

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

March 2025

Land North of School Road,
Arborfield Cross,
Wokingham

Prepared by
CSA Environmental

On behalf of:
Croudace Homes, Vortal
Homes Limited and Falcon
Developments

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 CSA Environmental has been appointed by Croudace Homes, Vortal Homes Limited and Falcon Developments (SE) Limited to undertake a landscape and visual impact assessment of Land North of School Road, Arborfield Cross, Wokingham (the 'Site'). This is in regard to an outline planning application for a proposed residential development of up to 70 dwellings together with open space and associated works. Means of access to be considered (with Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and Scale to be reserved).
- 1.2 The Site lies within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough Council. The location and extent of the Site is shown on the Site Location Plan at **Appendix B** and on the Aerial Photograph at **Appendix A** and a selection of photographs from within the Site and from public vantage points in the surrounding area are provided in **Appendix C**.
- 1.3 This assessment describes the existing landscape character and quality of the Site and the surrounding area. The report then goes on to discuss the suitability of the Site to accommodate the development proposals, and the potential landscape and visual effects on the wider area.
- 1.4 A previous application (Application Reference 242421) for development at the Site was refused planning permission in December 2024. The proposal was for outline planning permission for up to 95 dwellings on a larger site which included the entire field to the east. A total of twenty reasons for refusal were provided by the Council, with reasons 3 and 4 of relevance to this assessment:
 3. *'The proposed development will have a prominent negative and detrimental impact on the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape, character of School Road (designated as a Green Route) and character & appearance of the area by reason of the loss of a sizeable section of open and attractive undulating landscape in the countryside with an urbanising large-scale development. Due to the location of the proposed access road, land form and quantum of development, the proposal would appear as detached from the village's main built-up core and fail to read as an organic extension to the settlement, thereby eroding its character, resulting in poor place-making. Therefore, the proposal would be contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, Policies CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, the Borough Design Guide SPD, National Design Guide, the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment, the Wokingham Borough Council Valued Landscape Assessment (2024) and sections 8, 9, 11, 12 and 15 of the NPPF.*
 4. *The proposed development would significantly and prominently erode the open space that separates Arborfield Cross and Barkham*

Hill and Arborfield Cross and Arborfield, resulting in a detrimental degree of visual and perceived coalescence between these independent settlements, contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, Policies CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, the Borough Design Guide SPD, the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment, the Wokingham Borough Council Valued Landscape Assessment (2024) and sections 12 and 15 of the NPPF.'

- 1.5 To address landscape concerns raised with the previous planning application, the new planning application has reduced the overall quantum of housing from up to 95 dwellings to up to 70 dwellings. Residential development is no longer proposed in the eastern field with the new dwellings contained within the western field only.
- 1.6 In addition to the above changes, the scheme has also evolved following feedback from Officers at Wokingham Borough Council on the revised proposals. As a result of Officer feedback the scheme was reviewed again by the consultant team and further changes made to the layout to reflect the feedback received. The following changes to the scheme were made:
- A new central green space and play area was introduced at the heart of the scheme;
 - Sustainable drainage scheme was updated to include overland conveyance features including swales and rain gardens;
 - Housing orientated to back on to the southern boundary with the school site;
 - Space increased for the planting of large stature trees within verges within the streetscene; and
 - Pedestrian / cycle access point onto Cole Lane relocated to be closer to the centre of the village.
- 1.7 The degree to which changes made to the revised application address landscape concerns raised previously by Officers is considered further in Section 6.0.

Methodology

- 1.8 This assessment is based on a site visit undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced Landscape Architect in May 2024. The Site was revisited in January 2025 and the viewpoint photography updated when the vegetation was out of leaf and the Site at its most visible. The weather conditions at the time of the first visit were sunny with light cloud and visibility was very good. At the time of the winter visit, weather

conditions were overcast but visibility was very good in near and middle distance views.

- 1.9 In landscape and visual impact assessments, a distinction is drawn between landscape effects (i.e. effects on the character or quality of the landscape irrespective of whether there are any views of the landscape, or viewers to see them) and visual effects (i.e. effects on people's views of the landscape from public vantage points, including public rights of way and other areas with general public access, as well as effects from residential properties). This report therefore considers the potential impact of the development on both landscape character and visibility. The methodology utilised in this report is contained in **Appendix G**.
- 1.10 Photographs contained within this document (**Appendix C**) were taken using a digital camera with a lens focal length approximating to 50mm, to give a similar depth of vision to the human eye. In some instances, images have been combined to create a panorama. The photographs and visualisations within this report have been prepared in general conformance with the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 06/19, as set out in the Methodology in **Appendix G**.

2.0 LANDSCAPE POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Context

- 2.1 National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF'). Section 15 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 187 of the document states that the planning system should contribute to the protection and enhancement of the natural and local environment through, among other things, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, '*... (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)*'. The paragraph also outlines that the planning system should recognise the, '*...intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.*'
- 2.2 The Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG') adds further context to the policies contained in the NPPF. The guidance as relevant to this assessment covers landscape and the natural environment and the design of new developments.
- 2.1 The National Design Guide (2019) has been produced as part of the PPG. It provides guidance to *illustrate '... how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice.'* The National Model Design Code (July, 2021) expands upon the ten characteristics of good design providing an overarching framework for design.
- 2.2 Those sections of the NPPF and PPG relevant to this assessment are summarised in **Appendix E**.

Local Policy Context

- 2.3 The development plan relevant to the Site is the Core Strategy, adopted by Wokingham Borough Council in 2010. It sets out the planning objectives for the Borough for the period 2010 - 2026. Policies relating to the Site and the landscape as relevant to this assessment are summarised below.
- 2.4 **Policy CP1 Sustainable development** notes that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that prioritize sustainable development by maintaining or enhancing the quality of the environment and preserving water quality.
- 2.5 **Policy CP3 General Principles for development** outlines that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that adhere to

several key principles: appropriate scale, high-quality design, functionality, and safety without compromising neighbouring amenities or ecological features. These proposals should enhance the site's ability to support biodiversity, integrate with surroundings, and contribute to community infrastructure and facilities.

- 2.6 **Policy CP7 Biodiversity** requires that sites designated as internationally or nationally important for nature conservation will be conserved and protected from inappropriate development. Development that may harm designated sites, habitats, species of principal importance, or compromise biodiversity action plans will only be permitted if it's demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard nature conservation. Mitigation measures or appropriate compensation must be provided to offset any potential harm.
- 2.7 **Policy CP11 Proposals Outside Development Limits (including countryside)** indicates that proposals outside development limits may be permitted if they contribute to sustainable rural enterprises, promote recreation in the countryside or bring about environmental improvements.

Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan

- 2.8 Adopted in 2014, the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan builds on the strategy set out in the Core Strategy. Again, the document sets out the planning objectives for the Borough for the period 2010 – 2026. Policies relating to the Site and the landscape as relevant to this assessment are summarised below.
- 2.9 **Policy CC01 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development** establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development as per the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2.10 **Policy CC02 Development Limits** delineates development limits for each settlement. Planning permission at settlement edges requires demonstration that the proposed development is within these limits and respects the transition between built-up areas and open countryside, considering the character of adjacent landscapes.
- 2.11 **Policy CC03 Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping** sets out that development proposals are expected to enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks. This includes provisions for new green spaces, the protection and enhancement of existing ones, and the incorporation of high-quality landscaping. Additionally, proposals must ensure the protection and retention of existing trees, hedges, and other landscape features, with an emphasis on native planting.

