



Shinfield Park, Reading

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

On behalf of **Wrenbridge (FRELD Reading) LLP**

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Visual Material

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 Stantec was commissioned by Wrenbridge (FRELD Reading) LLP to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) regarding development on land at Shinfield Park, Reading ('the Site'), in relation to redevelopment of the Site for flexible employment use (Use Class E(g)(ii)-(iii)/B2/B8) together with associated servicing areas, parking, landscaping and other associated works ('the Proposed Development').
- 1.1.2 The objectives of this document are to provide a background to the identified opportunities and constraints and to explain the rationale behind the proposed landscape strategy in terms of the landscape character and visual qualities and envelope of the Site and its surroundings. The work undertaken includes an appraisal of the existing landscape features and character, a visual appraisal of the Site and its context, the planning policy context and the published landscape character evidence. It outlines the landscape strategy for the Proposed Development and appraises the landscape and visual receptors likely to be affected as a result of the Proposed Development.

1.2 Methodology

- 1.2.1 The methodology employed in carrying out the LVA of the Proposed Development has been drawn from the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* 3rd Edition (2013) (GLVIA3). The aim of these guidelines is to set high standards for the scope and content of LVIAs and to establish certain principles that will help to achieve consistency, credibility, transparency and effectiveness throughout the assessment.
- 1.2.2 GLVIA3 sets out the difference between LVIAs and LVAs. The preparation of an LVA has the rigour of the EIA process but looks to identify issues of possible harm that might arise from the development proposal and offset them through change and modification of the proposals before a fix of the final design scheme. This LVA has been used as a tool to inform the design process, rather than to provide an assessment of a final proposal.
- 1.2.3 A landscape appraisal is the systematic description and analysis of the features within the landscape, such as landform, vegetation cover, land use, and settlement and transport patterns that create a particular sense of place. A visual appraisal relates to visual receptors, which are the viewers of the landscape, and may include people at locations such as residential or business properties, public buildings, public open space and Public Rights of Way (PRoW).
- 1.2.4 A desktop appraisal of the study area was undertaken, including an appraisal of landscape character, landform, landscape features, and designations, as well as policies relevant to the Site or the type of development proposed. This information was used as a basis against which to compare the findings of the Site appraisal.
- 1.2.5 The study area has been confined to an area 2-3km from the Site. This distance from the Site was chosen based on existing features such as landform and vegetation; settlement morphology and land use patterns. This is considered a sufficient area to establish the landscape and visual baseline and to allow the comprehensive appraisal of the Site and its context.
- 1.2.6 A brief description of the existing land use of the study area is provided and includes reference to existing settlement, transport routes and vegetation cover, as well as local landscape designations, elements of cultural and heritage value and local landmarks or tourist destinations. These factors combine to provide an understanding of landscape value and sensitivity, and an

indication of key views and viewpoints that are available to visual receptors, which are then considered in the visual appraisal.

1.2.7 The Site has been considered in terms of the following:

- Landscape character, i.e., landform, vegetation cover, land use, scale, state of repair of individual elements, representation of typological character, enclosure pattern, form/line and movement;
- Landscape value, i.e., national designations, local designations, tranquillity / remoteness, scenic beauty and cultural associations; and
- Visual influence, i.e., landform influences, tree and woodland cover, numbers and types of residents, numbers and types of visitors and scope for mitigating the potential for visual impacts.

1.2.8 The full methodology is set out in **Appendix A: LVIA Methodology** and was agreed with WBC (via email with Brigitte Crafer in November 2024).

2 Site Context

2.1 Overview

- 2.1.1 **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** provides an overview of the location of the Site within the southern extents of the town of Reading, although it is within the administrative boundary of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).

2.2 Land Use and Settlement

- 2.2.1 The Site lies within the Reading settlement boundary, and the South of the M4 SDL covers the majority of the land to the south. The townscape surrounding the Site is predominantly residential. To the north-east of the Site it is known as Shinfield Park, and to the west it is known as Whitley Wood.
- 2.2.2 The study area is bisected centrally by the M4 Motorway transport corridor, which borders the southern settlement edge of Reading, running broadly east/west immediately to the south of the Site. The Reading to Basingstoke railway line runs north/south at the western edge of the study area. Other highways provide access to industrial, commercial and residential areas in the vicinity of the Site:
- The A327, a principal road running north/south 130m to the east of the Site, connecting central Reading to Shinfield and settlements to the south-east;
 - The B3270, a secondary road that passes immediately adjacent to the eastern Site boundary and otherwise following the M4 transport corridor broadly east/west;
 - Whitley Wood Lane, a secondary road that passes immediately adjacent to the eastern Site boundary and provides access to the Site;
 - Pascal Crescent, Cirrus Drive and Greenwich Road, residential streets 60m to the north-east of the Site, providing access to the southern edge of the Shinfield Park residential area; and
 - Old Shinfield Road, Shinfield Road, the Eastern Relief Road, Hollow Lane, Brookers Hill, Cutbush Lane, Garret Drive, secondary roads, residential streets and country lanes in and around north-west Shinfield.
- 2.2.3 To the south of the Site the study area is broadly agricultural, with three main villages clustered toward the centre. Shinfield lies to the south of the Site, and Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood lie to the south-west. Other settlement within this agricultural landscape is limited to small villages and hamlets and isolated farmsteads. Energy infrastructure is present within the study area in the form of pylons crossing the south-eastern extents, broadly following the River Loddon valley.
- 2.2.4 As indicated on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** there is a substantial amount of new urban development within the study area with “major developed sites” in planning, under construction or recently completed, extending the settlement areas of Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross and Shinfield. Notably Shinfield Studios on the southern side of the M4, to the south-east of the Site, is a distinctive element of built form along the motorway corridor.

2.3 Topography and Hydrology

- 2.3.1 As shown on **Figure 2: Topography Plan**, the centre of the study area is dominated by a localised ridge running north/south within Reading, with the Site being on the southern spur of this elevated land. This ridge reaches a maximum elevation of 85m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), falling steeply to the west and more gradually to the east. It descends to 35m AOD toward the Kennet and Avon Canal in the north-western corner of the study area and around a series of lakes and reservoirs to the south of the canal. The central ridge descends to the same low level of 35m AOD along the River Loddon valley, which runs south-west/north-east across the south-eastern corner of the study area, eventually discharging into the River Thames beyond the study area.
- 2.3.2 The localised ridge running through Reading continues southward beyond the M4 corridor, albeit at lower elevations (50-60m AOD). As such, the study area is formed of undulating topography, for the most part gently sloping but in some areas substantially steeper.

2.4 Vegetation

- 2.4.1 Dense blocks of woodland are scattered throughout the study area, including around the Site itself, within Reading at The Cowsey and Redhatch Copse, and along the River Loddon valley at St John's Copse, Rounds Copse and Moor Copse. Smaller blocks and sinuous belts of woodland also characterise much of the valley, which is otherwise predominantly agricultural.
- 2.4.2 A block of Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland (Nores Hill Wood) borders the Site to the north-west, and two others are present within its vicinity to the north and east.
- 2.4.3 The woodland encompassing the Site on three sides is listed on the Priority Habitat Inventory as Deciduous Woodland, including the ancient woodland to the north, which lies within an area also listed as Woodpasture and Parkland BAP Priority Habitat.
- 2.4.4 Hedgerows and hedgerow trees are typical field boundaries throughout the agricultural landscape within the southern extents of the study area. Field boundaries are generally intact, although in places they are denuded.

2.5 Designations

- 2.5.1 Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) are present in the vicinity of the Site, including:
- Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS, immediately to the west of the Site;
 - The Grove LWS, 30m to the south-east of the Site beyond the B3270; and
 - Pearmans Copse, also a Local Nature Reserve, 300m to the east of the Site, albeit separated from the Site by intervening built form either side of the A327.
- 2.5.2 The River Loddon Valued Landscape¹ lies 1km to the south-east of the Site, and the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape lies to the south-west. There is one Site of Urban Landscape Value² present within the study area, namely Maiden Lake, Earley, 2.4km to the north-east of the Site, although no intervisibility has been found between this and the Site.

¹ Wokingham Borough Council (2020) *Topic Paper: Valued Landscapes*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-studies> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

² Wokingham Borough Council (2020) *Topic Paper: Sites of Urban Landscape Value*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-studies> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

2.5.3 Heritage designations in the vicinity of the Site include:

- Lodge to Meteorological Office, Grade II listed, 185m to the north of the Site;
- Lane End Farmhouse, Grade II listed, 330m to the south-east of the Site; and
- Little Lea Cottage, Grade II listed, 1.3km to the south-west of the Site.

2.5.4 No other designations have been identified to have intervisibility with the Site, including conservation areas, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, World Heritage sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation or Ramsar sites.

2.6 Public Rights of Way

2.6.1 A network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) is present within the vicinity of the Site, including:

- PRoW SHIN10, a short distance local footpath that passes through the north-eastern extents of the Site and adjacent to the northern Site boundary, extending east/west through the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS;
- PRoW SHIN3, SHIN4, SHIN5 and SHIN6, short distance local footpaths within the River Loddon Valued Landscape to the south-east of the Site;
- PRoW SHIN30, a short distance local footpath within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape to the south-west of the Site; and
- PRoW SHIN13, SHIN16, SHIN17, SHIN18, SHIN19 and SHIN20, short distance local footpaths within the wider undesignated landscape between Shinfield, Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood to the south of the Site.

2.6.2 An area of permissive access land is present to the south-east of Shinfield within the River Loddon Valued Landscape, and to the north-west the Shinfield Cricket Club grounds are publicly accessible.

2.6.3 A Green Route passes to the east of the Site, following the course of the A327 and connecting Reading with Shinfield.

2.6.4 A cycle route passes the eastern Site boundary along the routes of the B3270 and Whitley Wood Lane.

3 Landscape Policy and Guidance

3.1 Overview

- 3.1.1 The relevant policies in relation to the study area and the nature of the Proposed Development are summarised below.

3.2 National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)³

- 3.2.1 The current version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2024, and key extracts are set out in this section.
- 3.2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines that ***“the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”***, which is defined as ***“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”***.
- 3.2.3 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions. The NPPF states that the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. The environmental objective is described as follows:

“to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”

- 3.2.4 Paragraph 9 of the NPPF notes that the objectives should be delivered through the planning process but recognises that planning policies and decisions should ***“take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area”***.

- 3.2.5 Paragraph 39 relates to decision making and states:

“Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.”

- 3.2.6 Paragraph 48 of the NPPF also clarifies that ***“planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.”***

³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024) *National Planning Policy Framework*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

3.2.7 Section 15 relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, with Paragraph 187 setting out that planning policies and decisions should look to achieve the above by ***“protecting and enhancing Valued Landscapes”*** and ***“recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services”***.

3.2.8 Paragraph 188 states:

“Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.”

Planning Practice Guidance (2024)⁴

3.2.9 To support the policies of the NPPF, the Government has produced live online Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) covering a number of topics.

3.2.10 Under the topic of Design: process and tools and sub-heading of Planning for well-designed places (Paragraph: 001, October 2019) the PPG states that ***“development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes”***. This section of the PPG also introduces the National Design Guide, which sets out the 10 characteristics of good design, including:

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

3.2.11 Under the topic of Natural Environment, the sub-heading of Green Infrastructure, Paragraph 005 (July 2019) focuses on the natural capital that green infrastructure can add to communities including, ***“...enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes...”***. This approach to achieving biodiverse communities is enshrined in Paragraph 006, which states:

“Green infrastructure can help in...:

- ***Achieving well-designed places...;***
- ***Promoting healthy and safe communities...;***
- ***Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change...;***

⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024) *Planning Practice Guidance*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

▪ **Conserving and enhancing the natural environment”.**

- 3.2.12 Under the topic of Natural Environment, sub-heading Landscape, Paragraph 037 (July 2019) supports the use of LVIA to **“demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on the landscape”**. The PPG also makes reference to Natural England’s guidance on undertaking landscape character assessment **“to complement Natural England’s National Character Area Profiles”**.
- 3.2.13 PPG Natural Environment, Landscape, Paragraph 039 (July 2019) requires that **“in considering development proposals that are situated outside National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty boundaries, but which might have an impact on their setting or protection ... relevant authorities ‘shall have regard’ to their purposes for which these areas are designated”**.

3.3 Local Policy

- 3.3.1 The current local policy for Wokingham Borough relevant to the Site and the Proposed Development comprises the Core Strategy, adopted 2010, and the Managing Development Delivery Plan, adopted 2014. These are supported by Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) including the Borough Design Guide, adopted 2012, and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD, adopted 2010. The current neighbourhood policy covering the Site is the Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan, made 2017. Between 2023 and 2026, WBC expects to complete and adopt the Local Plan Update, which will become part of the development plan to 2040 upon its adoption, replacing the Core Strategy. The Local Plan Update: Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19) consultation closed on 13 November 2024. The council will then undertake any further work required before submitting the Local Plan Update and all supporting documents to the Secretary of State.

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010)⁵

- 3.3.2 The Core strategy sets out the broad spatial vision for how the borough will develop and where development will take place in the period to 2026, and the policies designed to achieve this. It was adopted in 2010 and is a material consideration for determining planning applications, subject to its compatibility with national policy.
- 3.3.3 Policy CP1 – Sustainable Development states:

“Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that:

1) Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment...;

10) Provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes.”

- 3.3.4 CP3 - General Principles for Development states:

“Planning permission will be granted for proposals that:

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

⁵ Wokingham Borough Council (2010) *Adopted Core Strategy*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-development-plan/local-plans> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

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

b) Provide a functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable scheme;

c) Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses.

d) Maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species;

e) Use the full potential of the site and contribute to the support for suitable complementary facilities and uses;

f) Contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping”.

3.3.5 CP7 - Biodiversity states:

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

Development:

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

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

C) That compromises the implementation of the national, regional, county and local biodiversity action plans will be only permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, that no alternative site that would result in less or no harm is available which will meet the need, and:

i) Mitigation measures can be put in place to prevent damaging impacts; or

ii) Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided.”

3.3.6 CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals states:

“The scale of development proposals in Wokingham borough must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility.

Development proposals (in addition to the Strategic Development Locations in policies CP18-21) within development limits will be acceptable in:

1) The major development locations of Earley, Green Park, Shinfield (North of M4), Twyford, Winnersh, Wokingham and Woodley..."

3.3.7 CP19 – South of the M4 Strategic Development Location

"Within the areas identified South of the M4 motorway, a sustainable, well-designed mixed-use development will be delivered by 2026 including:

- i. Phased delivery of around 2,500 dwellings including affordable homes in accordance with policy CP5;***
- ii. Appropriate employment;***
- iii. Appropriate retail facilities;***
- iv. Social and physical infrastructure ...;***
- v. Measures to maintain separation of these settlements from each other and from Green Park Business Park (Reading), settlements within the administrative Borough of Reading, Shinfield (North of M4) and Swallowfield;***
- vi. Necessary measures to avoid and mitigate the impact of development upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area ... will include sufficient Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace;***
- vii. Improvements to highway capacity along the A327 (on routes to Reading and the M3, including Shinfield eastern relief road) and the A33 (route to Reading);***
- viii. measures to improve accessibility by non-car transport modes along the A327 and A33 corridors and routes to the stations at Green Park and Winnersh Triangle; and***
- ix. Provision of a Park and Ride in line with CP10."***

Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Plan SPD (2014)⁶

3.3.8 The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan is an important part of implementing the adopted Core Strategy, and adds extra detail to the policies within the Core Strategy. Together, these two documents set out how the Borough will develop up until 2026.

