of the Site passing through the proposed orchard and flanking the western side of the Common. The SuDS features of basins near both housing blocks and the main access road could be classed as more characteristic of other ponds within and near Hurst but their appearance will likely be as SuDS features first and foremost and subservient to the residential buildings that prompted their creation. Maturity of planting at Year 15 will ameliorate the appearance of landcover to a degree but it will still appear as related to urban, rather than rural land use.
Topography	Medium	Yr 0 - Medium Reducing to Yr 15 - Small	MODERATE, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MINOR, Adverse & Permanent	The scale of topographic modification is not expected to be dramatic on Site given its gentle sloping nature. There will be disturbance from the formation of the housing platforms, long access road, paths and cycleways and SuDS features. There may also be topographic change near the Site entrance should the Lodge Road ditch be daylighted. The ground disturbance will generally decline quickly on establishment and maintenance of grass cover leaving a Minor, Adverse and Permanent change. This assessment assumes that excess cut material is removed from Site rather than used to form bunds or raising particular areas of the Site.
Tree Resource	High	Yr 0 - Medium Reducing to Yr 15 - Medium/Small	MAJOR/MODERATE, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	The mature trees and particularly the veteran trees amongst them are a highly sensitive feature that require buffer zones and construction kept well away from them. Such zones are shown on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (CD I.6) and I have no doubt that they can be retained by the proposals as presented. However the proposals will create a new, urban context to these landscape features. They will be viewed and judged with the houses positioned close to them. The new tree planting proposed to ameliorate the landscape and visual effects of the development will not remove the changed context to the mature tree resources on Site. The new tree planting will be judged as part of the residential development that led to their planting given that they are contemporary with it, smaller size and planted for amenity purposes rather than agricultural function. Community orchards have become popular within residential proposals since their reference in the NPPF however they are not a listed feature of LCA C2. Water retaining clay soils can also present problems for fruit tree establishment and ongoing management. To be successful community orchards require quite intensive management and more than native tree planting. Its position some way away from the housing blocks means it does not provide adjacent amenity or amelioration to the housing and the housing no degree of informal supervision.
Hedgerows	Medium/High	Yr 0 – Medium/Small Reducing to Yr 15 – Small/None	MODERATE, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MINOR, Beneficial & Permanent	The initial change to the hedgerow assets on Site are most keenly felt on Lodge Road where 73m of roadside hedge will be removed for the access and associated sightlines. Of this initial removal new hedges could be planted behind the sightlines but would take a medium time – up to 10 years to establish. On establishment there will still be the break for the access road and the new hedges would angle in marking the position of the access road and making it appear different to the rest of the road side hedge along Lodge Road. The break in the tree group/hedge boundary to Tape Lane is not as extensive and would occur at the end of the hedge line where it is less obvious. New hedgerow planting is indicated on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (CD I.6) at Lodge Lane and parts of Tape Lane. Notes also suggest enhanced management of the hedgerows with existing vegetation ' <i>enhanced & supplemented</i> '. The identified beneficial effect relates predominately to an improved program of hedge management and re-planting hedges to northern boundary adjacent to the fields.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Yr 0 & 15 Magnitudes	Significances of effect	Narrative on effects
Site Character	Medium/High	Yr 0 – Large Reducing to Yr 15 – Medium/Large	MAJOR, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MAJOR/MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	The open space of the field would be fundamentally altered to appear as residential housing blocks. This is sometimes referred to an inevitable effect of house building anywhere a green field Site is developed. However it is an adverse effect that needs to be considered when weighing up the different effects at the Site. With reference to the WLCA LCA C2 Valuable Landscape Attributes the peaceful and open character of the Site will be permanently lost as will its contribution to the area's rural settlement pattern and in turn it will lead to a reduction rather than a positive addition to local distinctiveness. The proposals would neither conserve nor enhance the quiet, rural landscape character of the Site.
LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium/Small Remaining at Yr 15 - Small	MODERATE/MINOR, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MINOR, Adverse & Permanent	The changes to the Site's openness and associated reduction in the rural settlement pattern carries over to the wider LCA C2 character area. Added to this is the adverse change to Tape Lane and Lodge Road's character as rural lanes (another of LCA C2 Valuable Landscape Attribute) and reducing the perceived gap between Whistley Green and Hurst that the current rural Lodge Road provides. The proposals will be an urbanisation of the countryside and be a significant loss to the countryside setting to Hurst by placing built form in the space of the reversed 'C'. The attractive village characters of both Whistley Green and Hurst would be degraded by the suburbanisation of the space between them altering their form and contribution to the wider LCA C2. The current transition between residential areas and countryside would be degraded by the insertion of the housing into this sensitive, open stretch of LCA C2. It should be remembered that LCA C2 is a much larger area than the Site with its context and the magnitude of change is judged against the whole character area.
Individual contextual areas to Site – These effects look at the identified contextual areas to the Site with the sum of these effects contributing to the change on the overall LCA C2 area.				
Whistley Green and Northern Fields	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium/Large Remaining at Yr 15 - Medium/Large	MODERATE, Adverse Remaining at MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	The greatest change is the loss of openness to the south of Whistley Green and resulting reduction in the village's rural setting, character and form with an increased sense of connectivity with Hurst. The proposed mitigation of tree planting will partly screen the proposals but not address the loss of openness which is why the Year 15 effect is not reduced.
A321 – Broadwater Lane	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium to Small Reducing to Yr 15 - Small	MODERATE/MINOR, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MINOR, Adverse & Permanent	As identified in the description of receptors above the landscape connectivity between the A321 as part of the Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC is through the gaps between buildings that line the south side of the road. The mature tree canopies on Site are visible in summer conditions and they may be effective at screening out any sense of the northern housing block on Site. However in winter conditions the house forms in the northern block are likely to be evident and give the impression of built form rather than open space behind the current houses. This in turn changes the sense of a linear development along Broadwater Lane but to one that is part of a larger, more contemporary settlement.
Tape Lane	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium/Large Remaining at Yr 15 - Medium/Large	MODERATE, Adverse Remaining at MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	Tape Lane is the Site's contextual area that would experience the greatest character change with it becoming more twin-sided with its close links to both of the proposed housing blocks. The rural openness that exists to the west of the lane would be permanently lost and there will be a significant increase in perceived activity. The narrow section of the lane would lose its current rural character and the cul-de-sac would have a focus on the new build of the northern housing block changing its edge of village character.
Tape Lane Allotments	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium/Large Reducing to Yr 15 - Medium	MODERATE, Adverse Remaining at MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	The southern housing block would effectively enclose the allotments by closing off the last linkages to the rural landscape to the north. The allotment area would appear more urban in character by being enclosed within housing. The additional allotments would not mitigate the loss of rural connection in landscape character terms but would provide additional plots for more people to recreate at.
Martineau Lane and Barber Close	Medium/Low	Yr 0 – Medium/Small Reducing to Yr 15 - Small	MINOR, Adverse Remaining at MINOR, Adverse & Permanent	The connectivity between public space in these areas and the Site, specifically the southern housing block, is not extensive given the density of the houses and having their rear elevations arrayed to the open countryside. The proposed houses would add settlement depth to the area and there is less contrast in terms of architectural styling with one contemporary housing area adjacent to another. The openness of Martineau Green remains largely disconnected