- 2.12 **Policy CC10 Sustainable Drainage** mandates that all development proposals must manage surface water sustainably, considering climate change impacts.
- 2.13 **Policy TB08 Open Space, sport and recreational facilities standards for residential development** stipulates that open space, indoor or outdoor play areas, as well as sports and recreational facilities, should be provided on-site as part of residential development proposals.
- 2.14 **Policy TB21 Landscape Character** states that proposals must address the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, considering landscape quality, strategy, sensitivity, and key issues.
- 2.15 **Policy TB24 Designated Heritage Assets** (Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Areas) outlines the Borough Council's commitment to conserving and enhancing designated heritage assets. Development proposals must demonstrate that they will conserve and, where feasible, enhance the important character and special interest of these assets and their settings.

Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.16 The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan, produced by Arborfield and Newland Parish Council, was made in April 2020. Policies relating to the Site and the landscape as relevant to this assessment are summarised below.
- 2.17 **Policy IRS1 Preservation of separation of settlements** notes that in order to safeguard the division between settlements, development proposals beyond designated development limits must adhere to Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy. This entails preserving the rural landscape's character and appearance while ensuring that new developments do not contribute to the merging of existing settlements, whether physically, visually, or in perception.
- 2.18 **Policy IRS2 Recognise, respect and preserve identity and rural setting of settlements** underscores the importance of recognising, respecting, and preserving the identity and rural setting of settlements in development proposals. This entails considering the scale, form, and density of development, as well as using materials that reflect the local character. Applications are expected to align with guidance outlined in the Village Design Statements for Arborfield and Barkham.
- 2.19 **Policy IRS3 Protection and enhancement of the natural environment and green spaces** emphasizes the importance of preserving and enriching the natural environment and green spaces within the area. Development proposals must prioritize conservation efforts, aiming to

prevent biodiversity loss and ideally achieve a net gain. Additionally, the policy guides development on designated Public Open Spaces, advocating for their enhanced use or adherence to national planning policies if space loss is proposed. Locally valued natural assets, like The Coombes woodland, are mentioned for conservation and enhancement.

- 2.20 **Policy IRS4 Protection and enhancement of the historic character of the area** prioritises preserving and enhancing the historic character of the area in development proposals. It requires projects to protect or enhance specific areas like Arborfield Cross Conservation Area and Chamberlain's Farm Area of Special Character, as well as the local historic environment, including Listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments.
- 2.21 **Policy AD3 High quality development with generous open space, properly landscaped** states that all new developments must maintain the rural and historical character of the area while delivering high-quality design. This includes recognising and contributing sensitively to local character, considering density in harmony with the surroundings to promote spaciousness and variety.
- 2.22 **Policy AD4 Address local flood risk management** requires planning applications for development to address local flood risk management comprehensively. This includes incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) principles. Additionally, measures such as swales, ponds, and tree planting should be implemented to slow water runoff rates, with consideration given to known local flooding problems.
- 2.23 **Policy GA2 Implement local network of green routes for non-motorised users** requires development proposals to facilitate the establishment of a comprehensive network of Greenways and other Public Rights of Way (PROWs). This includes supporting the creation of all-weather routes, safe crossings at intersections with primary routes, and improved connectivity across the Plan Area. Additionally, proposals should encourage sustainable transport options, like safe routes to schools, and enhance access to the countryside and nearby destinations for recreational use.
- 2.24 Annex V of the Neighbourhood Plan identifies a number of important views from within the Neighbourhood Plan Area. These include in the vicinity of School Road. However, none of these views look towards the Site, although View 2.2 is from Arborfield Cross in the direction of the woodland called The Coombes.

Emerging Policy

Local Plan Update

2.25 Wokingham Borough Council submitted the Local Plan Update 2023 - 2040: Proposed Submission Plan to the Secretary of State for examination in February 2025. It should be noted that CSA Environmental submitted representations on behalf of the Applicant during the consultation period for the Regulation 19 Local Plan Update specifically dealing with draft Policy NE6, which was subject to significant objections.

2.26 Proposed policies of relevance to the Site include:

- **Policy SS1: Sustainable Development Principles**
- **Policy SS2: Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy which defines Arborfield Cross as a Minor Settlement**
- **Policy SS4: Development Within and Adjacent to Minor Settlements**
- **Policy NE1: Biodiversity and Geodiversity**
- **Policy NE2: Biodiversity Net Gain**
- **Policy NE6: Valued Landscapes**

Supplementary Planning Guidance

2.27 The following supplementary planning documents provide information relevant to the Site. This information is summarised below.

Arborfield and Newland Village Design Statement

2.28 Adopted in 2015, the Arborfield and Newland Village Design Statement sets out how the local community wishes the characteristics of the area to be preserved and enhanced. Policies relating to the Site and the landscape as relevant to this assessment are summarised below.

2.29 **Policy 1 Impact on Surroundings** notes that development should have regard to the surrounding landscape and neighbouring development, particularly where this is of unique local character.

2.30 **Policy 2 Variety of Housing Styles** comments that the parish enjoys diverse housing styles, spanning from historic estates to terraces, enriching its architectural landscape. Encouragement is given for diversity to enhance street character, with building designs sensitively aligned to neighbouring housing features.

- 2.31 **Policy 3 Position of Buildings** notes that building lines should remain set back from the road to preserve the area's character, contributing significantly to its rural ambiance.
- 2.32 **Policy 4 Farmland, trees and boundaries** states that the parish features extensive farmland, characterized by large fields bordered by hedgerows, predominantly arable and sheep pasture, with smaller fenced paddocks near settlements. Hedgerow trees, small woodlands, and shelterbelts enhance scenic views and provide recreational spaces. Preservation of high-quality trees, particularly native broadleaf species, is prioritized. Additionally, boundaries should blend with existing features, favouring natural frontages like low hedges while ensuring compatibility with the area's character.

3.0 SITE CONTEXT

Site Context

- 3.1 The Site comprises two parcels of land on the north eastern edge of Arborfield Cross (Parcels A and B as shown on the aerial photograph in **Appendix A**). Parcel A comprises a field located immediately to the north of The Coombes Primary School; Parcel B comprises the south west corner of a second field located immediately north of School Road. The settlement of Arborfield Cross is a nucleated village, situated approximately 8km south east of the centre of Reading.
- 3.2 School Road, to the south of the Site, extends from the roundabout junction within the north of Arborfield Cross, to Langley Common Road in the east. The main built-up area of Arborfield Cross extends south and westward. To the east of the Site is the wider field associated with Parcel B, with Wood Lane (Byway ARBO10) which extends northwards to a sewage works. Beyond Wood Lane to the east is a large, detached property and associated grounds, a horse paddock and residential built form along the northern edge of School Road (extending up to Langley Common Road). To the immediate west of the Site is Cole Lane (Byway ARB09) which continues north eastwards and is lined with substantial hedgerows on both sides. To the north of the Site are agricultural fields with the aforementioned sewage works located approximately 250m north of the Site.
- 3.3 Fields in the surrounding area typically have strongly defined boundaries comprising hedgerows and mature trees. Ancient Woodland called 'The Coombes' lies about 750m north east of the Site, with the Bearwood Lakes golf course located immediately beyond that.