⁶ Wokingham Borough Council (2014) *Adopted Managing Development Delivery Plan*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-development-plan/local-plans> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

3.3.9 Policy CC02: Development Limits states:

“2. Planning permission for proposals at the edge of settlements will only be granted where they can demonstrate that the development, including boundary treatments, is within development limits and respects the transition between the built up area and the open countryside by taking account of the character of the adjacent countryside and landscape.”

3.3.10 Policy CC03: Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping states:

“1. Green Routes and Green Route Enhancement Areas are defined on the Policies Map.

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

a) Provide new or protect and enhance the Borough’s Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development;

b) Promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green corridors including public rights of way such as footpaths, cycleways and bridleways;

c) Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside;

d) Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features;

e) Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.

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

3.3.11 Policy TB21: Landscape Character states:

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

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

3.3.12 Policy TB23: Biodiversity and Development states:

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

a) Provide opportunities, including through design, layout and landscaping to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing;

b) Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation;

c) Ensure that all existing and new developments are ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network."

Wokingham Borough Design Guide SPD (2012)⁷

3.3.13 The Borough Design Guide SPD brings together, updates and extends previous guidance in line with the Adopted Core Strategy. The Guide was prepared to help deliver the vision and objectives of the Borough. The overall aim is to enhance the quality of development and make sure proposals are of the highest quality of design.

3.3.14 With regard to general principles, the Guide states:

"G1: Development must respond positively to its site and local context, including;

- *Topography and orientation of the site;*
- *Existing natural and landscape features of value, including the countryside, the Green Belt, mature trees, hedges and field patterns, ponds, rivers and wetlands etc;*
- *Heritage assets and their settings, for instance archaeological features, listed buildings, historic parks and gardens and conservation areas;*
- *The local settlement pattern and network of routes; and*
- *Neighbouring properties.*

G2: Development must create a sense of place that responds positively to the character of the local area in terms of urban design, architecture, landscape and public realm qualities.

G3: Development proposals should where possible create, or add to, a connected network for movement that is easy to navigate, safe and comfortable to use, for all modes of transport. In particular, design should promote walking and cycling, and public transport access.

G4: Development proposals should connect places together, in particular providing safe pedestrian and cycle links between residential areas, community facilities and services, open spaces and local employment opportunities.

G5: Development proposals must be designed to create a sense of place, with an attractive, safe, public realm that is accessible to all.

⁷ Wokingham Borough Council (2012) *Borough Design Guide*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-planning-guidance> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

G6: Development proposals must be designed to provide high quality, functional, accessible, secure and adaptable buildings for their users.

G8: Development proposals should minimise their environmental impact and, where mitigation is necessary, this should be designed into proposals as a positive feature, wherever possible.”

3.3.15 With regard to non-residential development, the Guide states:

“NR1: Non-residential development should be designed to respond to and exploit key features or characteristics of the site and the local context.

NR2: Non-residential development should be designed to contribute towards improving the character and quality of the area. Proposals will be required to demonstrate the appropriateness of the approach in each case.

NR3: Developments must be arranged to create a positive impression on arrival for people arriving by all modes of transport.

NR4: Buildings should address the street.

NR5: Building height, bulk and massing should be designed to relate well to the local context.

NR6: Where there are significant differences in height and/ or bulk between immediately neighbouring buildings, the design approach must moderate its impact.

NR7: Roofs and roofscapes need to be carefully designed in relation to the context, and should respond to their visibility.

NR8: The approach to materials should generally be a simple one, focusing on high quality materials and components, with the appropriate level of intricacy and detail being guided by the nature of the viewer experience.

NR9: Large floorplate uses must be designed with care to minimise any potential impact on their context and local character.

NR10 Car parking should be positioned unobtrusively and well designed and landscaped.

NR11: The impact of servicing areas upon the public realm should be minimised through locating them sensitively and screening.

NR12: Boundary treatments should form an integral part of the design of proposals for non residential development.

NR13: Non-residential development should contribute to the quality of the public realm, either by creating high quality new spaces, streets or other routes that are accessible to the public, or by enhancing the existing public realm in terms of its safety; convenience and/ or quality. This can be achieved through high

quality hard or soft landscape, street furniture or equipment such as seating, and/or public art...

NR16: New developments must create a high quality public realm and wherever possible should include some form of focus, in terms of urban or open space and/ or local facilities."

3.3.16 With regard to development in rural areas and on the settlement edge, the Guide states:

"RD1: New development and associated landscape should retain, incorporate and enhance features that contribute towards the landscape character and biodiversity of the area..."

RD3: The location and design of new development must respond to and should not harm the setting of the village in the landscape.

RD4: New development must be carefully composed in relation to important views into or out of a village, so that the setting of the village in the landscape is maintained or enhanced...

RD6: The elevations of new buildings must be well composed, well proportioned and well detailed.

RD7: New buildings should respond to the materials, details and colours that may be distinctive to a locality.

RD8: The relationships between public and private space and the transition between them in new developments should relate to the existing character of the village.

RD9: The location, siting and design of new development on the edge of settlements must be carefully designed to:

- ***create an edge to the built up area with a character that relates to the local pattern; and***
- ***incorporate soft landscape to soften the edge of settlements and to help integrate new housing into its rural setting."***

Wokingham Borough Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2010)⁸

3.3.17 The Sustainable Design and Construction SPD focuses on the design and construction of buildings and sites. It also covers issues of spatial planning and location, such as transport and biodiversity. It promotes the use of sustainable techniques and materials in the construction of buildings and structures through 12 Sustainability Issues.

3.3.18 Sustainability Issue 6: Biodiversity states:

"The Council will encourage opportunities to be taken to retain and enhance existing habitats in addition to areas of new landscaping. Where a significant impact on biodiversity is likely or probable, an ecological assessment will be required. Further guidance can be found in Policy CP7 (Biodiversity) and CP8

⁸ Wokingham Borough Council (2010) *Sustainable Design and Construction*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-planning-guidance> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

(Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area) of the adopted Core Strategy.

Sustainability Statements are required to provide details of how the proposal has addressed existing biodiversity value. It should also show where biodiversity requirements have been designed in, not only for adequate mitigation (where required) but also to show where appropriate thought has been made to enhancements across the site. In such circumstances, where an EIA is required, the Sustainability Statement need not repeat the relevant EIA chapter on biodiversity."

Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan (2017)⁹

3.3.19 The Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan covers the period from 2016 through to 2026 and sets out policies relating to use of land and planning decisions.

3.3.20 Policy 1: Location of Development states:

"In Shinfield Parish, development within the Development limits (as illustrated in Fig 2), will be supported; development adjacent to the Development Limits will only be supported where the benefits of the development outweigh its adverse impacts."

3.3.21 The Site lies within the 'Shinfield, North of M4' development limits shown on Figure 2 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

3.3.22 Policy 2: General Design Principles states:

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

1) Use of quality materials that complement the established built environment around the development site;

2) Compatibility with the scale and features of existing buildings in the locality;

3) Creation of suitable site layout that provides sufficient spacing between buildings to maintain privacy and amenity for any new and existing residential properties;

4) Allowance of appropriate space for hard and soft landscape works, particularly at settlement boundaries, in the public realm and along designated green routes and green route enhancement areas;

5) Provision of appropriately high quality and high specification sustainable landscape works and tree planting, particularly at settlement boundaries, in the public realm and along designated green routes and green route enhancement areas (existing and proposed);

⁹ Shinfield Parish Council (2017) *Neighbourhood Plan*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-development-plan/neighbourhood-development-plans> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

6) Where appropriate, provision of suitable and unobtrusive storage facilities for refuse and recycling;

7) Design of road and service layouts to ensure the sustainable retention, where appropriate, of existing landscape features, including trees and historic landscape features, and to allow space for new sustainable landscape works without the need for maintenance and upgrades to services damaging landscape works, as they mature;

8) Relevant adopted Village Character or Design Statement;

9) Designing out opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour."

3.3.23 Policy 6: Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland states:

"New build development will be supported where it can be demonstrated that:

1) Hedgerows which are appropriate for retention, as determined by the assessment of a survey of affected hedgerows to be carried out by the developer, due to their age or ecological value or in order to screen other development or land use, will have a buffer zone of sufficient width to ensure that the value provided by that hedgerow (as determined by the survey) is adequately preserved. Any buffer zone will be measured from the central stem of the hedge and will be comprised, usually on both sides, of soft landscaping that excludes any residential curtilage;

2) Habitats of Principal Importance in England (Section 41 Habitats under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)), which are appropriate for retention and which are shown to have significant ecological importance as determined by the assessment of a survey of affected habitats to be carried out by the developer, will have a buffer zone of sufficient width to preserve that ecological value (as determined by the survey). This will be comprised of soft landscaping that excludes any residential curtilage. Where habitats meet the description of a section 41 Habitat type and are being retained but do not currently support significant ecological value, the developer should, where possible, put forward proposed management or other enhancement measures to improve the future ecological value of that habitat;

3) Ancient Woodlands, Local Wildlife Sites and ponds which are appropriate for retention, as determined by the assessment of a survey of affected woodlands, wildlife sites or ponds to be carried out by the developer, will have a buffer zone of sufficient width to preserve the ecological value of that feature. For Ancient Woodlands, buffers should normally be of a minimum 15m width in accordance with Natural England's Standing Guidance for Ancient Woodlands, except where surveys identify the need for additional width to address a particular sensitivity, or where an alternative width can be justified under paragraph 118 of the NPPF. The optimal composition of buffers will vary depending on the feature being protected, but for Ancient Woodland will normally

include an element of native woodland and scrub planting that grades into other habitats such as tall flower-rich grasslands, which excludes any residential curtilage;

4) All buffer zones should consist of appropriate native species and where appropriate should be designed in such a way as to encourage public access and enjoyment of the zone and with appropriate provision for its maintenance."

3.3.24 Policy 7: Biodiversity states:

"New build development will be supported where it can be demonstrated that:

1) The scheme, where practical, provides biodiversity enhancement through the creation of new areas of Habitats of Principal Importance in England (Section 41 Habitats under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)) such as woodlands, ponds, hedgerows and wildflower grasslands.

2) The scheme provides biodiversity enhancement through the provision of additional bat roosting and bird nesting opportunities, hibernacula and 'Bug hotels'.

3) The scheme provides biodiversity enhancement through the provision of suitable wildlife corridors¹ to ensure that the development site retains or enhances its ecological permeability.

4) The scheme provides biodiversity enhancement for garden dwelling species such as hedgehogs through the provision of suitable residential boundary treatments."

3.3.25 Policy 11: Commercial Development states:

"1) Proposals for (or that incorporate) employment uses may be supported where they do not conflict with other policies and it can be demonstrated that:

A) The scheme will not result in any net loss of dwellings

B) The scale of the development would complement the local area

C) The proposals will not result in an unacceptable loss of amenity for neighbouring land uses

D) The proposal will not cause an adverse impact on highway safety

E) The scheme will contribute to the development of local employment and innovation (e.g. through the creation of live-work units)

F) The scheme will retain and enhance green routes and green route enhancement areas (existing and proposed) where relevant

2) In cases where new development would result in the loss of commercial premises that fall under Classes A and B of the Use

Classes Order (2005), and where planning permission is required for the change of use, proposals may be supported where they demonstrate that the commercial use of the premises is no longer viable (e.g. through continued vacancy and evidence of competitive marketing for an appropriate time period, at an appropriate price, and in an appropriate location)."

4 Published Landscape Character Evidence

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 The landscape character assessment approach is a descriptive approach that seeks to identify and define the distinct character of landscapes that make up the country. This approach recognises the intrinsic value of all landscapes, not just 'special' landscapes, as contributing factors in people's quality of life, in accordance with the European Landscape Convention. It also ensures that account is taken of the different roles and character of different areas, in accordance with the NPPF. The description of each landscape is used as a basis for evaluation, in order to make judgements to guide, for example, development or landscape management. The various landscape areas are shown on **Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan**.

4.2 National Landscape Character

- 4.2.1 As part of Natural England's responsibilities in delivering the Natural Environment White Paper, Biodiversity 2020 and the European Landscape Convention, Natural England has developed a series of National Character Area (NCA) profiles. These NCA profiles include an outline of the key characteristics that define broad landscape character areas.

NCA 115: Thames Valley (2024)¹⁰

- 4.2.2 The Site is located within NCA 115: Thames Valley. The key characteristics of the Thames Valley include:

- ***"Flat and low-lying land, rising to low, river-terraced hills..."***
- ***Woodlands characterise the north-western area, with the wooded character extending up to the southern edge of the Chiltern Hills.***
- ***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. Localised areas of species-rich hay meadows provide a splash of colour in summer.***
- ***Although densely populated and developed, pockets of woodland, open grassland, parkland, wetlands and intimate meadows provide escape and tranquillity, and include a variety of habitats supporting important populations of many species...***
- ***The area has an urban character, and there are very few villages of more traditional character...***
- ***The area is important for recreation, both for residents and visitors..."***

- 4.2.3 The Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs) include the following:

"SEO 3: Maintain existing greenspace and plan for the creation of green infrastructure associated with the significant projected growth of urban areas, to reduce the impact of development, to help reduce flooding issues, and to strengthen access and recreation opportunities. Seek links from urban areas to wider

¹⁰ Natural England (2024) NCA Profile: 115 – Thames Valley. Available at: <https://nationalcharacterareas.co.uk/thames-valley/> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

recreation assets such as the Thames Path National Trail, National Cycle Routes, and the river and canal network, and promote the incorporation of best practice environmental measures into any new development.

SEO 4: Protect and manage the area's historic parklands, wood pastures, ancient woodland, commons, orchards and distinctive ancient pollards, and restore and increase woodland for carbon sequestration, noise and pollution reduction, woodfuel and protection from soil erosion, while also enhancing biodiversity, sense of place and history."