Receptor	Sensitivity	Yr 0 & 15 Magnitudes	Significances of effect	Narrative on effects
				from the Site other than at the south east of the green. There would be a greater sense of landscape change for the private residencies that back onto the Site.
Lodge Road	Medium/High	Southern section Yr 0 – Medium Remaining at Yr 15 - Medium Northern section Yr 0 – Medium/Large Reducing to Yr 15 - Medium	Southern section MODERATE, Adverse Remaining at MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent Northern section MAJOR/MODERATE, Adverse & Temporary Reducing to MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	Lodge Road is a rural route between Nursery Close in Hurst to the south and the row of Whistley Green houses to the north. There is woodland to the west side marking the boundary with the River Loddon Area of Landscape Value whilst to the east where the Site is located there is a greater degree of openness perceived over field gates and through the road side hedge. Occasional large properties such as the Old Lodge and Badgers Bottom/Poole House appear as large individual properties within a rural setting. Lodge Road has been split into two parts north and south as each end would experience different landscape effects. The southern end would not appear as open with the houses of the southern housing block evident beyond the paddock at Badgers Bottom. There is currently no sense of large residential development to the east of this section but there would be with the development in place reducing the area's rurality and increasing the apparent scale of Hurst. The north end would have the physical connection of the Site's access leading onto Lodge Road. This will erode the rural appearance of the rural route in this location with the recognition of it being a modern road leading into some form of development beyond. Coupled to the actual road junction would be necessary highway intervention of ghost islands for right turning vehicles, street name signs, speed signs, the possible commencement of street lighting and the formalisation of the cycle path/footpath link to the north running up to Whistley Green. These works would all combine to increase the sense of urbanisation of Lodge Road. The presence of the community orchard set within the Site either side of the proposed access would add to the sense of change rather than keep the current pasture field character. All in all the character of the rural route as a valued landscape attribute would be reduced near the Site access and up in to Whistley Green. Coupled with this is the possible felling of trees to the west side of Lodge Road if the carriageway widening extends the road width in that direction. The works will also reduce the perceived rural gap between Hurst and Whistley Green from its current approximate 470m to approximately 330m with the new access road being judged as the start of Whistley Green. The replacement hedge planting of the visibility splays and orchard will not ameliorate this sense of a reduced gap as the Site's access will still be clearly evident.

Review of the significance of landscape effects assessment

7.28 The review of landscape effects has been lengthy given the amount of landscape receptors identified on and around this large Site. To simplify this review the landscape effects that I consider of primary importance are the ones where the receptors receive a permanent **Moderate** scale of landscape effect or greater. The receptors from my assessment that receive such a scale of effect are:

- Landcover – Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Tree Resource – Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Site Character – Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Whistley Green and Northern Fields - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Tape Lane - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Tape Lane Allotments - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Lodge Road - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent

7.29 All of these more significant effects are adverse in nature and none are beneficial.

7.30 In arriving at an amalgamated summary of the above landscape effects, including the less significant ones I consider that an overall finding of **Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** is appropriate for the Site.

Comparison with the Application LVIA Landscape Effects (CD 8.1)

7.31 The Application LVIA considered six landscape receptors which I have also considered. The comparison table below summarises the differences between our judgements.

RLC Table 6 – Comparison of LVIA Findings

Landscape Receptor	Appellant's LVIA by Pegasus (CD 8.1)	My LVIA Findings
Landcover	Moderate, Adverse	Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
Topography	Minor, Adverse	Minor, Adverse and Permanent
Tree Resource	Moderate, Beneficial	Moderate, Adverse and permanent

Landscape Receptor	Appellant's LVIA by Pegasus (CD 8.1)	My LVIA Findings
Hedgerows	Minor, Beneficial	Minor, Beneficial and Permanent
Site Character	Moderate, Adverse	Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace	Negligible	Minor, Adverse and Permanent

- 7.32 There is commonality of opinion regarding the effects on topography and hedgerows.
- 7.33 Differences lie with regards to landcover, tree resources, the overall character of the Site and effects on the wider LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace character area.
- 7.34 Returning to the Site Character's landscape effect of **Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** this is at a scale greater than the overall 'amalgamated' landscape effect of **Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** for the Site and contextual area. It is reasonable to assume that it is this overall landscape effect, including the countryside setting to Hurst that others including previous Inspectors and the WBC Landscape Officer have expressed their opinion that it is at the 'upper end of the Moderate scale.' Our LVIA methodology does not allow for such grading within a significance band so I have refrained from making the same statement but I can understand these assessors applying the phrase to the overall landscape effects of the proposals.
- 7.35 Finally the proposal's effects on the contextual areas around the Site need to be recognised as they will change the character of parts of the landscape that lie around it to varying degrees.

Balancing adverse and beneficial effects

- 7.36 In considering the overall balance of adverse effects versus positive ones there is only the Minor beneficial effects to the hedgerows to factor against the range of adverse effects for all the other landscape receptors.

Section summary

- 7.37 This section on landscape baseline and effects is particularly long given the number of landscape receptors on Site and in the context to it. The points listed below are a reduced summary of the findings.

Section 7 Landscape Baseline and Resulting Effects Summary Box

- The landscape at the Site and in its context is not designated and nor is it considered a valued landscape for the purposes of NPPF §187 a).
- A thorough landscape baseline is established by considering the wider landscape character area LCA C2 Hurst River Terrace, the Site as an overall entity, four different characteristics of the Site and six different contextual areas to the it.
- A valued landscape assessment using Landscape Institute's TGN 2/21 Table I factors has identified that the Site has elevated value for the mature and veteran trees it holds (Natural Landscape), the spatial arrangement of providing open ground to the reversed 'C' of village form around it (Distinctiveness) and for the role it plays as a separating rural landscape between Whistley Green and Hurst (Functional).
- The sensitivity of the different landscape receptors to residential development of this contemporary form is provided with the overall Site Character determined to have **Medium/High** landscape sensitivity.
- The magnitude of change at Years 0 and 15 are identified for all 12 No. landscape receptors and then set against the sensitivity of the individual landscape receptors to determine the significance or effects for each.
- There are seven landscape receptors that will experience receive a permanent **Moderate, Adverse** scale of landscape effect or greater.
- Landcover and Site Character experience **Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** effects
- Tree Resource, Whistley Green and Northern Fields, Tape Lane, Tape Lane Allotments and Lodge Road experience **Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** effects.
- The only identified beneficial landscape effect to set against these adverse ones is a **Minor, Beneficial and Permanent** effect on the Site's hedgerows. This improvement to the Site's hedgerows does not offset the more significant adverse effects.
- The adverse landscape effect at and around the Site results in a negative effect of **Minor, Adverse and Permanent** to the much larger LCA C2 – Hurst River Terrace area.

8.0 Visual baseline and resulting effects

8.1 This section establishes the visual baseline for the Site and the surrounding area to establish which visual receptors would be able to see the proposals and what the significance of any visual change is.

8.2 It is acknowledged that views to the Site are generally localised and that there are no longer distance views towards it.

Promoted viewpoints, protected views, designed vistas and scenic views

8.3 There are no promoted viewpoints as marked on OS Maps or within local authority literature that take views across the Site.

8.4 Protected views are rare in planning terms and unsurprisingly there are none in the area. WBC do not follow a policy of proscribing which views are worthy of protection.

8.5 Purposely designed vistas are also lacking on the Site or in the contextual area.

8.6 There are however views from Tape Lane noted in the site characterisation work considering the nature of the various AoSC in the village. These longer views are indicated on the hand drawn survey sheet (CD 8.13 and above at my §5.40) from the central portion of Tape Lane, north westwards towards the wooded horizon formed by the trees on Lodge Road.

8.7 There are scenic views across the Loddon Valley from near the Site to the west side of Lodge Lane and Loddon permissive path has been developed to allow people to enjoy them. For clarity at this point I confirm that the proposed development would not block any of the scenic views to the River Loddon itself.