National Landscape Character

- 3.4 Natural England has produced profiles for England's National Character Areas ('NCA'), which divides England into 159 distinct natural areas, defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, cultural and economic activity. The Site is located within NCA 129 Thames Basin Heaths with NCA 115 Thames Valley just to the north of the Site.
- 3.5 The Thames Valley character area is a wedge-shaped area spreading out from Reading to include Slough, Windsor and the south-west fringes of London. The Thames Basin Heaths character area stretch westwards from Weybridge in Surrey to the countryside around Newbury in Berkshire.

3.6 NCA 129 Thames Basin Heaths includes parts of the Metropolitan Green Belt around Chobham and the rivers Wey and Mole. West of this are large conurbations and a major road network incorporating the M25 and M3 motorways. Key characteristics of the area relevant to the Site include:

- *Plateaux of Tertiary sands and gravels in the London Basin, with intervening river valleys floored by London Clay.*
- *High woodland cover, offering an array of colour in the autumn. Conifers and large plantations on former heathland are dominant features in the east, while the west is scattered with small, semi-natural woodlands on ancient sites.*
- *Acid, leached soils mean that farming on the plateaux is limited to rough pasture, and that alternative land uses (such as forestry, golf courses and horse paddocks) have emerged. Heather, gorse, oak and birch all thrive here. Arable land and improved pasture are found in the valleys, on alluvium.*
- *Beyond the large areas of heathland and woodland, there is a patchwork of small to medium-sized fields with woods. The legacy of historic hunting forests includes veteran trees, ancient woods, ancient hedgerows and parklands. Historic meadows remain as fragments along watercourses.*
- *Historic commons offer tranquillity and unenclosed views, while other rights of access are enjoyed across farmland, canals and downland.*
- *Valley floors are wet with ditches, numerous watercourses, ponds, waterfilled gravel pits, reedbeds and carr. Historic features include mills, relict water meadows, and canals such as the River Wey Navigations.*

3.7 NCA 115 is mainly low-lying with the River Thames providing a unifying feature through a very diverse landscape of urban and suburban settlement, infrastructure networks, commons, woodland, reservoirs and mineral workings. Key characteristics relevant to the Site include:

- *'Flat and low-lying land, rising to low, river-terraced hills.*
- *The underlying geology is dominated by the London Clay which, over much of the area, is overlain by river-lain sands and gravels.*
- *The numerous hydrological features provide unity to an area which otherwise lacks homogeneity.*

- *Farming is limited. Where it survives, grazed pasture is the major land use within a generally open, flat and featureless landscape. The field pattern is medium-scale and irregular, with smaller fields to the west.*
- *Although densely populated and developed, pockets of woodland, open grassland, parkland, wetlands and intimate meadows provide escape and tranquillity.*
- *To the south, the open Thames flood plain dominates, with its associated flat grazing land, becoming characterised by a number of formal historic landscapes on higher ground.'*

Regional Landscape Character

- 3.8 The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) considers the character of the landscape at a district level.
- 3.9 The Site falls within Landscape Character Area ('LCA') J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay, which lies within the Landscape Character Type ('LCT') J Settled and Farmed Clay. LCA L1 Bearwood Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills lies just to the north of the Site.
- 3.10 The stated key characteristics of this LCA relevant to the Site include:
- **'A gently undulating landscape** between 50m and 65m AOD, underlain by London Clay with localised areas of River Terrace Gravels. Shallow wooded valleys follow the course of the Barkham Brook, which is geologically marked by areas of alluvium.
 - **Consistent pattern of water bodies** including streams, drainage channels, ditches and open water bodies of various sizes resulting from the clayey and loamy soils which impede drainage.
 - **Wooded context** provided by characteristic mature hedgerow and in-field trees, combined with woodland belts, with BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills. This creates a loose sense of enclosure.
 - **Arable farming dominates, with pasture on higher ground** and horse paddocks near settlement. Fields are large and geometric, bound by fragmented hedgerows supported by post and wire.
 - **A dense settled character influenced by modern development** including the new garden village on the site of Arborfield Garrison

and the southern edge of Wokingham which incorporates an industrial estate. There is little consistent style or form.

- **Older scattered settlement of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages** at Barkham and Arborfield Cross. The buildings have traditional vernacular of timber framing and clay tiles, exemplified by the Conservation Area at Arborfield Cross. A number of farmhouses are listed.
- **A network of busy local roads cross the area.** They tend to be rural in character, with ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees, sometimes opening directly onto the arable fields. The A327 adds noise and movement to the area.
- **Public rights of way** run between the settlements, and provide access for recreational use.
- **A rural character away from development and roads**, with views across to adjacent character areas including across the Loddon Valley.
- **A historic road, now represented by footpaths, lanes and Victorian carriageways**, that appears on Norden's map of 1607, connecting Swallowfield Park via Arborfield Cross and the Coombes (in LCA L1), with Wokingham.'

3.11 The assessment identifies the following valuable landscape attributes of the LCA:

- **Barkham Brook and associated wetland** which provide important ecological habitats.
- **Pattern of arable and pastoral fields**, which provides a rural character away from settlement, and creates an important separation between settlements.
- **Mature hedgerow trees and in-field trees** which provide a wooded character and visual interest within the landscape.
- **Rural settlement pattern** of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages outside the urban area which provides a rural character and a link to the past.
- **Recreational value** of the network of rights of way between settlements.

- **Views across the landscape** to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south.
- 3.12 Overall, the assessment states that the condition of the landscape is moderate, due to the pattern of arable and pastoral fields, and remnant wetland associated with Barkham Brook. The assessment notes that the hedgerow network is fragmented and further development at the Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location will further fragment the rural settlement pattern.
- 3.13 The assessment outlines landscape guidelines for the LCA. Overall, the strategy is to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character. The specific guidelines for the area, relevant to the Site, include:
- **'Conserve woodlands, including ancient woodland**, BAP priority habitats and remnant standard trees.
 - **Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland**, using locally occurring native species in order to provide screening of roads and development and linking woodland habitats.
 - **Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape** which provides a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements. Protect the individual identity of towns and villages, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land between Arborfield Garrison and Barkham, and Barkham and Wokingham town, and Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Cross.
 - **Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields** by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
 - **Conserve and manage hedgerows with standard trees** as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland.
 - **Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields** and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
 - **Conserve, enhance and manage wetland and woodland habitats.**

- **Conserve the value of Arborfield Cross Conservation Area** and the listed and historic buildings, including farmhouses, and non-designed heritage assets such as Second World War defences.
- **Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges** through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and create a positive interface between the built up and rural areas particularly around Wokingham town, Arborfield Garrison, and Finchampstead.
- **Enhance sense of place through careful design** (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the potential impacts of any new development on valuable attributes.
- **Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes** resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage particularly in the most rural areas.
- **Conserve views to distinctive wooded horizons.** Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.'

3.14 LCA L1 Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills is described as a self-contained area of higher ground which formed part of the historic Bearwood estate. The area is said to contain undulating hills characterised by dense woodland.