4.3 Local Landscape Character

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019)¹¹

- 4.3.1 The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment published in 2019 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.
- 4.3.2 The 2019 Assessment identifies 14 Landscape Character Types (LCTs), each representing a distinct identity and reflecting the range of contrasting landscapes across the borough. Each LCT is divided into a number of geographically specific Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). These share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity or 'sense of place'.
- 4.3.3 The Site is located within the Settled and Farmed Clay LCT, which is characterised by ***“a shelving and undulating landform underlain by London Clay. There are large tracts of post-war settlement, connected by both major and minor roads cutting across the landscape. Areas of large arable fields remain, as well as tributaries draining towards the Loddon.”***
- 4.3.4 The Settled and Farmed Clay LCT is subdivided into four LCAs. The Site falls within the northern extents of LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay, as illustrated on **Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan**.
- 4.3.5 The key characteristics of LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay include:
- ***“Rolling clay ridge above the Loddon Valley to the east and the lowlands to the west, rising to a flat sandy plateau at 66m AOD.***
 - ***Small scattered mixed deciduous woodland blocks and copses including some of ancient origin, many designated as LWS, most located on the steep west and south facing slopes of the ridge.***
 - ***Fragmented unimproved meadow habitats, with BAP priority habitat lowland meadow, are found on lower slopes...***
 - ***Large arable fields with some pasture, with an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow oaks...Smaller and irregular field boundaries...are still evident, indicating early enclosure.***

¹¹ Wokingham Borough Council (2019) *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-studies> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

- ***Remnant parkland...A number of these are clustered along the top of the ridge overlooking the clay lowlands of Grazeley to the west...***
- ***Densely settled landscape, with new large-scale residential estate development around the substantially 20th century settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross, as part of South of the M4 SDL.***
- ***...The A33 form the western border and is very busy, while the M4 crosses the area north of Shinfield, and introduces noise and movement.***
- ***Sense of elevation from the ridgeline and good views over surrounding lowlands including to the Loddon valley and over West Berkshire..***

4.3.6 The valuable landscape attributes of LCA J3 include:

- ***“Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provide a rural character away from the urban areas and provide an important separation between settlements.***
- ***Small-scale woodlands provide visual diversity in the landscape, as well as ecologically important habitats.***
- ***Strong hedgerow network with standard oaks provides a wooded character and visual interest within the rural landscape...***
- ***Views to the surrounding lowlands provide a sense of place and of orientation.”***

4.3.7 The 2019 Assessment judges the landscape condition of the LCAs on a scale from poor, poor-moderate, moderate, moderate-good, to good. The landscape condition of LCA J3 is described as “good” as a result of the ***“survival of former field patterns, the remnants of historic parklands, woodland blocks and the hedgerow network”***. However, it is noted that the ***“new South of the M4 SDL and other development, and urban edge of Reading fragment the rural character of the northern part of the area, while the major transport corridors introduce noise and movement, except where well screened by ground modelling or trees.”***

4.3.8 The landscape guidelines for LCA J3 include:

- ***“Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape. Conserve ancient woodlands and woodland copses. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland...***
- ***Conserve, enhance and manage woodland and meadow habitats, particularly BAP priority habitats and LWS, from development and changes in land use...***
- ***Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries, hedgerows and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas...***
- ***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 impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.***
- ***Use appropriate woodland, hedgerow and tree planting to help integrate roads into the landscape...Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.***

- *Take care in the siting and design of vertical elements e.g. communication masts and the siting and design of large agricultural buildings so they do not impact on the valuable characteristics of this landscape.*
- *Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, including infrastructure, and especially any proposed night-time lighting.”*

4.3.9 The Site is adjacent to LCA I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland to the west. The key characteristics of this LCA include:

- *“Flat vale landscape lying at 40 to 50m AOD, enclosed to the east by the prominent clay ridge of Spencer’s Wood...*
- *Wetland character in parts...*
- *Largely devoid of woodland...[although some] are of ancient origin and are designated as LWS.*
- *...The area includes intact 19th century field patterns in the south and small areas of ancient field systems adjacent to the M4...*
- *Remnant parkland around the 18th and 19th century country houses...*
- *Drainage ditches and remnant wayside commons, now only visible as wide grass verges, line the lanes.*
- *Transport corridors including the A33, M4 and Great Western Railway on the periphery of the area introduce noise and movement.*
- *Urban fringe land uses close to Reading and the M4 include paddocks and MereOak Park and Ride with larger scale development north of the M4... Some agricultural buildings have been converted into small rural business parks...*
- *Glimpsed views of Reading urban fringe...and a wind turbine north of the M4 contrast with enclosed views along lanes and roads created by mature trees and thick hedgerows.*
- *Strongly rural agricultural landscape, which is tranquil away from the urban fringe and major transport corridors. The M4 and Reading urban fringe negatively impact on the tranquillity. The urban glare makes Reading particularly prominent at night but limited development in the south results in dark night skies..”*

4.3.10 The valuable landscape attributes of LCA I3 include:

- *“Rural character of the working agricultural landscape...*
- *Hidden wetland character of the network of drainage ditches, ponds and small streams...adds visual diversity and important ecological habitats.*
- *Remnant historic field patterns...*
- *...Time-depth is provided by the Grade II listed farm buildings.*
- *Winding sunken lanes enclosed by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees and historic grassy verges provide a sense of enclosure and scenic quality.*
- *Strongly rural and remote landscape character due to scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility which results in a sense of tranquillity and dark night skies.”*

- 4.3.11 The landscape condition of LCA I3 is described as “good” as a result of the ***“distinctive flat landform, mixed working farmland with neatly clipped hedges and rural settlement pattern linked by winding rural lanes”***. However, it is noted that the

“presence of major transport corridors on the periphery of the area disturbs the rural and tranquil character of the landscape. The proximity of Reading and the development of the South of the M4 SDL have introduced adjoining marginal land uses. The rural roads are increasingly busy, and informal passing points have been created eroding roadside verges. The remnant wayside commons and wetland and woodland habitats would benefit from enhanced management.”

- 4.3.12 The Site is outside of LCA A2 Loddon River Valley to the south-east, but forms part of the context of the LCA. The key characteristics of this LCA include:

- ***“A broad, flat alluvial floodplain around 40-45m AOD...”***
- ***The River Loddon follows a meandering course within braided channels...***
- ***A wooded backdrop is provided by scattered blocks of deciduous woodland and copses, interlinked woodland belts and scattered mature trees and scrub...***
- ***Pasture and arable farmland in medium and large irregular geometric fields, divided by post and wire fencing, post and rail fencing, gappy hedgerows and drainage ditches...***
- ***Wetland character, including BAP priority habitats of floodplain grazing marsh, wet woodland, lowland fen and lowland meadows which contain characteristic features such as willow pollards...***
- ***Important historic riverside features include traditional brick humpback bridges and water mills...***
- ***Extensive designed parkland landscape at Swallowfield Park...***
- ***Low-density scattered settlement pattern of villages and farmsteads...***
- ***Tranquil and rural character away from river crossings and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas...***
- ***Little public access to the floodplain except for the Blackwater Valley Path which runs south and east of Swallowfield. Busy roads cross the flood plain, including the A33, M4 and Winnersh and Shinfield Eastern Relief Roads, and create physical and visual severance along the floodplain.***
- ***Pylons, residential and commercial development are distinctive visual features in this open and flat landscape, with development very visible along the edges of this character area. The new landmark Science and Innovation Park building at Shinfield is a notable feature in the landscape.”***

- 4.3.13 The valuable landscape attributes of LCA A2 include:

- ***“The naturalness of the meandering course of the River Loddon and wide floodplain landscape which provide a strong sense of place.***
- ***The wooded backdrop of mature broadleaved woodland copses and natural riparian corridors including ancient woodland which provides scenic quality and a sense of place, as well as framing views across, into and out of the area...***

- ***Sparse settlement pattern of farmsteads and the village of Swallowfield, characterised by a strong local vernacular which contribute to the scenic quality of the area and impart a sense of time depth...***
- ***Localised areas with a strong sense of tranquillity particularly in the south, with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies away from roads and visual influence of large scale settlement in adjacent areas."***

4.3.14 The landscape condition of LCA A2 is described as "moderate" as a result of the intact ***"meandering course of the river and the flat floodplain landscape"*** and the ***"remote and rural landscape with characteristic riverside features and important wetland habitats"***. However, it is noted that ***"views to adjacent large scale development and busy infrastructure corridors, particularly in the north of the area fragment the rural landscape."***

Valued Landscapes Assessment (2024)¹²

4.3.15 WBC published a Valued Landscapes Assessment in September 2024, building on a previous topic paper published in 2020¹³ as well as on the Landscape Character Assessment published in 2019. It identifies 13 areas within the borough as Valued Landscapes, being of the highest quality and most value that merit designation as such. Two Valued Landscapes lie partially within the study area: the River Loddon Valued Landscape to the south and east of the Site, 1.2km at its closest point; and the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape to the south-west of the Site, 2.5km at its closest point (although the proposed boundary increases the area of this Valued Landscape, bringing it to within 1.3km of the Site).

4.3.16 The River Loddon Valued Landscape is described as follows:

"The River Loddon Valued Landscape runs the entire length of that part of the river within the borough. It mostly occupies the A2 'Loddon River Valley' and B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water' Landscape Character Areas (LCA) as identified in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019). The valued landscape occupies the generally flat, alluvial floodplain of the river and parts of the river terraces, from where it enters the borough to the west of Risley, to where it joins the River Thames Valued Landscape upstream of Wargrave."

4.3.17 The Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape is described as follows:

"The Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape, encompasses the southern end of a high ridge of clay running from Spencers Wood in the north down to Beech Hill in the south. The valued landscape includes the southern part of the ridge and a substantial part of the floodplain of the Foudry Brook to the west. The ridge rises to a flat sandy plateau at 66m above ordnance datum (AOD) which broadens out at the southern end. The A33 runs north to south through the centre of the valued landscape. The northern part of the clay ridge sits in the southern part of the J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' Landscape Character Area (LCA) with an eastern spur extending into the A2 'Loddon River Valley' LCA to

¹² Wokingham Borough Council (2024) *Valued Landscapes Assessment*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-studies> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

¹³ Wokingham Borough Council (2020) *Valued Landscapes Topic Paper*. Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-studies> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

the east. To the west of the A33, the valued landscape encompasses most of the I3 'Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland' Landscape Character Area (LCA)."

4.3.18 The attributes of the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape are for the most part shared with those of the River Loddon Valued Landscape, as the attributes of both Valued Landscapes are based on the characteristics of most of the same LCAs published in WBC's Landscape Character Assessment. The attributes of both Valued Landscapes include:

- Landscape quality (condition) – moderate, being peaceful, intact, remote, rural and with and important wetland habitats, though with some fragmentation;
- Scenic quality – undeveloped and intact, with characteristic riverside features and a sense of time-depth, though with some urban influence;
- Rarity – containing a number of features that would be hard to recreate, including some of regional and national importance;
- Representativeness – in many ways representative of many lowland river floodplain landscapes in the south-east;
- Conservation interests – provides an important mix of wildlife sites and habitats;
- Cultural heritage and built form – contains many heritage assets of both statutory and non-statutory designations;
- Recreational value – greater access often in areas of reduced tranquillity, and less access in areas of greater tranquillity;
- Perceptual aspects – some disturbance and light pollution along transport corridors, but higher levels of tranquillity and dark night skies elsewhere; and
- Associations – a very high number of close associations with nationally important figures.

5 Site Landscape and Visual Appraisal

5.1 Overview

A landscape and visual appraisal has been undertaken to ascertain the existing landscape character of the Site and to determine the relationship of the Site with its surroundings. This is accomplished through recording and analysing the existing landscape features and characteristics, the way the landscape is experienced, and the value or importance of the landscape and visual resources in the vicinity of the Site. The elements of the landscape that contribute to landscape character include the built and natural form, the pattern of features, detailing, scale, planting, land use and human perception. In this regard, landscape character is derived from the perception of, and action and interaction between, natural and human factors.

- 5.1.1 A visual appraisal was undertaken to determine the relationship of the Site with its surroundings and the approximate extent of its visibility within the wider landscape as experienced from publicly accessible viewpoints (roads, footways, PRoW and open spaces).
- 5.1.2 The visibility of the Site is predominantly influenced by landform and the extent and type of vegetation cover and built elements within the surrounding landscape. Baseline studies of these features enabled the identification of the potential visibility of the Site from the surrounding area to be tested through fieldwork.
- 5.1.3 The character of the Site and its constituent elements is illustrated on **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**. The visual context of the Site is illustrated by **Site Context Photographs 1 to 20**, the locations of which are identified on **Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan**. The photographs were taken in September, October and November 2024. Deciduous vegetation was in leaf in September and October, and partially in leaf in November. Cloud cover varied from clear to overcast but visibility was good.

5.2 Site Appraisal

- 5.2.1 The Site is located within the southern settlement boundary of Reading. It is of an irregular shape and covers 5.5ha of previously developed land. The Site predominantly comprises built form, hard pedestrian and vehicular surfaces, with some trees, shrubs and herbaceous planting. Access to the Site is from the B3270 and Whitley Wood Lane.
- 5.2.2 The Site is bounded by the dense, mature woodland of the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS to the north, west and south, the B3270 and Whitley Wood Lane to the east, and the Shinfield Park residential area to the north-east.
- 5.2.3 The topography of the Site falls from 76m AOD along the northern boundary to 67m AOD at the southern corner. The change in elevation is accommodated through varying the floor levels of the existing building and through the use of battered retaining walls to provide platforms for the sections of the building.
- 5.2.4 At 76m AOD, the northern extents of the Site are at an elevation broadly similar to that of the adjacent townscape of the Shinfield Park residential area, which rises gently to 80m AOD 100m to the north-east. To the south and west the landform falls away relatively steeply from the Site boundary at 67-72m AOD, across the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS, to 55-60m AOD on the eastern edge of the Whitley Wood residential area, which continues to fall gradually to the west.
- 5.2.5 The built form within the Site is known locally as 'Shire Hall' and was built in 1981 as the County Hall for Berkshire County Council. It was most recently occupied by the engineering business, Wood Group. The Brutalist style building comprises seven connected octagonal low-rise boxes

of alternating concrete and glazed layers. It is not listed or locally designated. It is a distinctive and locally recognisable building, both within its immediate context as a result of its scale and architectural form, and within its wider context as a landmark atop the wooded southern spur of the localised elevated ridge.

- 5.2.6 Shinfield Lodge (now the Grade II listed 'Lodge to Meteorological Office') to the north-east, was the home of the Member of Parliament Ebenezer Maitland in the late 18th century. Shinfield Grove (now demolished) to the east, was the home of the Hulme family. The Site was historically part of a wider formalised parkland landscape associated with Shinfield Lodge. The first built form within the Site formed part of the camp at RAF Shinfield Park, which was the home of the RAF Flying Training Command from 1940 to 1968.
- 5.2.7 The Shire Hall building covers 14,229m². A three-storey modular office building (1,061m²) is present within the northern extents of the Site (albeit this has recently been removed and only hardstanding remains), and two single storey buildings (113m² and 114m²) are present within the north-eastern extents. Three other buildings cover a total of 211m². and Hard surfacing covers half of the area of the Site, including access roads, car parks and pedestrian surfaces.
- 5.2.8 Vegetation covers a fifth of the area of the Site, including trees, shrubs, native and ornamental hedgerows, herbaceous planting and lawns. Mature deciduous trees of varying sizes are present within the Site, toward the edges and along the access roads.
- 5.2.9 The majority of the trees within the Site are identified as Category B (moderate quality) on the Tree Constraints Plan produced by Aspect Arboriculture. A few Category A trees (high quality) are present within the south-eastern, western and northern extents of the Site, but the majority of Category A trees shown on the plan are outside the Site, within or near to the ancient woodland adjacent the northern boundary, where their canopies and Root Protection Areas (RPAs) overlap the Site. Several Category U trees (unsuitable for retention) are present adjacent to the Site, and there is one within the Site boundary, on the eastern edge of the Site.
- 5.2.10 Two short stretches of hedgerow, one of hawthorn and one of yew, have been identified on the Tree Constraints Plan adjacent to the northern and western Site boundaries. These are Category C (low quality).
- 5.2.11 None of the trees within or immediately adjacent to the Site is the subject of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).
- 5.2.12 A single waterbody, a pond, is present within the Site. It is artificial, of a geometric layout with hard-surfaced edges, and relatively small, and enclosed by planters containing small trees and other vegetation.
- 5.2.13 Two natural or naturalistic ponds of a moderate size are present immediately adjacent to the south-western Site boundary. Their edges are predominantly soft, formed from tree, shrub and wetland planting. The northern pond is particularly closely surrounded by large, mature trees, and as such benefits from some shading, whereas the adjacent woodland is slightly more offset from the southern pond and therefore does not benefit from shading.
- 5.2.14 None of the ponds within or adjacent to the Site appear to be connected to the wider network of waterbodies in the study area.