Visual receptors

8.8 Visual receptors groups have been identified around the Site by adopting the viewpoint locations taken by Pegasus in the application LVIA (see Fig5 CD 8.1). There are currently no publicly accessible parts of the Site meaning there are no public views taken from the Site looking out to its surroundings.

8.9 There are 11 viewpoints presented in the application LVIA and they are roughly ordered in clockwise direction starting on Tape Lane and moving back round to A321 Broadwater Lane. I have visited each of these 11 viewpoints and taken panoramic photography of my own that forms my Appendix E. The photographs I have taken are from the area of the LVIA viewpoints

and provide similar views rather than exact reproductions of the LVIA material. They are held as VP's I to II and match the numbering of the application LVIA for ease of reference.

8.10 Whilst visiting Site I noted three additional representative viewpoints that were not taken in the LVIA photography. The three extra viewpoints are:

- VPI2 – View down Tape Lane cul-de-sac to the east side of the Site;
- VPI3 – View from the Loddon permissive path looking towards the west side of Site;
and
- VPI4 – View south down Lodge Road near the current edge of Whistley Green,

8.11 The locations of all the representative viewpoint photography are shown on the plan at the start of Appendix E.

8.12 Even though there is a total of 14 representative viewpoints presented there are only eight visual receptor groups discussed in this section as listed in RLC Table 7. The table identifies the different groups, establishes their sensitivity by using their susceptibility to this form of development and the value the users place on the view. A final column lists the corresponding representative viewpoints as presented in Appendix E.

8.13 All viewpoints are from publicly accessible areas and where roads are listed the term users represents vehicle drivers, their passengers, cyclists and pedestrians. For the purpose of this assessment the Tape Lane Allotments have been viewed as a publicly accessible amenity albeit with access usually controlled for allotment holders.

RLC Table 7 – Identification of visual receptor groups and their sensitivity

Visual Receptor Group	Susceptibility	Value of view	Visual sensitivity	Comments	Representative viewpoints
Tape Lane users	Medium	Medium/High	MEDIUM	Sensitivity is related to rural edge positioning and character of route as well as proximity to the Site.	VP's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7
Tape Lane cul-de-sac users	Medium	Medium/High	MEDIUM	Both residents and visitors access this cul-de-sac which aligns on the current Site framing a view to it.	VP 12
Tape Lane allotment users	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM	Views out to the north to open rural scene between boundary trees. Allotment users sole attention is not on the view but on their main gardening activity	VP 6
Martineau Lane / Martineau Green users	Low	Medium/High	MEDIUM/LOW	Very similar views gained from the south end of lane and the green with the latter more elevated as the green is banked.	VP 8
Lodge Road (south) users	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM	Between the end of Nursery Close running past the Old Lodge and Badgers Bottom/Poole House where	VP 10

Visual Receptor Group	Susceptibility	Value of view	Visual sensitivity	Comments	Representative viewpoints
				the Site is set to the east of the vegetated paddock.	
Lodge Road (north) users	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM	Running along Lodge Road from where the Site starts to abut the road up to the row of houses that form the start to Whistley Green	VP's 9 & 13
Loddon Permissive Path users	Medium	High	MEDIUM/HIGH	People walking the permissive paths that make up the Loddon permissive paths are generally walking the route for recreation and value the views from it.	VP 12
A321 – Broadwater Lane users	Medium	Medium	MEDIUM	This route is the perceived main street of the village and benefits from many interesting older buildings hence its designation of AoSC.	VP 11

Representative viewpoint photography

- 8.14 I took panoramic photography of representative viewpoints to illustrate how the Site appears at the moment and to consider what visual changes would occur if the proposals are built out in their indicated form. They are presented in Appendix E with a single A3 template sheet provided for each viewpoint along with a description of the visual change experienced by people at these locations.
- 8.15 The magnitude of visual effects is given on the viewpoint sheets at Year 0 and again at Year 15 when the mitigation has had a chance to establish and the development proposals have lost their 'just constructed' rawness.
- 8.16 Laid out in Appendix F are a series of 30 No. single plate photographs that illustrate particular points of interest about the Site and in the surrounding area. There are also a pair of illustrative panoramas. They are not meant to represent views but rather capture features and characteristics and are referred to as illustrative photographs for that reason.

Visual effects findings

- 8.17 For expediency I do not repeat all the text under the representative panoramic photographs but rather set out the assessment of visual effects at Years 0 and 15 in RLC Table 8 below.

RLC Table 8 – Visual Effects Table

Receptor	Sensitivity	Yr 0 & 15 Magnitudes	Significances of effect	Narrative on effects
Tape Lane users VP's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7	Medium	Yr 0 - Large Reducing to Yr 15 - Medium/Large	MAJOR/MODERATE, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	The view along Tape Lane and from Tape Lane across the currently open Site field towards the Loddon valley will fundamentally change. By placing housing to the open west side of the lane it will mean users will be walking or driving towards new housing, or actually passing it and experiencing the lane with housing set to both sides. The open view to the north west is a critical one as it allows understanding of the village's setting in a rural situation. The setting of two large housing blocks will create a sense of encroachment out into the countryside. The Common area that is flanked to the north and south by the housing thereby reducing its sense of openness with further activity in the form of access road traffic to its western end. The view will no longer appear rural but urbanised in appearance.
Tape Lane cul-de-sac users VP 12	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium/Large Remaining at Yr 15 – Medium/Large	MODERATE, Adverse Remaining at MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	The composition of the view when looking down this cul-de-sac off Tape Lane appears framed by housing. Its alignment on the north east corner of the Site, combined with the framing effect would channel the view onto the northern housing block. The open rural end of the current scene would be changed to focus on the new houses and even with additional boundary planting the framed view would be filled with new houses. This new view would not be as scenic as the current and the loss of sight to the open rural field cannot be mitigated therefore permanently keeping the initial Moderate, Adverse effect.
Tape Lane allotment users	Medium	Yr 0 - Medium Reducing to Yr 15 - Medium/Small	MODERATE, Adverse Remaining at MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	The allotment users will be concentrating on their plots as the primary reason for attending the allotments but the quality of the environment that they are in is also of keen interest to such users. The most notable change would be the loss of visual connection through the existing boundary trees to the open pasture field beyond. This would be replaced with another row of trees indicated between the southern housing block and the strip of additional allotments. The double layer of vegetation would partly screen, but not remove sight of the southern houses with the view to the new development being more open in winter and spring when the trees are without leaf and the allotments stand bare.
Martineau Lane / Martineau Green users	Medium/Low	Yr 0 – Medium/Small Reducing to Yr 15 – Small	MINOR, Adverse Remaining at MINOR, Adverse & Permanent	The Martineau Lane development is inwards facing towards the central green POS that it is built around. Generally views from public locations within it towards the Site are limited and where they do exist tend to have other contemporary housing in the foreground. The resulting change of visual scene would only experience a Minor, Adverse visual effect. This is from the public areas whilst the change in view from the rear of the northern Martineau Lane properties will experience a greater magnitude of effect.
Lodge Road (south) users	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium Remaining at Yr 15 – Medium	MODERATE, Adverse Remaining at MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	After passing by intermittent properties between Sawpit Road and Nursery Close users of this road enter into a more rural stretch of the route. There is a sense of openness towards the east where the southern housing block is proposed. The view to it is not open but is reliant on glimpses over paddock gates or through the hedge with motion parallax for vehicle users. The visual permeability of the hedge will increase in winter months. The distance to the proposed development will allow its extent and scale to be judged whilst also bringing the sense of urban development closer to the road corridor. This section of road appears to be infrequently walked with the permissive path to the west of Lodge Road observed to be preferred by pedestrians including dog walkers.
Lodge Road (north) users	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium/Large Reducing to Yr 15 - Medium	MODERATE, Adverse Remaining at MODERATE, Adverse & Permanent	This northern section of Lodge Road is where the proposed Site abuts the road. It is also where the proposed Site access would be taken. The access will appear urbanised with bell mouth geometry, ghost island and highway paraphernalia such as road names and speed signs. This urban form of access road would appear alien in an otherwise rural stretch of road adding to its notability. The hedge clearance to create sightlines can be