3.15 From our own assessment of the Site and surroundings, we would note that in terms of the wider landscape character of the area, the Site is broadly representative of the District LCA description of LCA J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay. It consists of arable farmland of fairly geometric fields divided by hedgerows.

Wokingham Borough Council Valued Landscape Topic Papers (2020) and (2024)

3.16 The Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape is described in Wokingham Borough Council's Valued Landscapes Topic Paper (2020). It centres around the Registered Park and Garden of Bearwood and with the village of Barkham to its extreme south. The Topic Paper reiterates the landscape characteristics articulated in The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment. The concept of valued landscape is an emerging policy in the Local Plan Update for the period to 2040.

- 3.17 The council's Valued Landscape Assessment Topic Paper (2024) seeks to build on the 2020 paper. To identify refinements to the valued landscapes identified in 2020 the Council mapped 'hot spots' of areas which displayed the highest number of valuable landscape attributes. This together with further desk-based analysis and site visits informed the proposed changes to the valued landscape boundaries. The narrative to the boundary refinements indicates that changes to the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape boundary were made to include the area around Barkham Brook and views to The Coombes from Arborfield Cross identified in Annex V of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan. The proposed changes to the Valued Landscape boundary would mean that the Site would lie on the southern edge of the proposed extended area.
- 3.18 The Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape narrative indicates that it is centred on the Registered Park and Garden of Bearwood and to the south on Langley Common. Whilst the 'hot-spot' analysis did not include Barkham Brook, the Landscape Character Assessment (2019) identifies it as a 'valuable landscape attribute'. The narrative notes that the Landscape Character Assessment identifies the part of the valued landscape which lies in LCA J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' as being of moderate quality, moderate character and moderate condition, it considers the area to the east of Arborfield Cross as arguably higher quality because of its visual and cultural links with the higher quality LCA L1 'Bearwood Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills'.
- 3.19 CSA Environmental submitted representations on behalf of the Applicant in relation to the Valued Landscape during the consultation period of the Local Plan Update.

Statutory and Non-Statutory Designations

- 3.20 The Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside Map ('MAGIC') and the policies maps contained within the Wokingham Borough Council Local Plan indicate that the Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality (Designations and Local Policy Plan in **Appendix D**).
- 3.21 There are no trees within or immediately adjoining the Site covered by Tree Protection Orders ('TPOs'). This was confirmed by consulting the online mapping provided by Wokingham Borough Council on 25th February 2025.

Conservation Area and Listed Buildings

- 3.22 The Arborfield Cross Conservation Area is located approximately 200m west of the Site. There are a number of Grade II Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area. The Site is not visible from within the Conservation Area, including the area around the Grade II listed Arborfield Cross War Memorial. The Grade II Listed Building Langleypond Farmhouse lies about 180m east of the Site.

Public Rights of Way

- 3.23 Cole Lane Byway ARBO9 runs from the roundabout where School Road meets Eversley Road immediately north of the north-western boundary of the Site and continues through open fields to The Coombes woodland about 1km away. Cole Lane is proposed by Wokingham Borough Council's Greenways Project to become part of Greenway Route K which would run from Arborfield along Greensward Lane, Swallowfield Road and Cole Lane to The Coombes. An historic road *'that appears on Norden's map of 1607, connecting Swallowfield Park via Arborfield Cross and the Coombes with Wokingham'* is mentioned in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) as characteristics of LCA J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay. Cole Lane is part of this historic road.
- 3.24 Wood Lane Byway ARBO10 extends from the southern corner of the wider field containing Parcel B before turning north west to meet Cole Lane Byway ARBO9 about 500m north of the Site. Just north of this point Ellis's Hill Byway ARBO8 runs west to meet Mole Road B3030. For details refer to the OS Mapping on the Site Location Plan in **Appendix B**.

4.0 SITE DESCRIPTION AND VISIBILITY

Site Description

- 4.1 The Site consists of a roughly rectangular arable field north of The Coombes Primary School and part of the arable field to the east. It has a combined area of 5.52ha. The western field is referred to below as Parcel A and the eastern portion as Parcel B as shown on the Aerial Photograph in **Appendix A**. A derelict agricultural vehicle was present near the western corner of Parcel A at the time of the site visit.
- 4.2 Parcel A is bounded on all four sides by out-grown hedges with many mature trees which provide a strong sense of enclosure to the parcel. Parcel B is bounded to the west and south by out-grown hedges with mature trees, but is undemarcated to the east and north. Towards the south-western corner of Parcel A there is a lower portion of the hedge where there is some intervisibility with The Coombes Primary School.
- 4.3 An agricultural access track running off Wood Lane Byway ARBO10 provides existing access to the Site. There is no access to Cole Lane Byway ARBO9 nor between the two parcels of land.

Topography

- 4.4 The Site is located on a gently north-east facing slope which falls from approximately 60m Above Ordnance Datum ('AOD') on the south-western edge to slightly below 50m AOD in the north-eastern corner. Parcel A slopes diagonally down to the north from high ground around The Coombes Primary School. Parcel B slopes diagonally down to the east from the high ground around the school.
- 4.5 To the north east the land levels off either side of Barkham Brook that runs north to flow into the River Loddon about 2.5km away. The other side of the brook the land rises again to The Coombes woodland. Just south west of the Site the landform flattens off at around 65m AOD around the centre of Arborfield Cross. Beyond this the land falls again to the north west and west to the River Loddon.
- 4.6 Immediately south of the Site across School Road is an area of pastoral land which slopes down in a V-shape either side of a small brook from a high point around 60m AOD adjoining rear gardens of dwellings on Link Way to 50m AOD to the east of the area. To the south west the ground gently rises further with local high points around Arborfield Court and Long Copse just above 75m AOD.

Visibility

- 4.7 An assessment of the visibility of the Site was undertaken and a series of photographs taken from public vantage points, rights of way and public highways. The photo locations are illustrated on the Location Plan and Aerial Photograph contained in **Appendices A and B** and on the photographs in **Appendix C**.
- 4.8 From our assessment, the Site is well contained against the existing built edge of Arborfield Cross, with only glimpses of the Site available from the majority of public vantage points. This is mainly due to the dense out-grown hedges with mature trees surrounding almost the whole Site. Although there are a number of public rights of way across the higher ground around Ellis's Hill Farm to the north, they run between hedges with dense hedgerow trees and have several additional layers of hedgerows between them and the Site. Overall, views are largely confined to glimpses from the stretch of School Road to the south west of Parcel B and very slight visibility from the stretch of Wood Lane Byway ARBO10 to the south east. The key views of the Site are described in the tables contained in **Appendix G** and are summarised below.