Landscape Value

5.2.15 Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21¹⁴ provides in its Table 1 a range of factors that can be considered when identifying landscape value. These are set out below with commentary relating to the Site:

- Natural heritage – Whilst the Site is adjacent to ancient woodland within the wider Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS, the Site itself does not contain surviving semi-natural habitat. The canopy cover within the Site is a natural capital asset and makes a contribution to the wider green infrastructure network, although this is to a limited extent, since the majority of the Site comprises built form or hard surfaces.
- Cultural heritage – The built form of the Site is a local landmark, and the 20th century history of the Site lends it some limited cultural time-depth. However, it does not contain historic parks and gardens or designed landscapes, and it does not contribute to the significance of heritage assets in its context.
- Landscape condition – The canopy trees within the Site are in a good physical condition, being relatively mature. However, there is no landscape structure and the existing built form and hard surfaces detract from the landscape of the Site insofar as there is little landscape remaining around them.
- Associations – The Site has no known associations with well-known literature, poetry, art, TV/film or music that contribute to perceptions of the landscape. The Site's links to historical events and people are of at least local significance.
- Distinctiveness – The Site is distinctive and has a strong sense of place as a result of the architecture of Shire Hall and its setting, although the natural landscape features of the Site are subservient to the dominant built form.
- Recreational – The ancient woodland adjacent to the Site, and the wider woodland of the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS, is accessible to the public via a footpath (PRoW SHIN10) that passes through the northern extents of the Site and skirts the northern boundary. Other than along this footpath, the Site is not publicly accessible. The footpath links to PRoW in its wider vicinity, although their distance from the Site (over 600m away) and the intervening vegetation surrounding the Site limits the visual relationship between them and the Site. The recreational value of the Site is therefore very limited.
- Perceptual (scenic) – The landform of the Site forms the southernmost spur of a localised ridge in an otherwise low-lying and relatively level landscape, and as such is part of a locally distinctive feature, although this is not dramatic, striking or particularly harmonious. The built form has some strong aesthetic qualities in terms of scale and form, and provides a distinctive landmark locally. The Site does not contain natural lines such as river corridors, or visual diversity that contributes to the appreciation of the landscape.
- Perceptual (wildness and tranquillity) – The Site is of low perceptual value, as it does not exhibit any wildness, comprising previously developed land with limited canopy cover, albeit the Site is surrounded by woodland, some of which is ancient (Nores Hill Wood), introducing perceptual value into the Site's immediate context. There is little to no sense of tranquillity experienced within the Site, due to the audible intrusion of commercial and industrial activity internally and traffic noise from the B3270 and the M4.
- Functional – Since the Site is primarily given over to built form and hard surfaces, it does not contribute to the healthy functioning of the wider landscape. Its canopy cover forms part

¹⁴ Landscape Institute (2021) *Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations*. Available at: <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/publication/tgn-02-21-assessing-landscape-value-outside-national-designations/> (Accessed 22 January 2025).

of the wider green infrastructure network, although this is to a limited extent. The elevated topography of which the Site is a part is of some importance in vistas of the locally designated Valued Landscapes to the south and south-west.

- 5.2.16 Overall, the Site has an urban commercial character resulting from the existing built form within it, influenced both by the surrounding woodland, adjacent settlement edge and nearby motorway. The existing large-scale built form within the Site has a strong visual relationship with its open context to the south resulting from the Site's elevated position, although the Site itself has a very limited relationship with its surroundings due to the mature woodland surrounding it.

Landscape Receptors

- 5.2.17 On the basis of the appraisal of the Site, the following landscape receptors have been identified as having the potential to be subject to important effects as a result of redevelopment of the Site:

- The character of Wokingham LCA J3 Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay – medium sensitivity;
- The character of Wokingham LCA I3 Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland – medium sensitivity;
- The character of Wokingham LCA A2 Loddon River Valley – high sensitivity;
- The character of Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS – high sensitivity;
- The character of the adjacent townscape – medium sensitivity;
- The character of the Site – medium sensitivity;
- Native hedgerows – medium sensitivity;
- Canopy trees – high sensitivity;
- Waterbodies – medium sensitivity;
- Grassland – low sensitivity; and
- Built form – medium sensitivity.

The character of Wokingham LCA J3 – Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay

- 5.2.18 LCA J3 has a **medium value**. Although fragmented by development on the settlement edges of Reading and Shinfield and the M4 corridor, the published evidence describes the landscape condition of the LCA as “good”. Views within and out of the LCA vary from enclosed to panoramic, due to the presence of dense woodland and elevated topography. The LCA has some scenic quality in terms of views from elevated recreational paths its landscape character. The area is densely settled and influenced by noise and movement from the A33 and M4. In combination with the varied topography and presence of dense woodland this receptor has some scope to accommodate the type of development proposed. As such, this receptor has a **medium susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the medium value and medium susceptibility results in a **medium sensitivity**.

The character of Wokingham LCA I3 Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland

- 5.2.19 LCA I3 has a **medium value**. The published evidence describes the landscape condition this LCA as “good”, although there is disturbance resulting from major transport corridors defining its northern and eastern edges, and development at Reading and Shinfield has caused increased marginal land uses and erosion of roadside verges. However, broadly, the character of the LCA has a sense of remoteness and tranquillity and is of **medium value**. There is some

enclosure resulting from sunken lanes lined with hedgerows and level landscape which limit long range views. As such, this receptor has a **medium susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the medium value and medium susceptibility results in a **medium sensitivity**.

The character of Wokingham LCA A2 Loddon River Valley

- 5.2.20 LCA A2 has a **high value**, since the published evidence describes its landscape condition as “moderate”, although the majority of the LCA is covered by the local designation of Valued Landscape and has a strong sense of place. Whilst there are views to large scale development, away from roads there is a strong sense of tranquillity. As such, this receptor has a **high susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the high value and high susceptibility results in a **high sensitivity**.

The character of Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS

- 5.2.21 The LWS has a **high value**, since it is locally designated for its landscape and ecological value, and contains an area of Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland. It also has historic cultural associations. Whilst there is potential for mitigation, the time-depth of the LWS is such that any loss of character or features would take considerable time to replace. As such, this receptor has a **high susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the high value and high susceptibility results in a **high sensitivity**.

The character of the adjacent townscape

- 5.2.22 The character of the adjacent townscape has a **low value**, since it is not designated for landscape or scenic beauty, and does not comprise distinctive components or characteristics, although it may be of importance to the local community. It does not lie within any conservation area and whilst there are two listed buildings within 500m of the Site, these are not near enough to be considered part of the adjacent townscape. The composition of the townscape is simple. It has a moderate relationship with the Site as it is separated from it by dense, mature woodland, although there is some intervisibility. Parts of townscape are already influenced by existing large-scale built form within the Site and by the transport corridor of the M4. As such, this receptor has a **medium susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the low value and medium susceptibility results in a **medium sensitivity**.

The character of the Site

- 5.2.23 The character of the Site has a **medium value**, since it is not designated for landscape or scenic beauty, although it does contain distinctive built form and has some historic cultural associations. Given that large-scale built form is already present across much of the Site, it has some capacity to accommodate redevelopment with new large-scale built form without undue consequences upon its overall integrity. As such, this receptor has a **medium susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the medium value and medium susceptibility results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Native hedgerows

- 5.2.24 The native hedgerows have a **medium value**, since they are neither designated nor rare, and are unlikely to have any wider recognition of value. The hedgerows support a number of woody species and tree standards. Whilst they comprise common components and characteristics, overall the hedgerows make a positive contribution to landscape character. In general, native hedgerow is readily replaceable and to have a good potential for retention within a commercial development structure. As such, this receptor has a **low susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the medium value and low susceptibility results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Canopy trees

- 5.2.25 The canopy trees, both internal to and adjacent to the Site, have a **high value**, as a result of their maturity and scenic quality. Those adjacent to the northern boundary comprise Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland, and those to the west are components of the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS. The trees have a good potential for retention around an industrial development structure and it is likely that mitigation can be implemented, although should any trees be

removed, it would take a long time for replacement trees to reach the same quality and condition. As such, these receptors have a **medium susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the high value and medium susceptibility results in a **high sensitivity**.

Waterbodies

- 5.2.26 The waterbodies have a **medium value**. Whilst the pond within the Site is small, artificial and likely to be of limited aesthetic and biodiversity value, the ponds external to the Site beyond the south-western boundary appear to be natural or naturalistic waterbodies of a moderate size and are likely have a moderate aesthetic and biodiversity value, albeit they do not appear to be physically connected to a wider network of waterbodies. The waterbodies all have a relatively simple form, and at most a moderate relationship to the surrounding context. Should the pond within the Site be removed, it is readily replaceable. On the other hand, should there be any damage to the structure or quality of the ponds outside the Site, it would take some time for the vegetative communities to regenerate to their current condition. As such, these receptors have a **medium susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the medium value and medium susceptibility results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Grassland

- 5.2.27 The grassland within the Site has a **low value**, being modified grassland maintained as lawn. It exhibits no scenic or perceptual qualities beyond its intrinsic absence of built form or hard surfaces in a setting that is predominantly characterised by both. None of the grassland is publicly accessible and as such it makes no contribution to recreation. It is likely to be of little biodiversity value. There is potential for the retention of some grassland as amenity space within a commercial development layout. The structure of the existing grassland is broadly uniform and simple. Should the grassland be removed, it would be readily replaceable. As such, this receptor has a **low susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the medium value and medium susceptibility results in a **low sensitivity**.

Built form

- 5.2.28 The built form has a **medium value**. It is not designated but it is a recognisable element within the local landscape, and as a landmark within the wider context it makes some positive contribution to the sense of place and landscape and scenic quality of the area. Shire Hall has no particular relationship to the character or structure of the nearby built form. Should the built form be removed it would take a relatively short time to replace, although it would be unlikely to be replaced to match its current form. As such, this receptor has a **medium susceptibility** to the type of development proposed. The combination of the medium value and medium susceptibility results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Landscape Receptors Scoped Out

NCA 115 Thames Valley and 129 Thames Basin Heaths

- 5.2.29 The Site is present within NCA 115 and as such the Proposed Development will have a direct effect on the NCA. However, the Site forms a very small proportion of the area of the wider NCA, which is already directly affected by the presence of the large settlement area of Reading, and by the existing large-scale built form present within the Site. As NCA 129 does not cover the Site, the Proposed Development will have only indirect effects on the character of the NCA, which is indirectly affected by the presence of Reading and the existing large-scale built form within the Site. Overall, the magnitude of change caused to these NCAs will be too small to have the potential for important effects.

LCAs other than LCA J3 Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay and LCA A2 Loddon River Valley

- 5.2.30 The Site is entirely contained within LCA J3, and as such, this is the only LCA upon which the Proposed Development will have direct effects. There will be only indirect effects on other LCAs as a result of the visual relationship between them and the Proposed Development, and the fact that there is already large-scale built form present within the Site will further limit the extent of

the change to which they are subjected. LCA A2 is scoped in to the assessment due to the high value conferred by the presence of the Valued Landscape across the majority of it.

LCAs featured within the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

- 5.2.31 The Berkshire LCAs cover areas that are broadly similar to those covered by the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment. In order to avoid double counting of receptors, only one of the assessments has been scoped in. The Wokingham assessment was selected due to its much more recent publication date (2019) in contrast to the Berkshire assessment (published 2003).

Valued Landscapes

- 5.2.32 The River Loddon Valued Landscape 1.2km to the south-east of the Site is broadly co-extensive with Wokingham LCA A2 Loddon River Valley, effects on which are scoped in to the assessment. The Valued Landscape is not assessed as a separate receptor in order to avoid double counting of receptors. The Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape to the south-west of the Site does not contain the Site, nor is it adjacent to it. At a distance of 2.5km, the visual relationship between the Proposed Development and the Valued Landscape will be very limited, and the fact that there is already large-scale built form present within the Site will further limit the extent of the change to which it is subjected. Furthermore, the LCA within which this Valued Landscape is located, LCA J3 Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay, is scoped in to the assessment, and the presence of the Valued Landscape contributes to the appraisal of this LCA's value.

5.3 Visual Appraisal

Near Distance Views – Up to 100m

PRoW SHIN10 – Site Context Photographs 17, 18, 19 and 20

- 5.3.1 Transient near distance views of the Site are available from PRoW SHIN10 as it crosses the northern extents of the Site and runs adjacent to the northern Site boundary. Views of the Site are predominantly glimpsed, being heavily filtered and screened by intervening trees and hedgerows along the Site boundary, particularly where the footpath passes within the woodland of the LWS. In places there is increased visibility where the vegetation is sparse or gappy, or the boundary comprises palisade fencing. Where PRoW SHIN10 crosses the access road between the northern car park and the main part of the Site to the south, open views toward both the car park and the north-eastern façade of the existing building are available. Where the route of the footpath is not within or adjacent to the Site boundary, there is little to no visibility of the Site or the existing buildings. Where the Site and its existing built form are seen, it is generally in the context of mature woodland, with occasional views of residential built form.

B3270 – Site Context Photographs 1, 3, 4 and 6

- 5.3.2 Transient near distance views of the Site are available from the B3270 where it passes along the eastern Site boundary. This is a busy single lane road with limited pedestrian access along most of its length, connecting the motorway with the A327 leading into central Reading. Views of the Site are glimpsed to open, being partially filtered by mature tree planting along the road verge adjacent to the Site boundary. At the Site access point there is little intervening vegetation and as such there are open views of the eastern façade of the existing building. Where the route of the B3270 is further from the Site boundary, visibility decreases due to intervening vegetation. To the east, between the Site and the Black Boy Roundabout, the highway is oriented directly toward the Site, such that views are channelled along the highway toward the Site, and Shire Hall is visible above the canopy of the trees adjacent to the Site. To the south-west, views are channelled by the adjacent vegetation along the highway, with the Site to the side, such that views toward the Site are oblique, and heavily filtered to partially screened by the woodland of the LWS. Where the Site and Shire Hall are seen, it is in the context of existing highways infrastructure including traffic signage and lighting columns.

Whitley Wood Lane – Site Context Photographs 2 and 5

- 5.3.3 Transient near distance views of the Site are available from Whitley Wood Lane, a local road serving the Shinfield Park residential area, as it passes along the eastern Site boundary. Views of the Site are predominantly glimpsed, being heavily filtered and screened by mature tree planting along the road verge adjacent to the Site boundary. At the eastern Site access there is little intervening vegetation and as such there are open views of the eastern façade of the existing building. To the east where the route of Whitley Wood Lane is further from the Site boundary, visibility decreases due to the screening effect of intervening tree cover, including the woodland on the southern side of the highway and the tree belts along the northern side. Where the Site and Shire Hall are seen, it is in the context of existing highways infrastructure including traffic signage and lighting columns.