Receptor	Sensitivity	Yr 0 & 15 Magnitudes	Significances of effect	Narrative on effects
				replanted but the inward alignment of the hedges would provide another clue to the presence of the road when travelling along the lane, as would any vehicles turning onto it or from it. The swan-necking of the long access route will reduce the ability to see straight down the access to houses beyond when the orchard and other onsite planting has established. However in the short to medium term after construction the southern housing block would be evident for road users travelling south from Whistley Green. Even without clear sight of housing beyond in the medium to long term the thought process after seeing the access is to presume it has to lead somewhere. Urban style roads with an adjacent footpath or cycleway, likely aligned with light columns will appear as a contrasting road style to the more low key, rural roads and lanes in the villages and wider C2 rural area.
Loddon Permissive Path users	Medium/High	Yr 0 – Small to None (Seasonal) Reducing to Yr 15 – Small/None to None (Seasonal)	MODERATE/MINOR, Adverse, Temporary (Winter) Changing to MINOR, Adverse & Permanent (Winter)	These permissive path to the west side of Lodge Road form a route jaggling in and out from the nearby rural road corridor. Starting at its northern end in Whistley Green it runs through a belt of semi-mature woodland approximately 5m from Lodge Road. The trees in summer conditions partly restrict views east but do not entirely prevent sight of Lodge Road and the Site beyond. It then reaches a narrow meadow associated with The Old Lodge that stands as a large building at the meadow's southern end. Here the path turns 90° to the west before running down the west side of the meadow. With the open ground of the meadow before path users there is a more open view to the east towards the Site but in summer it is largely screened by the twin lines of vegetation set along Lodge Road (see VP 13 in Appendix E). The path then returns to Lodge Road to skirt the large private curtilage of The Old Lodge before returning back into the woodland belt to run approximately 10m away from Lodge Road with resulting more screened views on this southern section between The Old Lodge and the gated access opposite Sawpit Road. Summer views to the proposed development are not generally anticipated from this route given the amount of tree cover other than at where the path runs close to the Site's access and from the Lodge Road corridor over the vegetated paddock at Badger's Bottom/Poole House (VP 10). In addition winter views over or through the Lodge Road hedgerow from the section of path skirting The Old Lodge Meadow may be apparent (VP 12) but these would be unlikely to contain any built form. However if there is notable tree felling to the west side of the Lodge Road to accommodate carriageway widening this will thin the vegetated boundary allowing possible views to the Site access and traffic upon it. This would act as a marker to position urban development in the rural scene as experienced from the permissive path. In summary after much descriptive text of the route the changes to the views from this path to the proposed development are unlikely to be any greater than Minor, Adverse and would be seasonally affected.
A321 – Broadwater Lane users	Medium	Yr 0 – Medium/Small Reducing to Yr 15 - Small	MODERATE/MINOR, Adverse & Temporary Changing to MINOR, Adverse & Permanent	There are a series of short duration, glimpsed views between the existing houses to the south side of the A321 that allow an understanding that there is open rural ground beyond the immediate housing line. The principle element visible in summer views were the canopies of the mature, deciduous trees on and leading up to the Site's northern boundary. In summer it is anticipated that with reinforcement the boundary trees would screen out sight to the houses beyond, particularly if augmented with additional planting. However, winter views may allow the form and mass of the houses in the northern housing block to be seen. The presence of lighting whether domestic or street lighting on the development will also increase the awareness of the housing block beyond the immediate roadside housing line.

Larger visual effects

8.18 In considering which of the eight visual receptor groups would still experience a Moderate, Adverse effect at Year 15 the following five groups have been identified:

- Tape Lane users as they both look along the lane and out from it to the north west, it is this group that will experience the greatest reduction in scenic quality to their views;
- Tape Lane cul-de-sac for people looking at the almost formal, framed view north west to the currently rural Site with this view now concentrated on the northern housing block;
- Tape Lane Allotment holders as they will permanently lose their view to the open rural scene to the north;
- Lodge Lane south users with an appreciation of the southern housing block; whilst the
- Lodge Lane north users would see the Site's uncharacteristic, urbanised access road set off the existing rural route.

8.19 With regards to more Minor, Adverse effects at Year 15 it would be the following groups who would experience them:

- Martineau Lane and Martineau Green users looking out to the north east over the open ground of the Tape Lane Allotments;
- Users of the Loddon permissive paths as they run to the west of Lodge Road with these likely to be seasonal views in winter, or when lights are on. There may also be more open views to the Site access depending on tree felling to the west side of Lodge Road to accommodate carriageway widening; and
- A321 Broadwater users looking through the gaps between buildings gaining an appreciation of development beyond the linear housing ribbon, with the presence of new housing more evident in winter and when lit.

8.20 There are no beneficial visual effects of any scale identified from the proposals at Year 15.

Section 8 Summary Box

- There are no promoted viewpoints, protected views or designed vistas at the Site or in its vicinity.
- It confirms that the visual receptors around the Site generally have a Medium visual sensitivity.

- The users of the Loddon Permissive Path have a Medium/High sensitivity but as the views from this route are largely wooded the visual effects are Minor.
- Users of Tape Lane would experience the greatest visual change in both views along the lane and from it looking north west across the Site towards the wooded horizon at Lodge Road. This is judged as a Moderate, Adverse and Permanent visual effect after 15 years.
- The Tape Lane cul-de-sac would have its current rural focus replaced with the eastern flank of the northern housing block. This is also a Moderate, Adverse and Permanent change.
- The Tape Lane allotment holders would have their last open views to the rural scene to the north replaced by the flank of the southern housing block.
- The users of Lodge Lane have been split into two groups south and north – the south end would have a partly filtered view of the southern housing block set away from the road whilst the north end users would have clear sight of the uncharacteristic Site entrance which would remain in contrast to the rural character of Lodge Road. Both these visual effects have been judged as Moderate, Adverse and Permanent.
- There have been no beneficial visual effects identified to offset these identified adverse ones.

9.0 Review of the cited planning policies from RfRs 3

9.1 The planning policies from RfR3 are listed below and cited in Section 2 above:

Core Strategy Policies

- **CPI – Sustainable development** – is not considered in detail in this Proof;
- **CP3 – General Principles for development** c) which requires ‘no detrimental impact upon important ... landscape. and f) requiring the ‘use of appropriate landscaping’;
- **CP9 – Scale and location of development proposals** – addresses matters of services within various settlements around the Borough and accessibility to them. Hurst is specifically mentioned in sub-point 3 as a ‘Limited Development Location’ (LDL
- **CPI I – Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)** – that seeks ‘to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment’

Managing Development Delivery (MDD)

- **CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development** – is not examined in this Proof;
- **CC02 – Development Limits** – sub-point 2) includes the need for proposals to respect the transition between the built up area and the open countryside;
- **CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping** – relates to the form of design proposals and sub-parts 2d) & 3) are pertinent to these proposals; and
- **TB21 – Landscape Character** – is directly applicable to the principal of whether the proposals can be accommodated at this location and both sub-parts of this two part are considered below.