Near and Middle Distance Views

South

- 4.9 There is a gap in the out-grown hedge near the southern corner of Parcel A adjoining The Coombes Primary School and to the west of this there are some thinner sections of the hedgerow. From parts of the school there are views of Parcel A from the upper storeys (Reciprocal view in **Photograph 1**) and there are some other glimpses of Parcel A from the upper floors of the school and from parts of the edge of the grounds (Reciprocal view in **Photographs 4 and 5**).
- 4.10 The commercial premises adjoining the field containing Parcel B have relatively low hedges with only a few trees. The premises are predominantly single-storied but there is slight visibility from them (Reciprocal views in **Photographs 6 and 7**). There is some visibility of trees standing on the Site from the stretch of School Road to the south beyond these premises (**Photograph 18**). There is no visibility of the Site from Langleypond Farmhouse to the south west due to the mature coniferous trees in its grounds. Neither is there visibility from the stretch of School Road to the south west beyond Langleypond Farmhouse (**Photograph 17**).
- 4.11 From the stretch of School Road between Wood Lane Byway ARBO10 and The Coombes Primary School there are glimpsed filtered views of Parcel B between vegetation (**Photographs 10 and 19**). From the stretch

south of the school itself views are entirely obscured by trees and the two-storey buildings which are especially tall in the style of Victorian school buildings (**Photograph 11**).

West

- 4.12 There is no visibility of the Site from dwellings in the village to the south west of School Road. There is no visibility from the Conservation Area including from the Arborfield Cross War Memorial. The Site is obscured from the area around the war memorial by dense tall trees along Cole Lane Byway ARBO9 (**Photograph 12**). The vegetation along Cole Lane is sufficiently dense to eliminate virtually all visibility of the Site including views in winter when the vegetation is out of leaf.

North

- 4.13 There is no visibility of the Site from the public rights of way in proximity to the Site to the north due to dense trees running along them (**Photographs 13 and 14**). There are views of the Site from Arborfield Sewage Treatment Works (Reciprocal views in **Photographs 2 and 3**). However, there is no public access to these facilities.

East

- 4.14 Along most of Wood Lane Byway ARBO10 the vegetation is dense and there is no visibility of the Site. There are a few places immediately to the east of the Site where gaps allow slight visibility (**Photographs 15 and 16**) but there is not a continuous experience of the Site from the byway. There are heavily filtered views from the upper storeys of some of the dwellings off Wood Lane Byway ARBO10 near the north-eastern corner of Parcel B (Reciprocal view in **Photograph 9**).

Longer Distance Views

North East

- 4.15 Although there is higher ground around Ellis's Hill Farm views of the Site from public rights of way running across this high ground are obstructed by trees alongside the route and other intervening belts of vegetation (**Photographs 20, 21 and 22**).

North West

- 4.16 As the B3030 approaches Arborfield Cross from the north, first as Mole Road then Sindlesham Road, there are views across the fields between Newland Farm and Hazeltons Copse. The views are most open on the stretch around the junction with Church Lane. However, views of the Site beyond are obscured by intervening landform and vegetation, especially the vegetation along Cole Lane Byway ARBO9 (**Photographs 23 and 24**).

Landscape Quality, Value and Sensitivity

- 4.17 The Site does not carry any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality. It consists of arable farmland north of School Road to the north east of Arborfield Cross. The farmland is utilised for relatively intensive arable cultivation. The farmland is surrounded by an intact structure of thick outgrown hedges in good condition. The Site is adjacent to built form in the village but it is not overly conspicuous as it is separated from it by substantial hedges. The Site has a generally rural and enclosed character due to the wooded character of the land facing it to the north. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape quality.
- 4.18 The Site consists of arable farmland adjoining a primary school on the northern edge of Arborfield Cross. It contains no particular features within it which could be described as rare. None of the trees within the Site are subject to Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and there is no Ancient Woodland within the Site or on its boundary. None of the trees on Site were assessed as being Category A in the survey conducted by SJA Trees in May 2024. However, the tree belt constituting the eastern boundary of Parcel A is an intact mature landscape feature. There are no heritage designations on the Site and no designations for nature conservation interest. There is no public access onto or across the Site. There are limited views of the Site from the wider landscape, with the majority of views from nearby public vantage points being partial, owing to the hedgerows on the Site boundaries.
- 4.19 The landscape associated with the Bearwood estate to the north is identified in Wokingham Borough Council's Valued Landscapes Topic Paper (2020) and an extended area that would include the Site is proposed in the Valued Landscape Assessment Topic Paper (2024) and the draft Local Plan. It should be noted that this is an emerging policy and has not, at this stage, been tested at public examination. A substantial number of objections to Policy NE6 were raised during the Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) consultation period.
- 4.20 The landscape associated with the Bearwood estate is described in the Landscape Character Assessment as a self-contained area of higher ground characterised by dense woodland. Much of this area lies within the Bearwood Registered Park and Garden. The Site in contrast is located within a different LCA, J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' which is assessed as being of moderate quality, moderate character and moderate condition. The Site forms part of a distinct landscape on lower ground and is characterised by mixed farmland. Whilst there is some intervisibility with the wooded estate to the north, the Site does not strongly share the same characteristics as the

Bearwood estate. The Site is assessed as being of medium landscape value.

- 4.21 Landscape susceptibility is judged according to the type of development proposed, in this case residential development. The Site's permanent vegetation is confined to the field boundaries including the field boundary running through the middle of the Site. The vast majority of this vegetation is capable of being retained within a sensitively designed housing layout and is not considered to be a substantial constraint to development, although the proposed access will impact a section of vegetation at the frontage with School Lane. The Site's character is influenced by its proximity to The Coombes Primary School on the built edge of Arborfield Cross, albeit separated by a dense out-grown hedge, and the nearby sewage treatment works. As noted above, the existing landscape structure of field boundaries provides a high degree of visual containment to the Site in views from the local area. Accordingly, the Site is assessed as having medium susceptibility to small to medium-scale residential development.
- 4.22 By combining judgements on landscape value and susceptibility, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape sensitivity.
- 4.23 To the south west of the Site lies the townscape of Arborfield Cross. There is housing from a breadth of time periods represented including Arborfield Cross Conservation Area but also some twentieth century development which does not specifically exhibit characteristics of the area. The settlement retains a strongly nucleated layout with its eponymous junction still serving as a local transport node. The Conservation Area is assessed as being of high quality and value with high sensitivity to residential development whereas the remainder of the townscape is assessed as being of medium quality and value, with medium sensitivity to residential development.
- 4.24 To the south and east of the Site there is a mixed area of pastoral fields, low density linear residential development and commercial / light-industrial development lying between Arborfield Cross and Arborfield Garrison. Out-grown hedges are retained throughout. The pastoral fields show signs of sporadic sub-division for horse pasture. This landscape is assessed as being of medium-low quality and medium-low value. Sensitivity to residential development is assessed as being medium-low.
- 4.25 To the north of the Site lies another area of mixed farmland that is essentially rural in character. This area consists of pastoral fields, arable fields, small blocks of woodland and a sewage treatment works. The sewage works are low-lying and visually contained. This landscape is assessed as being medium quality and medium value. Sensitivity to residential development is assessed as being medium-high.

- 4.26 Beyond this further north is an area associated with Bearwood estate. This is described in the Landscape Character Assessment as a self-contained area of higher ground characterised by dense woodland. This landscape is assessed as being high quality and high value. Sensitivity to residential development at the Site is assessed as being medium-high.

5.0 SUITABILITY OF THE SITE TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The proposals relate to an outline planning application for a proposed residential development of up to 70 dwellings together with open space and associated works. A Landscape Strategy Plan (**Appendix F**) has been developed.