Shinfield Park residential area – near Site Context Photographs 18, 19 and 20

- 5.3.4 From Pascal Crescent, Cirrus Drive and Greenwich Road on the southern edge of the Shinfield Park residential area, there are glimpsed views above the surrounding tree line to the highest built features existing on the Site, which is otherwise screened from view by the intervening evergreen tree belt along the northern edge of the northern car park, as well as by mature deciduous trees within and adjacent to the residential edge. However, several properties are three storeys in height, and in combination with their orientation toward the south and south-west, this is likely to result in some partial views from their upper storeys of Shire Hall, particularly from Nos. 21 and 23, which overlook the northern car park. Further north within the Shinfield Park residential area, views toward the Site are likely to be entirely truncated by the intervening built form on Pascal Crescent, Cirrus Drive and Greenwich Road.
- 5.3.5 No other PRoW, highways or properties are present within 100m of the Site.

Medium Distance Views – 100 to 500m

Residences in north-west Shinfield – near Site Context Photographs 7 and 8

- 5.3.6 Fixed medium distance views of the Site are likely to be available from residences in north-west Shinfield, particularly from those on the edge of the settlement and oriented toward the Site, such as on Fuchsia Drive, Brookers Hill and Newlands Close. There may also be glimpsed to partial views of Shire Hall from dwellings on Shinfield Road, including the northern end of the Grade II listed Lane End Farmhouse. From all these locations, views of the existing building are limited to the upper extents, since the woodland canopy of the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS curtails views of the lower parts of the building. Where the Site is visible, it is seen in the context of existing residential built form or transport infrastructure in the foreground.

Publicly accessible land to the south of the Site – Site Context Photograph 8

- 5.3.7 Medium distance views of the Site are available from the publicly accessible grounds of the Shinfield Cricket Club to the south of Brookers Hill. Views are predominantly transient, experienced by pedestrians using the open space, with some short-term/occasional fixed views, experienced by people using the cricket club grounds for sport. Views are glimpsed to partial, being filtered by canopies of trees either side of Brookers Hill, and partially screened by the woodland within the LWS. From this location, only the upper extents of Shire Hall are visible, seen in the context of residential built form in the foreground.

Highways

- 5.3.8 Medium distance views of the Site are available from highways to the south and east of the Site, including the M4, the A327, the B3270, Old Shinfield Road, Shinfield Road, the Eastern Relief Road, Hollow Lane, Brookers Hill, Cutbush Lane, Garret Drive. However, intervening vegetation and built form filters and partially screens views of Shire Hall. Where it is visible, it is at a distance of over 100m from the Site, such that it appears as a small element in the view, and it is experienced transiently. As such, it forms a very limited part of the visual experience of these road users.

Suburban PRoW

- 5.3.9 No medium distance views of Shire Hall have been identified from PRoW other than those within the agricultural landscape to the south of the Site. Very few suburban PRoW are present within 100-500m of the Site. Those such as PRoW SHIN8, SHIN8A and SHIN9 that are present within this radius have not been found to have views of the Site. Views toward the Site from PRoW SHIN8 and SHIN9 are obscured by the combination of intervening residential built form, tree cover and topography rising steeply to the north-west. PRoW SHIN8A traverses a pedestrian bridge over the M4. As such, although there are open views toward the rising land of the Site, the mature, dense woodland of Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS obscures views of Shire Hall.

Residences in the Whitley Wood and Shinfield Park residential areas

- 5.3.10 Other than in Shinfield, residential property within 100-500m of the Site consists of the Whitley Wood residential area and the Shinfield Park residential area. From these locations, it is generally only the tallest section of Shire Hall that can be seen, since the woodland canopy within the LWS truncates views of the rest of the building. In many locations the existing built form with the Site is entirely screened by dwellings and tree canopies within these residential areas. Where it is seen, it is predominantly glimpsed at most, and seen from locations further from the Site, since views from the closer dwellings are screened to a greater extent by the canopies of trees on the rising ground.

Long Distance Views – Over 500m

Residences on the southern edge of Reading – near Site Context Photograph 9

- 5.3.11 At these greater distances from the Site, the upward slope of the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS topography provides less screening of Shire Hall. However, in these fixed views, the distance is such that the existing building forms only a very small element in the view. From many locations, nearby residential built form and street trees partially or completely obscure the Site. Shire Hall is most visible where the townscape is open, including adjacent to the Grade II listed Little Lea Cottage 1.3km to the south-west of the Site. Where it is seen, it is predominantly glimpsed at most, and seen in the context of residential and commercial built form and highways infrastructure in the foreground.

PRoW and publicly accessible land within the River Loddon Valued Landscape – Site Context Photograph 14

- 5.3.12 As indicated by the ZTV and confirmed through field work, the Site is visible from only a small proportion of the River Loddon Valued Landscape, and only a small proportion of that area is publicly accessible. The PRoW (SHIN3, SHIN4, SHIN5 and SHIN6) within the Valued Landscape have little intervisibility with Shire Hall. Transient views of Shire Hall are available from an area of permissive access land south-east of Shinfield. At over 1.5km from the Site, these are long distance views, and Shire Hall forms only a very small element in the view where it is visible at all. Where nearby field boundaries contain mature hedgerow trees, views toward the Site are often entirely curtailed. From this location, the Site is seen beyond existing residential and commercial built form, with the open agricultural river valley in the foreground.

PRoW and publicly accessible land within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape – Site Context Photograph 13

- 5.3.13 The existing area of this Valued Landscape (known as the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape in the 2020 Valued Landscapes Topic Paper) is limited to land within which no intervisibility with the Site has been found. However, the proposed changes to the boundary of the Valued Landscape (known as the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape in the 2024 Value Landscapes Assessment) increases its area to encompass land within which there is some intervisibility with the Site. Nevertheless, the ZTV and field-work demonstrate that the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape contains only a few publicly accessible locations from which Shire Hall is visible, such as from PRoW SHIN30. This is in very long distance, transient views, and it is generally obscured by intervening field boundary vegetation, and where visible at all it is glimpsed as a very small element on the skyline.

PRoW and publicly accessible land within the undesignated landscape to the south of the Site – Site Context Photographs 10, 11, 12, 15 and 16

- 5.3.14 The wider agricultural landscape within the southern extents of the study area contains several PRoW (SHIN13, SHIN16, SHIN17, SHIN18, SHIN19 and SHIN20) and other publicly accessible land with long distance views toward the Site. These are transient views in which Shire Hall is seen on the skyline, partially screened by the woodland within the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS. The long distance is such that the built form is seen as a very small element within the view, and is sometimes entirely screened by intervening field boundary vegetation near the viewpoint. It is generally seen in the context of residential and commercial built form in the foreground.

Visual Receptors

- 5.3.15 On the basis of the visual appraisal, the following visual receptors have been identified as having the potential to be subject to important effects as a result of redevelopment of the Site:

- Users of PRoW SHIN10 – high sensitivity;
- Users of the cycle route that passes the eastern Site boundary – medium sensitivity;
- Users of the B3270 – low sensitivity;
- Users of Whitley Wood Lane – medium sensitivity; and
- Residents of properties in the Shinfield Park residential area – medium sensitivity.
- Residents of Lane End Farmhouse – high sensitivity;
- Residents of properties in north-west Shinfield – medium sensitivity;
- Residents of Little Lea Cottage – high sensitivity;
- Users of PRoW and publicly accessible land within the River Loddon Valued Landscape – high sensitivity;
- Users of PRoW and publicly accessible land within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape – high sensitivity; and
- Users of PRoW and publicly accessible land within the undesignated landscape to the south of the Site – medium sensitivity.

Users of PRoW SHIN10 – Site Context Photographs 17, 18, 19 and 20

- 5.3.16 Views from PRoW SHIN10 have a **high value**, since part of the route passes through Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland (Nores Hill Wood) and the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS. The most susceptible receptors in this location are pedestrians using a public footpath for recreation. They are engaged in activities where their visual setting is likely to be important and their environment is likely to be one of the main elements on which their attention is focussed. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings makes an important contribution to their amenity experience. As such, these receptors have a **high susceptibility**. The combination of the high value of the views and the high susceptibility of users of PRoW SHIN10 results in a **high sensitivity**.

Users of the cycle route that passes the eastern Site boundary – Site Context Photographs 1, 2 and 5

- 5.3.17 Views from the cycle route that passes the eastern Site boundary have a **low value**, since they are experienced from locations that are not designated and the cultural associations associated with the views are of importance primarily to the local community. The most susceptible

receptors in this location are cyclists using a cycle route as part of a recreational activity. They are engaged in an activity where their visual setting is likely to be of limited importance and their attention is likely to be only partially focussed on their environment. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings is incidental to their experience of their journey. As such, these receptors have a **medium susceptibility**. The combination of the low value of the views and the medium susceptibility of users of the cycle route that passes the eastern Site boundary results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Users of the B3270 – Site Context Photographs 1, 3, 4 and 6

- 5.3.18 Views from the B3270 have a **low value**, since they are experienced from locations that are not designated and the cultural associations associated with the views are of importance primarily to the local community. Receptors are predominantly motorists using a secondary road. Pedestrian use is limited with pavements providing crossing points but not linking along the road. Receptors are engaged in an activity and at a location where their visual setting is likely to be of minimal importance and little or no attention is likely to be focussed on their environment. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings is incidental to their experience of their journey. As such, these receptors have a **low susceptibility**. The combination of the low value of the views and the low susceptibility of users of the B3270 results in a **low sensitivity**.

Users of Whitley Wood Lane – Site Context Photographs 2 and 5

- 5.3.19 Views from Whitley Wood Lane have a **low value**, since they are experienced from locations that are not designated and the cultural associations associated with the views are of importance primarily to the local community. Receptors are pedestrians, cyclists and motorists using a local access road. They are engaged in an activity and at a location where their visual setting is likely to be of minimal importance and little or no attention is likely to be focussed on their environment. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings is incidental to their experience of their journey. As such, these receptors have a **medium susceptibility**. The combination of the low value of the views and the low susceptibility of users of Whitley Wood Lane results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Residents of properties in the Shinfield Park residential area – near Site Context Photographs 18, 19 and 20

- 5.3.20 Views from properties in the Shinfield Park residential area have a **low value**, since they are experienced from locations that are not designated and the cultural associations associated with the views are of importance primarily to the local community. The receptors in this location are people at their place of residence. Whilst their attention is likely to be only partially focussed on their environment, they are at a location where their visual setting is likely to be important. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings makes an important contribution to their amenity experience. As such, these receptors have a **high susceptibility**. The combination of the low value of the views and the high susceptibility of residents of properties in the Shinfield Park residential area results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Residents of Lane End Farmhouse – near Site Context Photograph 7

- 5.3.21 Views from Lane End Farmhouse have a **medium value**, since the property is subject to a statutory heritage designation. The receptors in this location are people at their place of residence. Whilst their attention is likely to be only partially focussed on their environment, they are at a location where their visual setting is likely to be important. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings makes an important contribution to their amenity experience. As such, these receptors have a **high susceptibility**. The combination of the medium value of the views and the high susceptibility of residents of Lane End Farmhouse results in a **high sensitivity**.

Residents of properties in north-west Shinfield – near Site Context Photographs 7 and 8

- 5.3.22 Views from properties in north-west Shinfield have a **low value**, since they are experienced from locations that are not designated and the cultural associations associated with the views are of importance primarily to the local community. The receptors in this location are people at their place of residence. Whilst their attention is likely to be only partially focussed on their environment, they are at a location where their visual setting is likely to be important. For these

receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings makes an important contribution to their amenity experience. As such, these receptors have a **high susceptibility**. The combination of the low value of the views and the high susceptibility of residents of properties in north-west Shinfield results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Residents of Little Lea Cottage – west of Site Context Photograph 9

- 5.3.23 Views from Little Lea Cottage have a **medium value**, since the property is subject to a statutory heritage designation. The receptors in this location are people at their place of residence. Whilst their attention is likely to be only partially focussed on their environment, they are at a location where their visual setting is likely to be important. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings makes an important contribution to their amenity experience. As such, these receptors have a **high susceptibility**. The combination of the medium value of the views and the high susceptibility of residents of Little Lea Cottage results in a **high sensitivity**.

Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the River Loddon Valued Landscape – Site Context Photograph 14

- 5.3.24 Views from PRow and publicly accessible land within the River Loddon Valued Landscape have a **high value**, since the area is locally designated for landscape and scenic beauty. The most susceptible receptors in this location are pedestrians using public footpaths and publicly accessible land for recreation. They are engaged in activities where their visual setting is likely to be important and their environment is likely to be one of the main elements on which their attention is focussed. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings makes an important contribution to their amenity experience. As such, these receptors have a **high susceptibility**. The combination of the high value of the views and the high susceptibility of users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the River Loddon Valued Landscape results in a **high sensitivity**.

Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape – Site Context Photograph 13

- 5.3.25 Views from PRow within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape have a **high value**, since the area is locally designated for landscape and scenic beauty. The most susceptible receptors in this location are pedestrians using public footpaths and publicly accessible land for recreation. They are engaged in activities where their visual setting is likely to be important and their environment is likely to be one of the main elements on which their attention is focussed. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings makes an important contribution to their amenity experience. As such, these receptors have a **high susceptibility**. The combination of the high value of the views and the high susceptibility of users of PRow within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape results in a **high sensitivity**.

Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the undesignated landscape to the south of the Site – Site Context Photographs 8, 10, 11, 12, 15 and 16

- 5.3.26 Views from PRow and publicly accessible land within the undesignated landscape to the south of the Site have a **low value**, since they are experienced from locations that are not designated and the cultural associations associated with the views are of importance primarily to the local community. The most susceptible receptors in this location are pedestrians using public footpaths and publicly accessible land for recreation. They are engaged in activities where their visual setting is likely to be important and their environment is likely to be one of the main elements on which their attention is focussed. For these receptors, their appreciation of their surroundings makes an important contribution to their amenity experience. As such, these receptors have a **high susceptibility**. The combination of the low value of the views and the high susceptibility of users of PRow within the undesignated landscape to the south of the Site results in a **medium sensitivity**.

Visual Receptors Scoped Out

Users of highways more than 100m from the Site

- 5.3.27 Receptors on highways not used recreationally by pedestrians tend to be of medium or low sensitivity. The views experienced will be highly transient in nature and large-scale built form is already present within the Site, limiting any change experienced.

Users of long distance recreational routes

- 5.3.28 The only example within the study area is St James' Way, which is not identified within the ZTV or from other desktop study as having the potential for views of the Proposed Development. If any views are available, they will be from such a distance that the Proposed Development will appear as a very small element in the view, since the route is 2.5km from the Site at its nearest. Any change will be further limited by the fact that there is already large-scale built form present within the Site.