National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

- **Paragraph 135 c)** are sympathetic to local character and ... landscape setting,
- **Paragraph 187 b)** Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

9.2 Before discussing the landscape elements of the cited policies I reiterate the fact that I am not a professional Planner and am not conducting a weighting, or planning balance exercise. That is

the task of Mr Mark Croucher as an experienced Chartered Planner who will be looking at the Local Plan and the NPPF as a whole. I seek to draw attention to how the landscape and visual effects may be taken into account when deciding if there is conflict or compliance with these various policies.

- 9.3 I also do not take the policies as listed in the above the same order but rather look at CP11, TB21 and CC03 in that order.

CP11 - Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)

- 9.4 In reviewing the Policy box as copied below as a digital extract the primary objective of this policy is contained in the first policy intent line that seeks to protect the separate identity of settlements.

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; 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; or
- 4) In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;
- 5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i) Bring about environmental improvements; or
 - ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
- 6) Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;
- 7) Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

- 9.5 A review of the seven sub-points that lay down the exceptions to the normal refusal of development outside of the settlement limits indicates that the proposals do not fall into any of the categories.
- 9.6 These proposals do not protect the separate settlement identity of Whistley Green and Hurst but rather reduce the spatial separation between them and with the Site access on Lodge Road

reduce the remaining sense of a gap between the two villages. I consider that the primary objective of the policy is not achieved and that the proposals are in **Conflict** with it.

MDD TB21 – Landscape character

9.7 TB21 has two parts to its policy box as reproduced below as a digital extract.

Policy 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.

9.8 The proposals have demonstrated that they have consulted the Wokingham LCA (CD 8.9) by reference to it in within the Application LVIA (CD 8.1). However with regard to the matters of landscape quality, landscape strategy, landscape sensitivity and key issues which are four areas of information informed by the Wokingham LCA, it is worth addressing what the LCA is recommending to understand if the proposals comply or conflict with the applicable points.

9.9 Landscape quality (condition) is defined in the GLVIA3 Glossary as, '*A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of the individual elements.*'

9.10 The landscape condition for LCA C2 is given as **Moderate** in the Wokingham LCA (CD 8.9 page 110) as reproduced in full in the digital extract below.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is in **moderate condition**. The physical landscape, particularly the gently shelving landform, rural settlement pattern and openness of the rural landscape are intact. However there has been loss of hedgerows and replacement with post and wire fencing, as well as field amalgamation. Linear development along roads has occurred, and there is a suburban character to buildings in villages. An increase in traffic has led to the creation of informal passing places on the rural road network, and increased disturbance due to motorway noise from the M4 and A329 (M).

9.11 I have no reason to depart from this judgement as the Site and contextual area display the intact elements of the physical landscape that contribute positively to the overall moderate condition, namely:

- Gently shelving landform;

- Rural settlement pattern;
- Openness of the rural landscape; and
- Nor is the Site affected by noise or traffic movement disturbance from the M4 and A329(M)

9.12 The landscape strategy when distilled down to a short phrase is to ‘*conserve and enhance the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape*’, with the full extract set below. These proposals do not conserve the Site’s rural and agricultural character. The proposals’ retention of the majority of hedges and mature hedgerow trees on site is not the same as retaining an agricultural landscape as those trees would be viewed within a new urbanised context. Nor do the proposals lead to a quiet use of the Site with an intensification of noise and general activity associated with residential areas.

9.13 The second part of the C2 landscape strategy requires development to ‘*retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements*’ which the proposals fail to achieve. In short they are not in accordance with the landscape strategy for LCA C2.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Hurst River Terrace* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape with its scattered rural farmsteads and small red brick villages connected by narrow rural lanes.

The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the open views overlooking the adjoining floodplain of the Loddon. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration and management of the hedgerows. Opportunities also exist to restore lost wetland and grassland habitats and reinstate woodland planting, which may mitigate the influence of the M4/A329 (M).

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green.

9.14 Turning now to the final listed point of Part I of TB21 and that is how the proposals have addressed the Key Issues of the Wokingham LCA. In total there are 12 such Key Issues for LCA C2 and above at my §5.25 I explain that I think five are applicable to the Site in its current form as tabulated below.

RLC Table 9 – Key Issues for LCA C2

Key Issue for LCA C2	Proposals Addressing of Key Issue
Hedgerow loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.	Successfully addressed – There would be an initial reduction in hedgerow to form the Site access points on Lodge Road and Tape Lane but a Minor Benefit has been assessed given

Key Issue for LCA C2	Proposals Addressing of Key Issue
	additional new hedgerow and improved maintenance of existing.
Despite the presence of pasture there are no areas of species-rich grassland in this area due to increasingly intensive grassland management and conversion to arable land or pony grazing.	Partly addressed – There will be a net loss of pasture to the housing blocks, road infrastructure and SuDS features but a potential to improve species make up in the Common and Orchard areas.
Increasing pressure for horse/pony paddocks and grazing, particularly at settlement edges, leading to a decrease in rural intactness and affecting landscape condition.	Not addressed – Even though the proposals would remove the current horse/pony grazing of the Site it would be replaced with built form that would permanently decrease the rural intactness and landscape condition to a significantly further extent than the equine activities.
Drainage operations associated with development and agriculture affecting small wetland habitats	Partly addressed – The SuDS features, particularly the basins present an opportunity for new wetland habitats but the winter waterlogging of the Site would be unlikely to be tolerated.
Demand for residential development increasing linear development along rural lanes and continuing to push towards the amalgamation of close settlements Whistley Green and Hurst impacting rural character. Incremental suburbanisation of buildings.	Opposite effect – The proposals act in the opposite way to this key issue by reducing the spatial and perceived separation between Whistley Green. The proposals in their indicated form and layout would provide a large injection of suburbanisation into the local landscape and not just incremental change.

- 9.15 In considering the key issues as a whole the proposals are able to address individual single topic elements such as hedgerow improvement and grass sward diversification but fail where the larger, more significant spatial and character factors are concerned.
- 9.16 In looking at all of Part I of Policy TB21 I consider that the proposals do comply where they can in terms of native planting and retention of existing trees and hedges but fail to comply with the broader point of retaining landscape character. Overall I consider there to be more conflict with Part I of TB21 with the landscape strategy to ‘*conserve and enhance*’ the quiet, rural landscape of the Site and the same within the wider LCA C2 not met. These have been assessed as experiencing **Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** landscape effects and **Minor, Adverse and Permanent** landscape effects respectively.

- 9.17 Part 2 of the TB2I requires proposals ‘to retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.’
- 9.18 The overall landscape character of Site changes to that of a contemporary urban estate set either side of a piece of public open space that will appear as part of the development rather than as a piece of rural landscape. The Common has the proposed LEAP located within it and crossed by cycleways both of which add to the urbanisation of the open space. Overall the Site’s landscape character is considered to experience a **Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** landscape effect.
- 9.19 Various parts of the contextual landscape around the Site will also experience **Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** landscape effects. These are Tape Lane and its cul-de-sac, Tape Lane Allotments and Lodge Road,
- 9.20 The LCA C2 (CD 8.9) at page 110 defines five ‘valuable landscape attributes’. In this sense these are the important landscape characteristics of the area that help to create its sense of place. The three that are clearly applicable to the Site were identified in my §5.20 and are set in RLC Table 10 below along with a summary of whether the proposals retain the attribute as described.