5.2 As set out in Section 1.0 the Site was the subject of a previous planning application which was refused planning permission in December 2024 (Application Reference 242421). This proposal was for a larger scheme of up to 95 dwellings which included the wider field in which Parcel B is located. This new application has been revised to remove residential development from the eastern part of the proposal. Reasons for refusal 3 and 4 identified a number of landscape issues in relation to the previous planning application, namely:

- Detrimental impact on the character of the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape;
- Detrimental impact on the character of School Road and the character of the area;
- Poor relationship with and detachment from the main settlement.
- Significantly eroding the open space that separates Arborfield Cross and Barkham Hill, and that separates Arborfield Cross and Arborfield, resulting in a detrimental degree of visual and perceptual coalescence between these independent settlements.

5.3 The revised scheme proposal has been developed to address the landscape concerns previously raised by Officers in connection with the previous application. The proposals have also evolved following feedback from Officers in March 2025. The key interventions are as follows:

- Housing development has been removed from the eastern field to minimise visual impacts on the character of School Lane and Wood Lane; to maintain the existing open space between Arborfield Cross and Langley Common; and remove housing from the immediate proximity of the Grade II listed Langleypond Farmhouse.
- Housing development is located within the western parcel only where it is closely associated with the nucleated settlement pattern of Arborfield Cross;

- A centralised green space has been incorporated into the development proposals;
- Above ground conveyance features incorporated into the sustainable drainage strategy to add interest to the layout, habitat and water treatment stages; and
- Broad verges incorporated into the scheme to allow planting of large stature street trees to add to the treed character of the local area.

5.4 The key landscape principles shown on the Illustrative Masterplan and Landscape Strategy are as follows:

- Access off School Road has been configured around an existing thinner point of the treed boundary to minimise the number and quality of trees to be removed. Any removals will be mitigated by planting of new trees and woodland at the Site frontage to maintain the treed character of School Road.
- New play provision including a Local Equipped Area of Play ('LEAP'). There will also be recreational routes through the proposal, providing exercise opportunities for adults and teens.
- Sustainable Drainage Systems ('SuDS') will form an integral part of the layout proposals. It is proposed that the drainage basin in the north west of the Site will include a pond which could provide new areas of marginal and aquatic habitat. The sides and floor of the basin will be seeded with wildflower mix to increase species diversity. Swales and rain gardens are proposed to be incorporated into the street scene and planted with vegetation tolerant of periodic wet conditions.
- Mature trees and hedgerows on the Site to be retained. New planting will be of native species and include a high proportion of English Oak in keeping with the existing species mix on Site. New tree planting will be undertaken throughout the layout to add to local tree cover and provide an attractive environment for residents.
- Recreational routes around and within the Site. These will offer a range of routes amongst the existing mature English Oak trees, through a Community Orchard and past wildflower meadows.

5.5 The following section considers the potential landscape and visual effects which would result from the proposed development. Where relevant it considers points raised in the Officer's Report and the reason

for refusal of the previous application. The key landscape and visual effects are summarised in the tables in **Appendix G**.

Impact on Landscape Features

- 5.6 The landscape features contained within the Site are confined to the field boundaries. There are out-grown hedges with numerous mature trees along the majority of the Site boundaries.
- 5.7 The Landscape Strategy Plan (**Appendix F**) shows how the Site can be developed while retaining the vast majority of the trees and hedgerows. Vehicular access from School Road would result in the loss of a group of semi-mature trees and 3 ash trees along the southwestern boundary of Parcel B. There would also be some trees lost for vehicle access from the hedge dividing Parcel A from Parcel B. However, in the arboricultural report by SJA Trees all these trees were categorised as Category C and assessed as being lower quality than other surrounding trees or as not contributing significantly to the local landscape. There would also be a small loss of vegetation to achieve a pedestrian and cycle link to Cole Lane. Any tree removal required to accommodate the new access off School Road and the access road between Parcel A and Parcel B, would be offset with new trees to be replanted behind the visibility splays of the access and elsewhere throughout the Site.
- 5.8 Further compensation for losses would be provided by the proposed tree, thicket and hedgerow planting on the Site boundaries, within the development and within the new public open spaces. Overall, the development would contribute to a net increase in tree cover. The new SuDS features would also be planted with wildflower meadow grass and areas of long grass which would provide opportunities to enhance the Site's biodiversity.

Relationship to Settlement

- 5.9 Parcel A is adjacent to the buildings and grounds of The Coombes Primary School which form the north-eastern edge of Arborfield Cross. Parcel B, which will facilitate the access is adjacent to Parcel A, to its east. To address concerns raised with the previous application, housing is no longer proposed to the east of Parcel A. The proposed housing in Parcel A will be closely associated with the existing settlement limits to the south.
- 5.10 Arborfield Cross is essentially a nucleated settlement around roads leading away from the historic core of the village at its eponymous crossroads. The majority of the settlement is located to the south of the crossroads, between School Road and Swallowfield Road and comprises twentieth century estate housing. The proposed housing

would be closely aligned with the existing settlement edge and would not extend materially east of existing built development on School Road. It would be consistent with the nucleated pattern of settlement within the remainder of the village and would be well contained by the established boundary vegetation on the perimeter of the Site. New landscaping and open space at the Site boundaries will provide a landscape edge to the Site and transition from the edge of the village to the wider countryside.

Impact on the Character of School Road

- 5.11 School Road leads between Arborfield Cross and Langley Common to the east. It is designated as a Green Route and has a tree lined character which provides a verdant approach into the village from the east. The road has been closed off to motor traffic a short distance to the east of the Site and users will be predominantly pedestrians and cyclists.
- 5.12 The proposal would involve the removal of approximately 48m of vegetation along the School Road frontage to facilitate the proposed vehicular access to the Site. The access route is proposed to be located close to the school to minimise the impact on the sense of enclosure on School Road further to the east, and approximately 95m of the treeline which extends to Langleypond Farm will remain intact and continue to provide a treed approach into the village.
- 5.13 When approaching Arborfield Cross from the east on School Road, new housing will be set back from the road and will not be visible due to the retained tree line along the boundary of Parcel A and new planting to the Site entrance. The new access point will also be screened by the curvature of the road until close to the existing edge of the village. When exiting the village from the west on School Road, the new access will be visible for a short stretch of the road east of the school buildings. However, beyond this the character of the road and the approach will remain intact. As a result, the sense of arriving and departing Arborfield Cross on School Road will not materially alter as a result of the proposals.
- 5.14 The Landscape Strategy shows that the entrance into the Site will be planted with new native trees and woodland species. This could include a mix of transplants and standard and advanced standard nursery stock to provide additional structure to the mix in the shorter term. Once established, this tree cover will reinstate the tree character of this stretch of School Road. The new homes will be set back from the access point and contained within Parcel A. The build outs on School Road as shown on the access drawings could be sown with native wildflowers to further

enhance the character of School Road; this can be discussed with Council's Highways Officers.

Settlement Separation

- 5.15 In respect of the previous refused planning application the Officer's report stated:

'The development of this part of open countryside would diminish the physical separation between the settlements and incrementally erode and urbanise the gap between them, contrary to the spatial objectives of CS Policy CP11 and development plan as a whole.'