Users of cycle routes more than 100m from the Site

- 5.3.29 These receptors tend to be of medium or low sensitivity depending on the location of the route. No views of the Site have been identified from these locations, and any views available will be transient in nature. Since large-scale built form is already present within the Site, any change experienced will be very limited.

Residents of properties within the Whitley Wood residential area

- 5.3.30 The ZTV indicates that there is likely to be little to no intervisibility between the Site and these receptors, and field testing is not generally undertaken for private residences within the scope of an LVIA. Since large-scale built form is already present within the Site, any change experienced will be very limited.

Residents of properties more than 500m from the Site other than Little Lea Cottage

- 5.3.31 Residents of non-listed properties tend to be of medium sensitivity. Large scale built form is already present within the Site, so at over 500m away the change experienced will be very limited. The ZTV indicates that residents of listed properties other than Little Lea Cottage have little to no potential for views of the Proposed Development, and field testing is not generally undertaken for private residences within the scope of an LVIA.

5.4 Accurate Visual Representations

- 5.4.1 Nine Accurate Visual Representations (AVRs) have been produced by Realm Communications, a specialist visualisation consultancy, in order to assist in understanding the visual effect of the Proposed Development as it will be seen within the landscape. These visualisations are generated using geometrically accurate photographs and accompanying verifiable data, taken from viewpoints on highways and PRow, camera matched with a 3D digital model of the landscape and the Proposed Development.

- 5.4.2 Type 4 rendered AVRs have been produced for **Site Context Photographs 1, 2 and 18**. Type 4 wireline AVRs have been produced for **Site Context Photographs 4, 7, 8, 11, 14 and 15**. A description of the AVR types used is set out below:

- Wireline AVRs: These show an outline demonstrating a modelled interpretation of the location, size and massing of the extent of the Proposed Development.
- Rendered AVRs with Year 1 planting: These show the location, size and massing of the proposed built form, as well as the proposed materials and other aspects of the proposed façade treatments in accordance with **Figures 5704-CA-ZZ-00-DR-A-00051: Proposed Site Layout Masterplan-P4** and **RG-LD-100: Overall Landscape Reference Plan**. The typical height of plant specimens at the time of planting is between 1.5m and 4.5m.

- Rendered AVRs with Year 15 planting: These are as the above, but showing the anticipated planting at Year 15. Whilst species vary considerably, for the purpose of the exercise growth is assumed to be at an average rate of one metre every three years, such that the height of trees at Year 15 is expected to range from 6.5m to 9.5m. The effects of the growth and enhanced management of the existing planting is not shown.

5.4.3 The AVRs and associated methodology are set out in within **Appendix D: Accurate Visual Representations**. The selected viewpoints, including those selected for wireline and rendered AVRs, were agreed with WBC (via email with Brigitte Crafer in November 2024). The viewpoints selected for AVRs provide a range of view directions and distance and are considered proportionate to the scale of development proposed, in accordance with GLVIA3.

6 Design Rationale

6.1 Overview

- 6.1.1 Based on the baseline analysis, including the review of policy and published character evidence and guidance, as well as the appraisal of the Site, its character and visual relationship with its surroundings, mitigation measures have been incorporated into the Proposed Development with the aim of reducing or avoiding adverse effects on character and visual amenity. These underpin the rationale of the scheme layout.

6.2 Description of the Proposed Development

- 6.2.1 The Proposed Development comprises redevelopment of the Site for flexible employment use (Use Class E(g)(ii)-(iii)/B2/B8) together with associated servicing areas, parking, landscaping and other associated works, as demonstrated on **Figure 5704-CA-ZZ-00-DR-A-00051: Proposed Site Layout Masterplan-P4**.

- 6.2.2 The Proposed Development includes:

- Demolition of Shire Hall and its replacement with five large scale commercial units ranging from 14,000ft² Gross External Area (GEA) to 80,000ft² GEA;
- Ancillary first floor office accommodation with ground floor access to all units;
- Internal haunch height of 12m to Unit 1 and 10m to Units 2 to 5;
- Car parking ratio as agreed with WBC, policy compliant cycle provision (including bicycle storage and shower and changing facilities), motorcycle bays and electric vehicle charging bays;
- All unit service yards and accessible by HGV with loading bays, with service yard depths to institutional standards; and
- Perimeter security without undermining access to the Site.

- 6.2.3 The overarching landscape design principles set out in Section 6 of the Design and Access Statement and demonstrated on **Figure RG-LD-100: Overall Landscape Reference Plan** are as follows:

- Retain existing trees, particularly where they are of high value and contribute to visual amenity;
- Provide additional tree planting where practicable to create a strong green infrastructure network across the Site;
- Create an attractive frontage for the Site with trees, native shrubs and meadow planting;
- Create safe and accessible green spaces providing valuable landscape amenity for staff;
- Preserve and enhance green infrastructure along ancient woodland boundaries;
- Facilitate pedestrian and cycle movement through proposed green infrastructure links where possible to reduce conflict with vehicular movement;

- Retain the existing ponds adjacent to the western Site boundary and develop a strong site-wide SuDS strategy;
- Enhance the amenity of the existing PRow; and
- Provide amenity hubs in close proximity to buildings for use of staff.

6.2.4 In order to implement these principles, the strategy for the key areas of the Site is proposed as follows:

- Built Form – arrangement of built form to provide front facing elevations to the public realm, as well as legible spaces within the Site for staff and other users; off-setting of buildings from northern boundary to protect integrity of adjacent ancient woodland; consideration of finished floor levels and retaining walls to avoid adverse impacts on RPAs;
- Site Frontage – creation of an attractive entrance gateway with an enhanced frontage to the Site along the B3270 and Whitley Wood Lane;
- Access Gateway and Central Spine – retention of existing trees providing valuable visual amenity, proposing tree-lined access roads, rain gardens and hedge-lined pedestrian routes create opportunities for north-south green links;
- Linear Park – provision of a new ‘Linear Park’ creating a strong east/west green corridor connecting the woodland along the frontage of Unit 5 to the existing ponds and woodland in the west, as well as visually softening the façade of Unit 1, providing safe pedestrian and cycle access and facilitating the creation of staff amenity spaces;
- Northern Car Park – creation of a smaller car park (relative to the existing large car park) providing opportunities to develop a generous green buffer to the Shinfield Park residential area to the north-east;
- PRow Corridor – creation of an enhanced PRow route around the Site through careful consideration of proposed fencing, tree planting and path widening;
- Green Edges – preserve, protect and enhance green infrastructure along woodland boundaries by pulling back the development boundary and providing green buffers comprising tree, native shrub and meadow planting; and
- A simple and considered paving palette, comprising: enhanced doorstep spaces with block paving; modified reinforced grass system around the building footprints; black macadam surface to all other areas of footpath and to the main access road; and self-binding gravel paths to amenity green spaces.

6.2.5 Following the appraisal of the existing landscape and visual context, and in considering the landscape principles and proposed design strategy, it is considered that the Site provides the opportunity to sensitively accommodate the Proposed Development, delivering green infrastructure that will relate strongly to the wider landscape context.

7 Landscape and Visual Effects

7.1 Overview

- 7.1.1 A Landscape, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been undertaken to determine the landscape and visual effects of the proposed commercial built form and associated infrastructure set within a landscape strategy for the Site.
- 7.1.2 The assessment of landscape and visual effects at Year 1 has been undertaken with reference to **Figures 5704-CA-ZZ-00-DR-A-00051: Proposed Site Layout Masterplan-P4** and **RG-LD-100: Overall Landscape Reference Plan**. As stated in Section 5, the typical height of plant specimens at the time of planting is between 1.5m and 4.5m.
- 7.1.3 The assessment of effects at Year 15 has been undertaken with reference to these same figures, as well as taking account of the growth of proposed trees. As stated in Section 5, whilst species vary considerably, for the purpose of the exercise growth is assumed to be at an average rate of one metre every three years, such that the height of trees at Year 15 is expected to range from 6.5m to 9.5m
- 7.1.4 For those visual receptors whose views are represented by wireline AVRs, the assessment of effects at Year 1 and 15 has also been made with reference to them.
- 7.1.5 For those visual receptors whose views are represented by rendered AVRs, the assessment of effects at Year 1 has also been made with reference to the Year 1 AVRs showing the Proposed Development with Year 1 planting, whereas the assessment of residual effects at Year 15 has been made with reference to the Year 15 AVRs showing the Proposed Development with Year 15 planting.
- 7.1.6 The Site Context Photographs are summer and autumn views, with deciduous vegetation varying from fully to partially in leaf. This has been taken into account when undertaking the visual assessment, with the anticipation that views of the existing and proposed built form will be less screened and filtered by vegetation in winter, particularly in near distance views. Areas of dense planting will still have some screening and filtering effects in winter due to the layering effect of the network of branches, particularly in long distance views.
- 7.1.7 It is acknowledged that the construction phase will also result in a number of alterations to landscape character and visual amenity through the addition of plant, machinery and construction traffic movements, together with the construction of the proposed built form and landscape implementation operations. In this regard the effects that will occur during construction will typically be adverse in nature and fluctuating in intensity as operations progress. However, due to the limited duration of the construction programme these effects will only be experienced for a brief period, thereby appreciably limiting the resulting magnitude of change. As such, they have been scoped out of the assessment as they are unlikely to result in important effects.
- 7.1.8 The assessment of landscape and visual effects combines the sensitivity of each receptor with the magnitude of change to reach a judgement regarding the significance of the effect. Typically, a receptor of high sensitivity subject to a large magnitude of change will experience a major effect. However, effects may be beneficial or adverse, and the balance of these may alter the level of significance, especially once mitigation is considered.
- 7.1.9 Effects are judged on a scale of neutral, negligible, minor, moderate and major.

7.2 Landscape Assessment

The character of Wokingham LCA J3 Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay – medium sensitivity

- 7.2.1 The Proposed Development will have a direct effect on the character of LCA J3, since the Site is within the LCA. The Site currently has a moderate visual relationship with the wider LCA. The most extensive intervisibility of the existing built form within the Site is limited to very near distance locations within the LCA. A large proportion of the wider agricultural extents of the LCA to the south has intervisibility with the upper portions of Shire Hall, although it generally forms a small or very small element on the skyline from these long distance locations. Shire Hall does not, however, have any intervisibility with the wider LCA to the north-east of the Site. The demolition of the existing built form within the Site and its replacement with the built form of the Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another. The volume of built form will be similar to that present within the baseline condition, although its maximum height will be lower, and it will therefore have a reduced visual relationship with the wider LCA to the south, since less of it will protrude above the canopies of the trees that surround it. On balance the magnitude of change will be **small**.
- 7.2.2 At Year 1, the new built form will be less unusual in its architectural style, and as such it will make a lesser contribution to the sense of place of its immediate environs within the LCA. The new built form will be in better condition than the existing. It will have a reduced intervisibility with the wider LCA to the south. On the one hand this will reduce the contribution to the sense of place of this part of the LCA by limiting its impact as a landmark. On the other hand, this will also reduce the visual influence of built form on the agricultural and open part of the LCA. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible adverse**.
- 7.2.3 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established. This will integrate the proposed built form in its immediate context and enhance the local street scene, as well as improving the green infrastructure and biodiversity benefits within the Site. The proposed planting will improve the localised portion of the LCA immediately around the Site, but will not affect the character of the wider LCA as there will be no intervisibility between it and the proposed planting. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible beneficial**.

The character of Wokingham LCA I3 Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland – medium sensitivity

- 7.2.4 The Proposed Development will have an indirect effect on the character of LCA I3, as whilst the Site is outside the LCA, there is some intervisibility between the two. A large proportion of the wider agricultural extents of the LCA to the south-west of the Site has intervisibility with the upper portions of Shire Hall, although it generally form a small or very small element on the skyline from these long distance locations. Shire Hall does not, however, have any intervisibility with the settled portions of LCA at Whitley Wood to the west, and has a very limited intervisibility with the northern extents of Three Mile Cross to the south-west. The Proposed Development will replace existing built form with new built form, which will have a lower maximum height and therefore a reduced visual relationship with the wider LCA to the south-west, since less of it will protrude above the canopies of the trees that surround it. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **very small**.
- 7.2.5 At Year 1, the Proposed Development will have a reduced intervisibility with the wider LCA to the south-west. On the one hand this will reduce the contribution to the sense of place of this part of the LCA by limiting its impact as a landmark. On the other hand, this will also reduce the visual influence of built form on the agricultural and open character. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

- 7.2.6 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established, but will not affect the character of the LCA as there will be no intervisibility between it and the proposed planting. As such, the effects will relate only to the changes in the height of the built form and its reduced function as a landmark and reduced influence of built form on agricultural and open character. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

The character of Wokingham LCA A2 Loddon River Valley – high sensitivity

- 7.2.7 The Proposed Development will have an indirect effect on the character of LCA A2, as whilst the Site is outside the LCA, there is some intervisibility between the two. A moderate proportion of the wider agricultural extents of the LCA to the south-east of the Site has intervisibility with the upper portions of Shire Hall, although it generally forms a small or very small element on the skyline from these long distance locations. The Proposed Development will replace existing built form with new built form, which will have a lower maximum height and therefore a reduced visual relationship with the wider LCA to the south-east, since less of it will protrude above the canopies of the trees that surround it. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **very small**.
- 7.2.8 At Year 1, the Proposed Development will have a reduced intervisibility with the wider LCA to the south-east. On the one hand this will reduce the contribution to the sense of place of this LCA by limiting its impact as a landmark. On the other hand, this will also reduce the visual influence of built form on the agricultural, open river valley character. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible adverse**.
- 7.2.9 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established, but will not affect the character of the LCA as there will be no intervisibility between it and the proposed planting. As such, the effects will relate only to the changes in the height of the built form and its reduced function as a landmark and reduced influence of built form on the agricultural open river valley character. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible adverse**.

The character of Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS – high sensitivity

- 7.2.10 The Proposed Development will have an indirect effect on the character of the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS, as whilst the Site is outside the LWS, there is some intervisibility between the two. This is limited to the portions of the LWS that are adjacent to the Site, as the dense and mature woodland throughout the LWS precludes intervisibility between the Site and portions of the LWS that are further away. The demolition of the existing built form within the Site and its replacement with the built form of the Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another. The volume of built form will be similar to that present within the baseline condition. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **small**.
- 7.2.11 At Year 1, the new built form will be less unusual in its architectural style, and as such it will make a lesser contribution to the sense of place of its immediate environs within the LWS. The new built form will be in better condition than the existing, and the proposed buildings and hard surfaces will be offset further from the ancient woodland within the LWS than in the baseline condition. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.2.12 At Year 15, the offsetting of the proposed built form and hard surfaces away from the edge of the ancient woodland within the LWS will have contributed to the health of this edge of the ancient woodland, which will have begun to benefit from the lack of compaction and restriction within the RPA of the trees adjacent to the Site boundary. The proposed landscape strategy will have become established. This will integrate the proposed built form in its immediate context and enhance the edge between the Site and the LWS, as well as improving the green infrastructure connections between the Site and the LWS. The proposed planting will improve the character and landscape and scenic quality of localised portion of the LWS immediately around the Site, including the ancient woodland and the route of PRoW SHIN10 that passes

through it. It will not affect the character of the wider LWS as there will be no intervisibility between it and the proposed planting. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible beneficial**.