RLC Table 10 – Valuable landscape attributes and the proposals’ effects on them

Valuable landscape attribute	Effect of the proposals on the valuable attribute
Peaceful and open character of the undeveloped arable and pastoral landscape when removed from the intrusion of major roads to the south [M4 and A329M], which provides an escape in close proximity to the urban population	Adverse effect – the peaceful and open character of the undeveloped pastoral field would be lost to build form and the associated increase in activity from people accessing and living within the residential area.
Rural settlement pattern of small villages with historic cores and farmsteads unified by the cohesive use of redbrick which provides a cultural record of the past and adds local distinctiveness.	Adverse effect – the existing settlement pattern between Whistley Green and Hurst with its important open space at the centre of the reversed ‘C’ will be significantly harmed by the inclusion of the two blocks of housing given their scale, contemporary layout and positioning within the rural setting of both settlements with or without the use of red brick finishes.
Gently undulating terrace landform provides open and clear views to the wooded	Adverse effect – the open view across the Site from Tape Lane towards the wooded edge of the Loddon Valley set to the west of Lodge Lane would be fundamentally altered from one that is rural with scenic

Valuable landscape attribute	Effect of the proposals on the valuable attribute
backdrop of the adjacent Loddon Valley.	qualities to one across a contemporary residential area that is not scenic in appearance. The wooded horizon of Lodge Road may be visible in part but there will be the introduction of residential elements and activity in the foreground.

- 9.21 In summary the proposals do not retain or enhance any of the three valuable landscape attributes associated with the Site. They instead lead to a reduction in them which reduces the quality of the Site and the overall landscape character area.
- 9.22 With regard to landscape features Part 2 of TB21 requires proposals to retain those that contribute to the landscape. Although not explicitly stated it is taken that the feature's contribution should be positive rather than negative one. In this regard the proposals do retain the mature and veteran trees that are valuable features of the natural landscape. However their context as open field trees, set within an agricultural landscape would be lost as they would be seen and judged with the nearby housing blocks.
- 9.23 The very final reference to the LCA C2 information is to consider the Landscape Guidelines that are set across pages 111 to 112 of CD 8.9. At my §5.35 I screen the 17 listed key issues identifying the six that are most relevant to the Site and these proposals. They are set in Table 11 along with my opinion as to whether they have been successfully addressed.

RLC Table 11 – NCA C2 Landscape Guidelines and how the proposals address them

Guideline for LCA C2	Proposals addressing of Guideline
Bullet 2 - Conserve the open and rural qualities of the 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.	Unsuccessful – The proposals do not conserve either the open element or rural qualities of the landscape.
Bullet 7 - Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of villages and dispersed farms through control of new development, avoiding further linear spread of development.	Unsuccessful – The existing strong settlement pattern of, and separation between Hurst and Whistley Green is significantly and adversely affected.
Bullet 9 - Conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the open landscape between adjacent village	Unsuccessful – as the open landscape between the two villages is reduced and their individual identities compromised. The Site itself

Guideline for LCA C2	Proposals addressing of Guideline
centres, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining between Hurst and Whistley Green.	is specifically identified as a sensitive area of remaining open land that these proposals do not conserve or conserve its sense of peacefulness.
Bullet 10 - Conserve the scenic value and rural character of the villages and the listed and historic buildings throughout the area, including within Hurst Conservation Area.	Unsuccessful – The scenic view across the Site from Tape Lane is not conserved nor is the Site's rural character for all the reasons already stated.
Bullet 12 - Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.	Unsuccessful – The scale and obtrusiveness of the twin housing blocks are not considered appropriate for this sensitive landscape nor would street lights running up the Site access road in an area of low key rural lighting.
Bullet 13 - Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways modifications, road widening, passing bays, infrastructure and signage.	Unsuccessful – The character of two rural lanes are significantly altered for the worse – Tape Lane with contemporary housing set to more of its western side and Lodge Road through the introduction of a series of highway modifications to accommodate the proposed Site access.

- 9.24 This review illustrates that all of these six applicable guidelines would not be achieved by the proposals and that they run counter to their broad intent and more specific detail.

TB21 – Landscape Character Summing Up

- 9.25 For all the reasons explored above I consider the proposals are in **Conflict** with both Part 1 and Part 2 of TB21 – Landscape Character.
- 9.26 The proposals would not be able to retain landscape quality at the Site and within parts of the contextual landscape to the Site. Nor have the proposals demonstrated how the LCA C2's key issues will be successfully addressed.
- 9.27 The proposals do not retain or enhance the condition and character of the Site's landscape and the contribution that it makes to the contextual area. Where features are retained such as

hedgerows and mature trees they are set within a new, more urban environment reducing their contribution to landscape character.

MDD CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping

- 9.28 This multi-strand policy has ten separate directions within its policy box that have been reproduced in RLC Table 16 below to test which are applicable to the Site and these proposals. The term ‘landscaping’ in this policy’s title refers to the physical treatment of the external realm around the proposals rather than landscape character.

RLC Table 12 – Policy CC03 Strands and the Proposals’ Compliance with them

Ref	Strand Topic	Proposals’ Compliance or Conflict with Strand
1	Green Routes & Green Route Enhancement Areas	Conflict - the Site is positioned near Green Route Enhancement Area to the west of Lodge Road but does not contribute positively to it.
2 a)	Provide new, or protect and enhance the Green Infrastructure Network.	Conflict – Green Infrastructure is defined in the supporting text to CC03 at §2.12 and includes ‘countryside’ in the definition making the Site part of the Green Infrastructure Network for the purposes of CC03. The large pasture field will be lost but there will be retention of hedgerows and mature trees as important GI assets but they are degraded by the proximity of housing. Overall there is a net loss to the quantum of land in the Green Infrastructure Network. BNG is treated as a separate topic at Reserved Matters stage as it requires matters of detail to be confirmed but CD11.5 is presented to indicate that it can be successfully delivered at Site.
2 b)	Promote accessibility in Green Infrastructure network.	Compliance – The proposed paths and cycleways allow accessibility to the remaining GI. These paths would be open to residents and visitors alike and given the shallow gradients should not present physical challenges to low mobility users.
2 c)	Promote integration of scheme with adjacent Public Open Space or Countryside	Conflict – The proposals do not integrate with the adjacent countryside but appear in stark contrast to it. Nor do the GI elements appear to link into the spaces around the Site’s open north and west sides.

Ref	Strand Topic	Proposals' Compliance or Conflict with Strand
2 d)	Protect & retain existing trees, hedges and landscape features.	Compliance – The compliance arises from the retention of field boundary planting around the Site.
2 e)	Incorporate high quality landscape ideally of native planting.	Likely Compliance – The quality of the landscaping proposals around the housing blocks cannot yet be confirmed without detail external realm design but it is fair to assume native planting can be provided and would be manageable through the Reserved Matters process.
3	The loss, fragmentation or isolation of Green Infrastructure is not acceptable.	Part Conflict / Part Compliance – The proposals lead to the loss of the housing areas' footprint and road network from the Green Infrastructure Network. The remaining POS would be seen as contributing to the GI network subject to detail design.
4 a)	Establish Loddon/ Blackwater riverside footpath.	Not Applicable – Even though the Site is in the vicinity of the Loddon the permissive path that has been established to the west of Lodge Road provides the local linkage to the Loddon..
4 b)	Establish Emm Brook footpath and cycleway.	Not Applicable – Not near the Emm Brook.
4 c)	Improve Green Infrastructure to help minimise flood risk.	Part compliance – I understand this to mean natural flood risk management measures such as woodland or wetland formation to slow the flow to River Loddon and River Blackwater in the River Valleys area that point 4 is referring to. The SuDS proposals address run-off rates from these proposals and seek to retain them at green field rates but do not appear to address wider flood risk management.