- 5.16 The proposed development would be located to the north of The Coombes Primary School. The proposals would not alter the existing separation distances between Arborfield Cross and Arborfield and Arborfield Garrison, and there would be little perceptible change in the gap to Barkham. As noted above, the proposal would retain most of the green rural character of School Road east of the school and the new development would not significantly alter the sense of transitioning between Arborfield Cross and neighbouring housing in Langley Common. There would be no intervisibility between the new homes and neighbouring settlements.
- 5.17 Consequently, the proposed development would not contribute to the merging of settlements and there would be no perceptual reduction in the separation between Arborfield Cross and surrounding settlement.

Impact on Public Rights of Way

- 5.18 There are no existing public rights of way which are directly affected by the proposals.

Visual Effects

- 5.19 As discussed in Section 4, the Site is well contained within the wider landscape, with few long-distance views available due to the undulating landform north west of Arborfield Cross, combined with the dense treed field boundaries all around the Site boundaries and around the public rights of way to the north west and north east. The key visual effects of the development are summarised in the tables in **Appendix G** and briefly discussed below.

Near and Middle Distance Views

South

- 5.20 From The Coombes Primary School there would be some views of proposed dwellings in Parcel A beyond the school playing fields and open space. These views would be heavily filtered by existing and proposed vegetation. As the dwellings would be on lower ground, views from upper-storey windows would be retained over the dwellings to the wooded higher ground around Ellis's Hill Farm to the north.
- 5.21 From the commercial premises to the south east of Parcel B there would be views of proposed new vegetation, but this would have very little impact on the character of the view.
- 5.22 There would be a change to the character of the stretch of School Road. However, the proposed access road would be located close to the boundary of the school grounds and the current edge of the settlement minimising impacts on the remainder of School Road and retaining most of the wooded character of the route in and out of the village.

West

- 5.23 There would be no visibility of the proposal from the rest of the village to the south west of School Road. There would be no visibility from the Conservation Area including from the Arborfield Cross War Memorial. The proposed dwellings would be screened by multiple layers of vegetation along Cole Lane Byway ARBO9, although there would be a framed vista of dwellings along the proposed pedestrian and cycle access into the Site.

North

- 5.24 There would be virtually no views of the proposed development from public rights of way in proximity to the Site to the north due to the dense trees running along them. Any visibility would be limited to a small number of glimpses of roof tops through dense vegetation. The changes to the view would be minor and there would be little alteration to the character of the view.
- 5.25 There would be views of the proposed dwellings from Arborfield Sewage Treatment Works. However, there is no public access to these facilities.

East

- 5.26 Along most of Wood Lane Byway ARBO10 the vegetation is dense and there would be no visibility of the proposed development. In places where there are gaps in the vegetation currently, from here proposed

new vegetation would be visible but this would have very little impact on the character of the view.

- 5.27 There would be no visibility of the proposals from the Grade II Listed Building Langleypound Farmhouse due to the mature coniferous trees in its grounds.

Longer Distance Views

- 5.28 Although there is higher ground around Ellis's Hill Farm to the north east, views of the proposals from public rights of way running across the higher ground would be screened by trees running alongside them and other intervening belts of vegetation.
- 5.29 Views of the proposals from the B3030 to the north west of the Site would also be screened by intervening landform and vegetation, especially along Cole Lane Byway ARBO9.

Landscape Effects

- 5.30 As set out in Section 4, the Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character, quality or value. It is identified in emerging policy as lying within the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape. However, this has yet to be tested at public examination and has been subject to a number of objections. The Site's main landscape features occur along the field boundaries and consist of out-grown hedgerows with numerous mature trees. All trees at the Site are confined to the field boundaries. The trees are generally of moderate or low arboricultural value but are mature landscape features contributing to the treed character of the settlement edge.
- 5.31 The majority of vegetation would be retained as part of the proposed development, however a group of trees alongside School Road would need to be removed. This would be to facilitate construction of the Site access. A short section of vegetation would also need to be removed from the hedge between Parcels A and B. However, in the arboricultural report by SJA Trees all these trees were categorised as Category C and assessed as being lower quality than other surrounding trees or as not contributing significantly to the local landscape.
- 5.32 Development of the Site would inevitably change its character from a single arable field and part of a second field, to a residential development with associated open space and SuDS features. The proposed development would adjoin the existing built form on School Road and around Link Way. It would be well contained by the existing planting around the boundaries and proposed enhanced planting especially to the eastern and northern boundaries. The proposals follow

the landscape guidelines for LCA J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay by conserving and managing hedgerows with standard trees, conserving the integration of urban edges, and using appropriate tree planting to help integrate new roads.

- 5.33 With regards to the effect on the character of the immediately surrounding area, the proposed development on the Site would somewhat extend the built edge of Arborfield Cross to the east as a result of the Site access, but the perceptual effect of this would be almost entirely contained to a short stretch of School Road east of The Coombes Primary School. Proposed planting around the new access to the Site from School Road would help to retain and enhance the character of School Road.
- 5.34 The development would have a limited impact on the wider landscape, as the new homes would be closely associated with the existing settlement, and the development would benefit from firm, clear boundaries to the wider countryside. The new dwellings would be set within the retained landscape framework strengthened by additional tree planting to enhance the treed character of the edge of the village. The proposals would be extremely well-contained in views from public locations. Consequently, landscape effects on the wider countryside would be limited. There would be no intervisibility with the Bearwood estate.
- 5.35 The emerging local plan identifies the Site within the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape. As set out in the preceding section this is largely centred on the Registered Park and Garden at The Bearwood Estate. The Bearwood estate lies within LCA L1 'Bearwood Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' which is characterised by woodland on higher ground and is assessed as being of high landscape quality in the Landscape Character Assessment. In contrast the Site lies within LCA J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' which is characterised by mixed farmland on lower ground and is assessed as being of moderate quality and condition. The valued landscape attributes relating to the Site appear largely to derive from its intervisibility with the higher ground in the Bearwood estate. Whilst the Site has a rural character, with some intervisibility with the neighbouring school buildings, the valued characteristics are less evident within the Site and neighbouring farmland than within the Bearwood estate to the north.
- 5.36 Based on the principles of the development set out at the beginning of this section, we consider that the Site can be developed while retaining the majority of the Site's established landscape framework, and without resulting in significant adverse harm to the landscape and visual character of the surrounding countryside. The proposals also include