The character of the adjacent townscape – medium sensitivity

- 7.2.13 The Proposed Development will have an indirect effect on the character of the adjacent townscape, as whilst the Site and the townscape do not physically overlap, there is some intervisibility between the two. The most extensive intervisibility of the existing built form within the Site is limited to very near distance locations within the adjacent townscape, including the southern edge of the Shinfield Park residential area, and the routes of the B3270 and Whitley Wood land as they pass adjacent to the Site. A small proportion of the Whitley Wood residential area to the west has intervisibility with the upper portions of Shire Hall, although it forms an element ranging from medium to small or very small on the skyline from these medium to long distance locations. Shire Hall does not, however, have intervisibility with the wider townscape to the north, north-east or north-west of the Site. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **small**.
- 7.2.14 At Year 1, the new built form will be less unusual in its architectural style, and as such it will make a lesser contribution to the sense of place of the adjacent townscape. The new built form will be in better condition than the existing. It will have a reduced intervisibility with the wider townscape to the west. On the one hand this will reduce the contribution to the sense of place of this part of the townscape by limiting its impact as a landmark. On the other hand, this will also reduce the visual influence of built form on the skyline experience from this part of the townscape. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.2.15 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established. This will integrate the proposed built form in its immediate context and enhance the local street scene, as well as improving the green infrastructure connections between the Site and the adjacent townscape. The proposed planting will improve the localised portion of the townscape immediately around the Site, but will not affect the character of the wider townscape to the west as there will be no intervisibility between it and the proposed planting. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible beneficial**.

The character of the Site – medium sensitivity

- 7.2.16 The Proposed Development will have a direct effect on the character of the Site. The demolition of the existing built form within the Site and its replacement with the built form of the Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another. The volume of built form will be similar to that present within the baseline condition. The function of the built form within the Site will change from disused offices to warehouses, and there will be an increase in the activity of heavy good vehicles within the Site. The built form will change from generally monolithic complex forming a single building to individual large units. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **medium**.
- 7.2.17 At Year 1, the new built form will be less unusual in its architectural style, and as such it will make a lesser contribution to the sense of place within the Site. The new built form will be in better condition than the existing, and the change from a broadly monolithic layout to individual large units will increase the Site's permeability and allow open space to penetrate the centre of the Site. The proposed landscape strategy will have been implemented and will have an initial effect on the scenic quality of the Site, although this effect will be relatively limited as the planting will not yet have become established. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.2.18 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established. This will integrate the proposed built form in its immediate context and enhance the landscape and scenic quality

of the Site, as well as improving the functional aspects of the Site including the green infrastructure and biodiversity benefits both within the Site and in their connections with the wider network. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **moderate beneficial**.

Native hedgerow – medium sensitivity

- 7.2.19 The existing native hedgerows (H1 and H2) along the northern and western Site boundaries are to be retained. They will be protected during construction in accordance with BS5837:2012, such that they will be subject to minimal disruption as a result of the works. An appreciable amount of new native hedgerow will be planted throughout the Site. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **small**.
- 7.2.20 At Year 1, the proposed native hedgerow will have been planted. The variety of sizes at the time of planting is such that there will be some immediate impact, although this will be limited as they will have yet to establish. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible beneficial**.
- 7.2.21 At Year 15, the proposed native hedgerow will have become established, with the hedgerows filling out and increasing in spread and height, appreciably increasing the overall hedgerow cover within the Site. This will improve the green infrastructure value of this landscape resource within the Site. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **minor beneficial**.

Canopy trees – high sensitivity

- 7.2.22 The Proposed Development will require the removal of a moderate proportion of the existing canopy trees within the Site to accommodate the changes to the levels, the building footprints and the layout of the access roads, car parks and other hard standing. The proportion to be removed is around one third of those surveyed within and immediately adjacent to the Site; i.e., 40 of the 158 individual trees surveyed will be removed, along with six of the 15 groups of trees, part of one group and part of a woodland. None of the trees outside the Site boundary will be removed in order to accommodate the Proposed Development. The retained trees within and adjacent to the Site will be protected during construction in accordance with BS5837:2012, such that they will be subject to minimal disruption as a result of the works. 371 new trees will be planted as part of the landscape strategy, the majority of which will be semi-mature or extra-heavy standards. The proposed new trees equate to broadly nine times the number of individual trees removed. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **medium**.
- 7.2.23 At Year 1, one Category A tree (high quality) will have been removed in order to accommodate the Proposed Development (T87). Part of a Category A woodland group (W1) will have been removed as well. The other trees that will have been removed are Categories B (moderate quality) and C (low quality). The proposed buildings and hard surfaces will be offset further from the ancient woodland adjacent to the northern Site boundary than in the baseline condition, and the building footprints will not encroach on the RPAs of the majority of the other trees retained within and adjacent to the Site. The proposed trees will have been planted, many of them being native species. As semi-mature or extra-heavy standards, the majority will have some immediate impact, although this will be limited as they will have yet to establish. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **moderate adverse**.
- 7.2.24 At Year 15, the offsetting of the proposed built form and hard surfaces away from the edge of the ancient woodland adjacent to the northern Site boundary will have contributed to the health of this edge of the ancient woodland, which will have begun to benefit from the lack of compaction and restriction within the RPA of the trees adjacent to the Site boundary. The proposed tree planting will have become established, with the trees gaining mass, spread and height, substantially increasing the overall canopy cover within the Site. This will improve the green infrastructure value of the trees within the Site as well as the value of their green infrastructure connections with the adjacent woodland. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **moderate beneficial**.

Waterbodies – medium sensitivity

- 7.2.25 The Proposed Development will result in the pond within the Site being removed in its entirety. However, the ponds outside the Site adjacent to the south-western boundary will not be removed or subject to any works. They will be protected during construction through the use of temporary fencing and siting of material stockpiles away from the ponds so as to prevent surface water run-off and leaching. A series of rain gardens will be implemented in the north-eastern and southern extents of the Site. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **medium**.
- 7.2.26 At Year 1, the ponds outside the Site will not be subject to adverse effects as a result of the Proposed Development. The pond within the Site will be removed in its entirety, although it is unlikely to be of particular scenic or biodiversity value, which limits the overall effect caused to this landscape resource as a result of its removal. The proposed rain gardens will have begun to establish and will have some limited positive impact at this stage. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.2.27 At Year 15, the proposed rain gardens will have become fully established. They will filter surface run-off and contribute biodiversity value by supporting wetland habitats. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible beneficial**.

Grassland – low sensitivity

- 7.2.28 The existing grassland covers around 5% of the area of the Site. It will be removed to facilitate construction of the Proposed Development, except where it is present within the RPAs of existing trees. The landscape proposals include seeding of new grassland across much of the northern extents of the Site and around buildings and circulation routes. This will substantially increase the proportion of this landscape resource across the Site. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **large**.
- 7.2.29 At Year 1, much of the amenity grassland within the Site will be removed, although it is unlikely to be of particular scenic or biodiversity value, which limits the overall effect caused to this landscape resource as a result of its removal. The proposed grassland will have begun to establish and as grass grows quickly it will have some positive impact at this stage. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **minor beneficial**.
- 7.2.30 At Year 15, the proposed grassland will have become fully established. The mixes include tough grass lawn, flowering lawn, wildflower grassland and rain garden meadow turf. This variety in combination with the increased quantity of grassland will substantially improve the scenic quality and biodiversity value of this landscape resource within the Site. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **moderate beneficial**.

Built form – medium sensitivity

- 7.2.31 The demolition of the existing built form within the Site and its replacement with the built form of the Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another. The volume of built form will be similar to that present within the baseline condition. The function of the built form within the Site will change from offices to warehouses, changing from a generally monolithic single unit to individual large units. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **large**.
- 7.2.32 At Year 1, the new built form will be less unusual in its architectural style, and as such it will be less recognisable as a built feature. The new built form will be in better condition than the existing and will have a contemporary character, although it will have less time-depth than the existing Shire Hall. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

- 7.2.33 At Year 15, whilst the landscape strategy will have become established, this will not affect the built form in itself. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

7.3 Visual Assessment

Users of PRow SHIN10 – high sensitivity

Site Context Photographs 17, 18, 19 and 20 Rendered AVR 17

- 7.3.1 Users of PRow SHIN10 will have transient near distance views of the Proposed Development where the route of the footpath passes within the northern extents of the Site and adjacent to the northern Site boundary. Views of the Proposed Development will be predominantly glimpsed, being heavily filtered and screened by intervening trees and hedgerows along the Site boundary, particularly where the footpath passes within the woodland of the LWS. Where PRow SHIN10 crosses the access road between the northern car park and the main part of the Site to the south, there will be open views toward Units 1 and 5 to the south and the car park to the north, which will be smaller than the existing car park and surrounded by wildflower meadow. Unit 1 will be seen occupying a footprint similar to that of Shire Hall, with tree planting and meadow in the foreground, whereas Unit 5 will be seen in place of the eastern extents of the existing car park in this location, with its associated service yard in the foreground. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. Whilst it will change from generally monolithic to individual large units, this will not be readily appreciable in views from this footpath due to the angle of the view in relation to the orientation of Units 1 and 2. The offsetting of Units 1 and 2 away from the northern Site boundary will increase the distance between the viewer and the built form, reducing its size in views from PRow as it passes adjacent to the Site boundary. Where the route of the footpath is not within or adjacent to the Site boundary, there will be little to no visibility of the Site or the Proposed Development. Where the Proposed Development is visible, it will generally be in the context of mature woodland, with occasional views of residential built form. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **medium**.
- 7.3.2 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed to open views, and the landscape strategy will not yet appreciably filter and soften it, although the existing trees that will be retained will contribute to filtering and softening the proposed built form in these views. The proposed landscape strategy will have been implemented, and its variety and structural diversity will be a positive aspect of the change to the views, although it will at this stage not be established. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.3 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established, including the tree planting, hedgerows and meadow within and around the car park to the north, and to the north-east of Unit 1, in its foreground in the views. This will have the effect of filtering views of the proposed built form and softening it within its landscape context, as well as improving the scenic quality of these views. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible beneficial**.

Users of the cycle route that passes the eastern Site boundary – medium sensitivity

Site Context Photographs 1, 2 and 5 Rendered AVR 1

- 7.3.4 Users of the cycle route that passes the eastern Site boundary on the B3270 and Whitley Wood Lane will have transient near distance views of the Proposed Development where the route passes adjacent or near to the Site boundary. Views of the Proposed Development will be glimpsed to open, being partially to heavily filtered and screened by intervening mature tree

planting along the road verge adjacent to the Site boundary. At the Site access point there is little intervening vegetation and as such there will be open views of the Unit 1 and filtered views of Units 5 and 4. Units 1 and 4 will be seen occupying a footprint similar to that of Shire Hall, whereas Unit 5 will be seen in place of the eastern extents of the existing car park in this location. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. It will change from generally monolithic to individual large units, which will be appreciable in views from this cycle route due to the angle of the view in relation to the orientation of Units 1, 4 and 5. Where the Proposed Development is seen, it will be in the context of existing highways infrastructure including traffic signage and lighting columns. To the east where the cycle route on Whitley Wood Lane is further from the Site boundary, visibility of the Proposed Development will decrease substantially due to the screening effect of intervening tree cover, including the woodland on the southern side of the highway and the tree belts along the northern side. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **medium**.

7.3.5 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed to open views, and the landscape strategy will not yet appreciably filter and soften it, although the existing trees that will be retained along the eastern Site boundary will contribute to filtering and softening the proposed built form in these views. The proposed landscape strategy will have been implemented, and its variety and structural diversity will be a positive aspect of the change to the views, although it will at this stage not be established. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

7.3.6 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established, including the tree planting, hedgerows and herbaceous planting around the south-eastern corner of Unit 1, in its foreground in the views. This will have the effect of filtering views of the proposed built form and softening it within its landscape context, as well as improving the scenic quality of these views. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible beneficial**.

Users of the B3270 – low sensitivity

Site Context Photographs 1, 3, 4 and 6 Rendered AVRs 1 and 18 and wireline AVR 4

7.3.7 Users of the B3270 will have transient near distance views of the Proposed Development where the route passes adjacent or near to the Site boundary. Views of the Proposed Development will be glimpsed to open, being partially filtered by intervening mature tree planting along the road verge adjacent to the Site boundary. At the Site access point there is little intervening vegetation and as such there will be open views of the Unit 1 and filtered views of Units 5 and 4. Units 1 and 4 will be seen occupying a footprint similar to that of Shire Hall, whereas Unit 5 will be seen in place of the eastern extents of the existing car park in this location. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. It will change from generally monolithic to individual large units, which will be appreciable in views from the B3270 due to the angle of the view in relation to the orientation of Units 1, 4 and 5. Where the Proposed Development is seen, it will be in the context of existing highways infrastructure including traffic signage and lighting columns. To the east and south-west where the B3270 is further from the Site boundary, visibility of the Proposed Development will decrease substantially due to the screening effect of intervening tree cover, including the woodland on both sides of the highway. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **medium**.

7.3.8 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed to open views, and the landscape strategy will not yet appreciably filter and soften it, although the existing trees that will be retained along the eastern Site boundary will contribute to filtering and softening the proposed built form in these views. The proposed landscape strategy will have been implemented, and its variety and structural diversity will be a positive aspect of the change to the views, although it will at this stage not be established. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

- 7.3.9 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established, including the tree planting, hedgerows and herbaceous planting around the south-eastern corner of Unit 1, in its foreground in the views. This will have the effect of filtering views of the proposed built form and softening it within its landscape context, as well as improving the scenic quality of these views. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **negligible beneficial**.

Users of Whitley Wood Lane – medium sensitivity

Site Context Photographs 2 and 5 Rendered AVR 2

- 7.3.10 Users of Whitley Wood Lane will have transient near distance views of the Proposed Development where the route passes adjacent or near to the Site boundary. Views of the Proposed Development will be predominantly glimpsed, being heavily filtered and screened by intervening mature tree planting along the road verge adjacent to the Site boundary. At the Site access point there is little intervening vegetation and as such there will be open views of the Unit 1 and filtered views of Units 5 and 4. Units 1 and 4 will be seen occupying a footprint similar to that of Shire Hall, whereas Unit 5 will be seen in place of the eastern extents of the existing car park in this location. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. It will change from generally monolithic to individual large units, which will be appreciable in views from Whitley Wood Lane due to the angle of the view in relation to the orientation of Units 1, 4 and 5. Where the Proposed Development is seen, it will be in the context of existing highways infrastructure including traffic signage and lighting columns. To the east where the route of Whitley Wood Lane is further from the Site boundary, visibility of the Proposed Development will decrease substantially due to the screening effect of intervening tree cover, including the woodland on the southern side of the highway and the tree belts along the northern side. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **medium**.
- 7.3.11 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed to open views, and the landscape strategy will not yet appreciably filter and soften it, although the existing trees that will be retained along the eastern Site boundary will contribute to filtering and softening the proposed built form in these views. The proposed landscape strategy will have been implemented, and its variety and structural diversity will be a positive aspect of the change to the views, although it will at this stage not be established. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.12 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established, including the tree planting, hedgerows and herbaceous planting around the south-eastern corner of Unit 1, in its foreground in the views. This will have the effect of filtering views of the proposed built form and softening it within its landscape context, as well as improving the scenic quality of these views. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **minor beneficial**.