9.29 If read as a whole I would summarise that the proposals are able to comply with the accessibility part of this Policy relatively easily by forming the internal footpath routes and retention of existing trees and hedgerows. There is a net loss in the Green Infrastructure Network from the removal of the pasture fields under the housing blocks and for the Site's access network. However the scheme is unable to demonstrate integration with the surrounding countryside.

9.30 Overall the proposal's conflict with this policy strands outweigh their compliance.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

- 9.31 Recognising that the NPPF has to be read as a whole and that not all of its contents are applicable to these proposals I find the following paragraphs as being the most relevant when considering landscape and visual matters.
- 9.32 **Paragraph 135 c) - Sympathetic to local character and history**, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities) – there is no notable innovation from the proposals and they are not sympathetic to local character. There is clear conflict with this part of the Framework when the adverse effects on the local character of either the natural landscape or built form of Hurst and Whistley Green are considered.
- 9.33 **Paragraph 187 a) – Valued landscape** is not applicable as it is common ground between parties that the Site and immediate surroundings are not a valued landscape for the purpose of this part of the paragraph; and
- 9.34 **Paragraph 187 b) – Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.** This policy is applicable and in my view the development's adverse impact on the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside results in conflict with this policy of the Framework.
- 9.35 it is a key consideration of their assimilation with the local rural landscape. As there are both landscape and visual harms identified to the Site and its contextual area there is clear conflict with this part of the Framework.

Section summary

- 9.36 In reviewing the proposals against the landscape orientated sections of policies CPII, TB2I and CC03 I found both compliance and conflict with the applicable parts of the policies. However it is my opinion that there is more conflict than compliance when they are read as a whole and that WBC were correct in citing them in RfR3.
- 9.37 The summary box below provides details of my review of Policies CPII, TB2I and CC03 as the most pertinent to the consideration of character and appearance effects at the Site.

Section 10 Summary Box

- That CPII seeks to protect the separate identity of settlements through the presumption against development.

- CPII provides seven exemptions to this presumption and the proposals do not fall within any of the listed categories.
- The proposals do not assist to retain the separate identities of Hurst and Whistley Green and reduce the sense of separation between the settlements and conflict is found with CPII.
- TB2I is the principle policy for consideration of landscape character effects.
- Detailed review of the key issues and guidelines for LCA C2 (which is the area in which the Site is located) help to demonstrate that there is harm to the existing landscape character of the Site and parts of its contextual landscape.
- Conflict is found with both parts of the TB2I policy.
- CC03 addresses matters associated with Green Infrastructure, trees and landscaping.
- It is found that the proposals comply with matters of access and habitat diversification but are conflict in terms of harm to the GI network through the loss of countryside and lack of successful integration.
- Overall I consider there to be more conflict than compliance with the CC03 strands when the policy is read as a whole.

With regards to the NPPF policies the following conclusions are drawn:

- **Paragraph 135 c) - Sympathetic to local character** – the proposals are not sympathetic to local character. There is apparent conflict with this part of the Framework; and
- **Paragraph 187 b) – Intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside** is applicable and there is apparent conflict with this part of the Framework as the intrinsic character and natural beauty of the Site is not retained.

10.0 Conclusions and Summary Proof

10.1 My evidence is in relation to landscape and visual matters as primarily contained in Reason for Refusal 3 (RfR 3) which address the character and appearance effects that would be brought about by the proposals to build 99 residential units on land to the east of Lodge Road set between the two rural settlements of Hurst and Whistley Green.

10.2 **Section 1** is a brief introduction to the Proof and me as a Chartered Landscape Architect.

10.3 **Section 2** maps out the scope of the Proof, the methodology used to prepare it and identifies the landscape and visual effects this evidence seeks to examine further.

10.4 **Section 3** provides a summary of the proposed development with the following summary points at the end of the section:

- The Site comprises a single, large improved pasture field that provides the majority of the open, rural separation between Hurst and Whistley Green;
- The proposals require a long access road taken from the west side of the Site running in curvilinear fashion before splitting to serve two separate housing blocks on Site;
- The northern housing block is set towards the north end of Tape Lane with its east side abutting Tape Lane which is Hurst's current largely open, western settlement edge;
- The southern housing block is located adjacent to Tape Lane Allotments and part of the Martineau Lane development;
- An area of grassed open space called the Common is set between the two housing blocks;
- The majority of existing trees and hedgerows are retained by the proposals and veteran trees given buffer space whilst new tree planting is also proposed;
- Cycleways and footpaths are proposed through and around the periphery of the built form;
- SuDS attenuation basins are shown associated with each housing block, along with roadside swales; and
- A community orchard is proposed at the Site entrance and a play area within the Common near the southern housing block.

10.5 **Section 4** reviews the applicable landscape orientated planning policy and two previous Appeals at and near the Site – these are referred to as the 200 unit scheme and the 5 unit scheme for ease. It reviews the policies cited in RfR3 and reports on the decision notices from Inspector Wildsmith from March 2023 who considered the 200 unit scheme⁷ and Inspector Major who dismissed the 5 unit Appeal⁸ in January 2020.

10.6 Paragraphs 60 and 61 is where Inspector Wildsmith draws his landscape and visual points together and reaches his overall conclusions on character and appearance harm that would be brought about by the 200 unit scheme. They are:

- He considered it, *'self-evident that the appeal proposal would have an adverse impact on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site,'*
- This would, *'inevitably have an adverse impact on the visual experience of users of Tape Lane and Lodge Road by bringing a more developed feel to the whole area.'*
- He considered, *'Because of the scale of the proposed development and the fact that its impact would be experienced from many different locations', whilst acknowledging , 'albeit within fairly close proximity to the site itself,'*
- He explained that he shared, *'the view of my colleague Inspector who determined an earlier appeal at Lodge Road, that the harm caused in landscape character and visual terms should be categorised as being at the upper end of the moderate scale.'*
- Footnote 21 set within this paragraph references Appeal APP/X0360/W/18/3194044 that was held by Inspector Major in January 2020 considering the erection of 5 dwellings and garages with creation of a new vehicular access and pedestrian access to Lodge Road and footway provision. This Appeal decision is touched upon briefly below.
- In Paragraph 61 he reiterates his conclusions, *'that the appeal proposal would have a moderate adverse impact, at the upper end of the scale, on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site and surrounding area'; and*
- The proposals, *'would fail to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green as set out in the C2 LCA landscape strategy.'*

⁷ Appeal Ref APP/X0360/W/22/3309202, March 2023 (CD 7.1)

⁸ Appeal Ref APP/X0360/W/18/3194044 January 2020 (CD 7.7)

10.7 The conclusions from Inspector Wildsmith reiterate similar ones reached by Inspector Major when he refused consent for a smaller 5 unit scheme in a vegetated paddock to the east of Lodge Road. Inspector Major draws his character and appearance points together in Paragraph 28 of his decision notice (CD 7.7) making the following specific points and conclusions on the scale of the harm:

- *The net result of the proposal would be that there would be a harmful impact to both the character and appearance of the area.*
- *The development would not respect the transition between the built up area and the countryside.*
- *The fact that an area of open land would be retained to the north of Badgers Bottom [Poole House] is not sufficient to ameliorate this harm.*
- *The harm would be at the upper end of the moderate scale.*

10.8 **Section 5** is where I consider existing landscape and other character appraisal information. Six characterisation documents are initially identified with this list narrowed down to three sources of pertinent information, they are:

- Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (WLCA), 2019 (CD 8.9) and specifically Landscape Character Area (LCA) C2 that the Site is located within;
- Historic Environment Topic Paper - Appendix C: Areas of Special Character pro-forma assessments (CD 8.11) reviewing matters related to the Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC that lies approximately 50m to the north of the Site broadly following the A321 – Broadwater Lane group of properties; and
- A Design for Hurst Incorporating The Parish Design Statement 2005 as updated in 2009 (CD 8.12) to confirm what landscape characteristics are considered important by the local community.