new landscaping at the periphery of the Site and within the site layout which will add to the treed character of the local area, and once established minimise any effects on the character of a short stretch of School Road. A summary table detailing the anticipated Landscape Effects can be found in **Appendix G**.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Site consists of arable farmland on the north eastern edge of Arborfield Cross. It comprises two parcels of land on the north eastern edge of Arborfield Cross (Parcels A and B as shown on the aerial photograph in **Appendix A**). Parcel A comprises a field located immediately to the north of The Coombes Primary School; Parcel B comprises the south west corner of a second field located immediately north of School Road.
- 6.2 The proposals comprise an outline planning application for a residential development of up to 70 dwellings together with open space and associated works. Proposed access is to be taken of School Road to the south.
- 6.3 The Site was the subject of a previous planning application which was refused planning permission in December 2024 (Application Reference 242421). This proposal was for a larger scheme of up to 95 dwellings which included the wider field in which Parcel B is located. This new application has been substantially revised to address landscape concerns raised by the Council in respect of the previous application. It has also been informed by advice received by Officer's at the Council.
- 6.4 The Site does not carry any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality. The farmland is utilised for relatively intensive arable cultivation, and is surrounded by an intact structure of thick outgrown hedges in good condition. The Site is adjacent to The Coombes Primary School at the north east edge of the village. It has a generally rural and enclosed character. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape quality.
- 6.5 The Site is well contained against the existing built edge of Arborfield Cross, with only glimpsed views of the Site available from the majority of public vantage points. This is mainly due to the dense out-grown hedges with mature trees surrounding the Site. Although there are a number of public rights of way across the higher ground around Ellis's Hill Farm to the north, they run between hedges with dense hedgerow trees and have several additional layers of hedgerows between them and the Site. Overall, views are largely confined to glimpses from the stretch of School Road to the south west of Parcel B and partial visibility from the stretch of Wood Lane Byway ARBO10 to the south east.
- 6.6 A Landscape Strategy Plan has been developed for the Site (**Appendix F**) which shows how the Site can be developed while retaining the vast majority of the trees and hedgerows. Vehicular access from School Road would result in the loss of a group of trees along the southwestern

boundary of Parcel B. There would also be some trees lost for vehicle access from the hedge dividing Parcel A from Parcel B. However, all of these trees were categorised as Category C and assessed as being lower quality than other surrounding trees and do not contribute significantly to the local landscape. These losses would be offset with new trees to be replanted behind the visibility splays of the access and elsewhere throughout the Site. There would be a localised effect on the character of the Site and its immediate surroundings, although the well contained nature of the Site would minimise the effect on the character of the wider landscape.

- 6.7 The new dwellings would be well contained by retained vegetation to the boundaries and that within the wider surrounding landscape, limiting the extent of visual effects to users of School Road and the adjacent Coombes Primary School. New structural thicket and trees planting is proposed to strengthen the existing Site boundaries which, together with new tree planting through the development, will reduce the level of visual effects as it matures.
- 6.8 As set out in this assessment, the proposed development at the Site would be closely associated with the existing edge of Arborfield Cross and very well contained in views from the wider area. Landscape effects on the character of the countryside beyond the Site would be limited.

Appendix A

Aerial Photograph
(Showing near distance photo locations)



 Site Boundary  Photo Locations



Dixies Barns, High Street,
Ashwell, Hertfordshire SG7 5NT

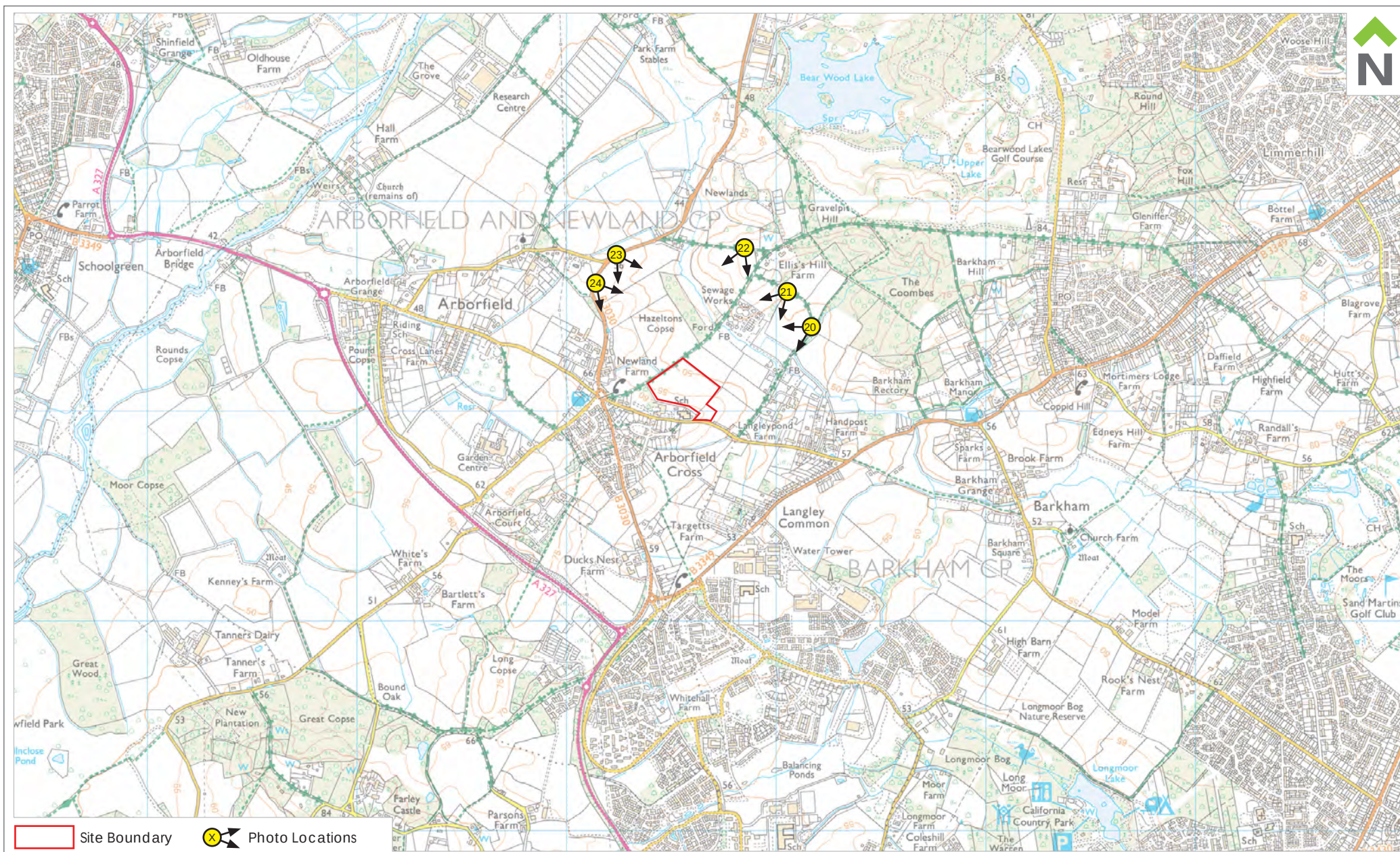
t 01462 743647
e ashwell@csaenvironmental.co.uk
w csaenvironmental.co.uk

Project	Land North of School Road, Arborfield Cross, Wokingham
Drawing Title	Aerial Photograph
Client	Croudace Homes

Date	February 2025	Drawing No.	CSA/6541/111
Scale @ A4	NTS	Rev	A
Drawn	JP	Checked	CA

Appendix B

Site Location Plan
(Showing middle to long distance photo locations)



Dixies Barns, High Street,
Ashwell, Hertfordshire SG7 5NT

t 01462 743647
e ashwell@csaenvironmental.co.uk
w csaenvironmental.co.uk

Project	Land North of School Road, Arborfield Cross, Wokingham
Drawing Title	Site Location Plan
Client	Croudace Homes

Date	February 2025	Drawing No.	CSA/6541/110
Scale @ A4	NTS	Rev	-
Drawn	JP	Checked	CA