10.9 Of these documents it is the WLCA that provides the most landscape information with lists of key characteristics and valuable landscape attributes many of which apply to the Site and its contextual area. It goes on to set a landscape strategy for LCA C2 to '*conserve and enhance it's quiet, rural and agricultural landscape*'. Key issues affecting LCA C2 are summarised as are the landscape guidelines which includes as Bullet 9 the following statement which makes specific reference to the Appeal Site and its protection as a sensitive area of open land.

- **Conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the open landscape between adjacent village centres**, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining between Hurst and Whistley Green.

10.10 **Section 6** is my review of the landscape consultation comments provided by WBC's Landscape Officer Ms Brigitte Crafer (CD 8.3). I consider the comments she made fair and reasonable and agree with them. She recommended refusal considering that the landscape effects are at the upper end of the Moderate, Adverse scale.

10.11 Mr Croucher reported the comments from Ms Crafer accurately in his Delegated Officers Report and the topics covered were carried forward to act as the base of WBC SoC Section 6 titled '*Main Issue 2: Harm to the character and appearance of the landscape and countryside*'. (CD 2.2).

10.12 **Section 7** is where I consider the landscape baseline for the Site and contextual areas around it. I adopt the same six landscape receptors identified in the application LVIA (CD 8.1) and add a further six contextual areas to allow me to understand the landscape effects on the areas around the Site that it is associated and judged with.

10.13 To judge the landscape effects a LVIA methodology is adopted and the sensitivity of each landscape receptor is determined (see RLC Table 3), before considering the magnitude of landscape effects at Year 0 at the point of completion and at Year 15 with the mitigation planting established and the scheme developing some maturity. (see RLC Table 4). The final stage in this three step process is combining the judgements of landscape sensitivity with magnitude of change to arrive at an end assessment of the significance of landscape effects (see RLC Table 5) for each receptor,

10.14 The larger landscape effects of Moderate, Adverse or greater at Year 15 occur to the following seven receptors:

- Landcover – Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Tree Resource – Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Site Character – Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Whistley Green and Northern Fields - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Tape Lane - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
- Tape Lane Allotments - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent

- Lodge Road - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent

10.15 Minor, Adverse and permanent effects occur to the following four landscape receptors:

- Topography on Site – Minor, Adverse and Permanent;
- LCA C2 Hurst River Terrace - Minor, Adverse and Permanent
- A321 Broadwater Lane - Minor, Adverse and Permanent
- Martineau Lane and Barber Close - Minor, Adverse and Permanent

10.16 One Minor, Beneficial and permanent effect has been identified for the Site's hedgerows through additional planting and improved management.

10.17 In weighing up all of the above and amalgamating them into a single combined conclusion of landscape effects then **Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** impact appears a fair and reasonable summary.

10.18 **Section 8** considers visual effects, it is supported by a series of annotated panoramic representative viewpoint photographs held in my Appendix E. Section 8's summary explains;

- There are no promoted viewpoints, protected views or designed vistas at the Site or in its vicinity.
- It confirms that the visual receptors around the Site generally have a Medium visual sensitivity.
- The users of the Loddon Permissive Path have a Medium/High sensitivity but as the views from this route are largely wooded the visual effects are minor.
- Users of Tape Lane would experience the greatest visual change in both views along the lane and from it looking north west across the Site towards the wooded horizon at Lodge Road. This is judged as a Moderate, Adverse and Permanent visual effect after 15 years.
- The Tape Lane cul-de-sac would have its current rural focus replaced with the eastern flank of the northern housing block. This is also a Moderate, Adverse and Permanent change.
- The Tape Lane allotment holders would have their last open views from to the north replaced by the flank of the southern housing block.

- The users of Lodge Lane have been split into two groups south and north – the south end would have a partly filtered view of the southern housing block set away from the road whilst the north end users would have clear sight of the uncharacteristic Site entrance which would remain in contrast to the rural character of Lodge Road. Both these visual effects have been judged as Moderate, Adverse and Permanent.

10.19 There have been no beneficial visual effects identified to offset these identified adverse ones.

10.20 **Section 9** is where all the above evidence and considerations are drawn together to consider if there is conflict or compliance with the planning policies cited in RfR3. Not all the listed planning policies are considered with the section concentrating on CPII, TB2I and CC03. The summary to Section 9 is presented below:

- That CPII seeks to protect the separate identity of settlements through the presumption against development.
- CPII provides seven exemptions to this presumption and the proposals do not fall within any of the listed categories.
- The proposals do not assist to retain the separate identities of Hurst and Whistley Green and reduce the sense of separation between the settlements and conflict is found with CPII.
- TB2I is the principle policy for consideration of landscape character effects.
- Detailed review of the key issues and guidelines for LCA C2 (which is the area in which the Site is located) helps to demonstrate that there is harm to the existing landscape character of the Site and parts of its contextual landscape.
- Conflict is found with both parts of the TB2I policy.
- CC03 addresses matters associated with Green Infrastructure, trees and landscaping.
- It is found that the proposals comply with matters of access and habitat diversification but are conflict in terms of harm to the GI network through the loss of countryside and lack of successful integration.
- Overall I consider there to be more conflict than compliance with the CC03 strands when the policy is read as a whole.

10.21 With regards to the NPPF policies the following conclusions are drawn:

- **Paragraph 135 c) - Sympathetic to local character** – the proposals are not sympathetic to local character. There is apparent conflict with this part of the Framework; and
- **Paragraph 187 b) – Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the Intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.** This policy is applicable and in my view the development's adverse impact on the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside results in conflict with this policy of the Framework.

10.22 In returning to the landscape and visual harms included in RfRs 3 and as summarised in Main Issue 2 from the WBC SoC (CD 2.2) I draw the following final conclusions on landscape and visual effects.

Landscape effects

- 10.23 There will be a clear urbanisation of this piece of countryside through the provision of two large housing blocks, associated infrastructure such as roads and the public open space provided will appear subservient and part of the development that led to its generation. This leads to clear policy conflict with MDD TB21 – Landscape Character.
- 10.24 The adverse change to the character of the open, rural field and reduction in its sense openness will remove the current countryside setting to the west side of Hurst, The proposals will have a harmful impact on the character of the village of Hurst by the suburbanisation of its rural fringe and insertion of contemporary built form into the sensitive open space between settlements.
- 10.25 The one minor benefit to hedgerows on Site does not offset these more significant adverse effects.

Visual effects

- 10.26 There are a series of adverse visual effects from around the edge of the Site where people would be able to plainly see the development as they go about their daily lives in the village or drive past it. The proposed mitigation strategy would not successfully address this visual change and the proposals would not integrate into the local scene remaining in contrast to the rural landscape and the neighbouring settlements.

Final conclusion

~~10.27~~ For all the reasons explored above my evidence indicates that the WBC Planning Officer was correct in identifying that notable landscape and visual harm would occur and should be taken fully into account as negative factors in the planning balance.

The following appendices are bound in a separate Appendix Report.

- A – Ryder Landscape Consultants' LVIA/LVA Methodology
- B – Character Assessment Information
- C – TGN 2/21 –Table I – Valued Landscape Assessment
- D – Supporting Figures
- E – Panoramic Photography of Representative Viewpoints
- F – Single Plate Illustrative Photography