Residents of properties in the Shinfield Park residential area – medium sensitivity

Near Site Context Photographs 18, 19 and 20 Near rendered AVR 17

- 7.3.13 Residents of properties in the Shinfield Park residential area to the north-east of the Site will have heavily filtered, fixed near distance views of taller parts of built-form within the Site, predominantly from locations on Pascal Crescent, Cirrus Drive and Greenwich Road. Views of the Proposed Development will be predominantly glimpsed, being heavily filtered by the intervening evergreen tree belt along the northern edge of the northern car park, as well as by mature deciduous trees within and adjacent to the residential edge. However, from the upper storeys of those properties that are three storeys in height and orientated toward the south and south-west, there will likely be some views of the upper extents of Units 1 and 5, particularly from Nos. 21 and 23, which overlook the northern car park. Further north within the Shinfield

Park residential area, views of the Proposed Development are likely to be entirely truncated by the intervening built form on Pascal Crescent, Cirrus Drive and Greenwich Road. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. Whilst it will change from generally monolithic to individual large units, this will not be readily appreciable in views from these residences due to the angle of the view in relation to the orientation of Units 1 and 5. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **medium**.

- 7.3.14 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed to open views, and the landscape strategy will not yet appreciably filter and soften it, although the existing trees that will be retained will contribute to filtering and softening the proposed built form in these views. The proposed landscape strategy will have been implemented, and its variety and structural diversity will be a positive aspect of the change to the views, although it will at this stage not be established. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.15 At Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established, including the tree planting, hedgerows and meadow within and around the northern car park. This will have the effect of filtering views of the car park and the proposed built form beyond and softening it within its landscape context, as well as improving the scenic quality of these views. However, from many of the residences the landscape interventions will not be visible, as they will be screened by intervening vegetation and built form. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

Residents of Lane End Farmhouse – high sensitivity

Near Site Context Photograph 7 Near wireline AVR 7

- 7.3.16 Residents of Lane End Farmhouse may have fixed medium distance views of the Proposed Development. Should views be available, they are likely to be at most glimpsed views seen from the northern end of the building and its curtilage. Views will be limited to the uppermost extents of the new buildings, predominantly Units 1, 4 and 5, since the woodland canopy of the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS will curtail views of the lower parts of the buildings. However, the Proposed Development will be heavily filtered and partially screened by the Shinfield Arms opposite Lane End Farmhouse and the mature tree belt beyond. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. However, this is unlikely to be readily perceptible in views from this location due to the heavy screening resulting from the intervening vegetation. Where the Proposed Development is visible at all, it will be seen in the context of existing residential and commercial built form and transport infrastructure in the foreground. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **very small**.
- 7.3.17 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed views. Whilst the landscape strategy will have been implemented, it will not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.18 At Year 15, whilst the landscape strategy will have become established, it will still not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

Residents of properties in north-west Shinfield – medium sensitivity

Near Site Context Photographs 7 and 8 Near wireline AVRs 7 and 8

- 7.3.19 Residents of properties in north-west Shinfield are likely to have fixed medium distance views of the Proposed Development, particularly from those on the edge of the settlement and oriented toward the Site, such as on Fuchsia Drive, Brookers Hill, Newlands Close and Shinfield Road. Should views be available, they are likely to be glimpsed to partial views limited to the uppermost extents of the new buildings, predominantly Units 1, 4 and 5, since the woodland canopy of the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS will curtail views of the lower parts of the buildings. Views will also be filtered and partially screened by intervening mature tree belts on the southern side of the M4 corridor, including in some cases within the curtilages of the properties. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the new buildings will be of a reduced height, protruding less above the surrounding woodland canopy, and this will be perceptible in views. The condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form, although this is unlikely to be readily perceptible in views from these locations due to their distance from the Site. Where the Proposed Development is visible at all, it will be seen in the context of existing residential and commercial built form or transport infrastructure in the foreground. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **very small**.
- 7.3.20 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed views. Whilst the landscape strategy will have been implemented, it will not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.21 At Year 15, whilst the landscape strategy will have become established, it will still not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

Residents of Little Lea Cottage – high sensitivity

West of Site Context Photograph 9

- 7.3.22 Residents of Little Lea Cottage to the south-west of the Site are likely to have fixed long distance views of the Proposed Development. Should views be available, they are likely to be glimpsed. The distance is such that the Proposed Development will form only a very small element in the view. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the new buildings will be of a reduced height, protruding less above the surrounding woodland canopy, and this may be just perceptible in views. The condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form, although this is unlikely to be perceptible in views from this location due to the distance from the Site. Where the Proposed Development is seen, it will be in the context of residential and commercial built form and highways infrastructure in the foreground. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **very small**.
- 7.3.23 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed views. Whilst the landscape strategy will have been implemented, it will not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.24 At Year 15, whilst the landscape strategy will have become established, it will still not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the River Loddon Valued Landscape – high sensitivity

Site Context Photograph 14 Wireline AVR 14

- 7.3.25 Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the River Loddon Valued Landscape will have transient long distance views of the Proposed Development, and these will be available from only a small proportion of the publicly accessible land here. Where the Proposed Development is visible at all, it will form only a very small element in the view due to the distance. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the new buildings will be of a reduced height, protruding less above the surrounding woodland canopy. The condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. However, these differences are unlikely to be perceptible in views from this location due to the distance from the Site. Where nearby field boundaries contain mature hedgerow trees, views toward the proposed units will often be entirely curtailed. From this location, the Proposed Development will be seen beyond existing residential and commercial built form, with the open agricultural river valley in the foreground. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **very small**.
- 7.3.26 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed views. Whilst the landscape strategy will have been implemented, it will not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.27 At Year 15, whilst the landscape strategy will have become established, it will still not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape – high sensitivity

Site Context Photograph 13

- 7.3.28 Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape will have transient long distance views of the Proposed Development, and these will be available from only a small proportion of the publicly accessible land here. Where the Proposed Development is visible at all, it will form only a very small element in the view due to the distance. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the new buildings will be of a reduced height, protruding less above the surrounding woodland canopy. The condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. However, these differences are unlikely to be perceptible in views from this location due to the distance from the Site. Views toward the proposed units will generally be entirely curtailed intervening field boundary vegetation. From this location, the Proposed Development will be seen in the context of the open agricultural landscape in the foreground. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **very small**.
- 7.3.29 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed views. Whilst the landscape strategy will have been implemented, it will not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.30 At Year 15, whilst the landscape strategy will have become established, it will still not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the undesignated landscape to the south of the Site – medium sensitivity

**Site Context Photographs 8, 10, 11, 12, 15 and 16
Wireline AVRs 8, 11 and 15**

- 7.3.31 Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the undesignated landscape to the south of the Site will have transient long distance views of the Proposed Development. Where the Proposed Development is visible, it will form only a very small element in the view due to the distance. The Proposed Development will result in a change from one architectural style and layout to another, and the new buildings will be of a reduced height, protruding less above the surrounding woodland canopy. The condition of the new built form will improve upon that of the existing built form. However, these differences are unlikely to be perceptible in views from this location due to the distance from the Site. Views toward the proposed units will sometimes be entirely curtailed intervening field boundary vegetation. From this location, the Proposed Development will be seen in the context of residential and commercial built form and the open agricultural landscape in the foreground. On balance, the magnitude of change will be **very small**.
- 7.3.32 At Year 1 the Proposed Development will be visible in glimpsed views. Whilst the landscape strategy will have been implemented, it will not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.
- 7.3.33 At Year 15, whilst the landscape strategy will have become established, it will still not be visible in views from this location due to the screening effect of the woodland canopy surrounding the Site. The intensity of the adverse and beneficial effects will be similar. On balance, the significance of the effect will be **neutral**.

8 Summary and Conclusion

8.1 Summary

- 8.1.1 An assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development has been undertaken in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition.
- 8.1.2 The Site is located within the southern settlement boundary of Reading. It is surrounded to the north, west and south by dense woodland within the Shinfield Park, Nores Hill Local Wildlife Site. To the north-east is the Shinfield Park residential area, and to the east are the B3270 and Whitley Wood Lane. To the south is the village of Shinfield beyond the M4. The Site sits on the southern end of a localised ridge within Reading, elevated above the wider landscape to the east, west and south.
- 8.1.3 The Site covers 5.5ha of the previously developed land of Shire Hall and its associated buildings, access roads and car parks. Vegetation is present within the edges of the Site and along the access roads, and includes trees, shrubs, native and ornamental hedgerows, herbaceous planting and lawns.
- 8.1.4 The Site is enclosed by the surrounding woodland, but open at the access point on the eastern boundary. The architecture and scale of Shire Hall make it a distinctive and locally recognisable building. It functions as a landmark experienced from within the agricultural landscape to the south.
- 8.1.5 A visual appraisal has been undertaken which demonstrated that Shire Hall is visible primarily in very near distance and long distance views. Near distance glimpsed to open views are available from the Public Right of Way SHIN10, the B3270, Whitley Wood Lane and properties on the southern edge of the Shinfield Park residential area. Long distance views of the upper extents of Shire Hall are available from residences on the southern edge of Reading and from locations within the agricultural landscape to the south. Medium distance views of Shire Hall are generally obscured by the wooded and built up surroundings, although views are available from the north-western edge of Shinfield and open land to the south of the Site.
- 8.1.6 The Proposed Development comprises redevelopment of the Site for employment use, together with associated servicing areas, parking, landscaping and other associated works. The landscape proposals include tree and hedgerow planting, amenity planting and rain gardens.
- 8.1.7 A series of mitigation measures has been embedded in the design of the Proposed Development from the outset, with the aim of reducing adverse effects resulting from its introduction into the surrounding landscape and visual context. These mitigation measures include both the landscape proposals and the layout, height and footprint of the proposed built form. The design of the Proposed Development has evolved as part of an iterative process and has been informed by the findings of the baseline landscape and visual amenity conditions.
- 8.1.8 An assessment of the likely landscape, townscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development has been undertaken for Years 1 and 15 of operation.
- 8.1.9 At Year 1, one landscape receptor will be subject to effects of moderate or greater significance; i.e. the canopy trees, which will be subject to moderate adverse effects due to the removal of existing trees and the fact that the proposed trees will not yet have become established. The ten remaining landscape receptors will be subject to effects that are at most minor. These will predominantly be neutral, since there is already large-scale built form present within the Site, although two landscape character receptors will be subject to negligible adverse effects and two landscape features will be subject to negligible or minor beneficial effects. All 11 visual receptors

will be subject to neutral effects at Year 1, since there is already large-scale built form present within the Site, and the beneficial visual effects will balance the adverse effects.

8.1.10 At Year 15, three landscape receptors will be subject to effects of moderate or greater significance; i.e., the character of the Site, the canopy trees and the grassland, all of which will be subject to moderate beneficial effects resulting from the establishment of the proposed landscape strategy. The eight remaining landscape receptors will be subject to effects that are at most minor. These will predominantly be negligible beneficial, although one will be minor beneficial and two will be neutral. All 11 visual receptors will be subject to effects that are at most minor. Four will be subject to negligible or minor beneficial effects as a result of the establishment of the proposed landscape strategy; i.e., users of PROW SHIN10, users of the cycle route that passes the eastern Site boundary, users of the B3270 and users of Whitley Wood Lane. The remaining seven visual receptors will be subject to neutral effects, since the established landscape strategy will not be visible due to screening caused by the woodland around the Site.

8.1.11 **Tables 8.1** and **8.2** below summarise the results of the assessment.

Table 8.1 Landscape Effects

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effect	
			Year 1	Year 15
The character of Wokingham LCA J3 Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay	Medium	Small	Negligible Adverse	Negligible Beneficial
The character of Wokingham LCA I3 Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland	Medium	Very Small	Neutral	Neutral
The character of Wokingham LCA A2 Loddon River Valley	High	Very Small	Negligible Adverse	Negligible Adverse
The character of Shinfield Park, Nores Hill LWS	High	Small	Neutral	Negligible Beneficial
The character of the adjacent townscape	Medium	Small	Neutral	Negligible Beneficial
The character of the Site	Medium	Medium	Neutral	Moderate Beneficial
Native hedgerow	Medium	Small	Negligible Beneficial	Minor Beneficial
Canopy trees	High	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Moderate Beneficial
Waterbodies	Medium	Medium	Neutral	Negligible Beneficial
Grassland	Low	Large	Minor Beneficial	Moderate Beneficial
Built form	Medium	Large	Neutral	Neutral

Table 8.2 Visual Effects

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Effect	
			Year 1	Year 15
Users of PRow SHIN10	High	Medium	Neutral	Negligible Beneficial
Users of the cycle route that passes the eastern Site boundary	Medium	Medium	Neutral	Negligible Beneficial
Users of the B3270	Low	Medium	Neutral	Negligible Beneficial
Users of Whitley Wood Lane	Medium	Medium	Neutral	Minor Beneficial
Residents of properties in the Shinfield Park residential area	Medium	Medium	Neutral	Neutral
Residents of Lane End Farmhouse	High	Very Small	Neutral	Neutral
Residents of properties in north-west Shinfield	Medium	Small	Neutral	Neutral
Residents of Little Lea Cottage	High	Very Small	Neutral	Neutral
Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the River Loddon Valued Landscape	High	Very Small	Neutral	Neutral
Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape	High	Very Small	Neutral	Neutral
Users of PRow and publicly accessible land within the undesignated landscape to the south of the Site	Medium	Very Small	Neutral	Neutral

8.2 Conclusion

- 8.2.1 At Year 1, the Proposed Development will result in moderate adverse effects on one landscape receptor. None of the visual receptors will be subject to moderate or greater effects. By Year 15, there will be no moderate or greater adverse effects remaining on either landscape or visual receptors, and there will be moderate beneficial effects on three landscape receptors.
- 8.2.2 Twelve of the landscape and visual receptors will benefit appreciably from the mitigation, such that adverse or neutral effects become beneficial by Year 15, or beneficial effects increase in their level of significance.
- 8.2.3 The Proposed Development will, on the whole, be an appreciable improvement on the baseline condition of the Site. The distinctive and locally recognisable architecture of Shire Hall and its function as a landmark in the wider landscape will be lost. However, the condition of the built form will be improved, and its lower height is such that the surrounding landscape and views will be less influenced by built form. The offsetting of the proposed built form away from the

ancient woodland to the north of the Site will provide a buffer that will allow the woodland edge to restore its health over time. The proposed landscape strategy represents a substantial improvement on the existing landscape condition. Whilst a number of trees will be removed, a much larger number will be planted. The planting will integrate the proposed built form in its immediate context and enhance the landscape and scenic quality of the Site. It will improve the functional aspects of the Site including the green infrastructure and biodiversity benefits both within the Site and in their connections with the wider network.

- 8.2.4 On the basis of the above, and the findings of this assessment, it is considered that the Site has the capacity to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue harm on the landscape character and visual amenity of the Site and the wider area. It is further considered that the Proposed Development will lead to tangible long term benefits on the character and features of the Site and the character and general amenity of the local area.

Appendix A LVIA Methodology

Appendix A LVIA Methodology

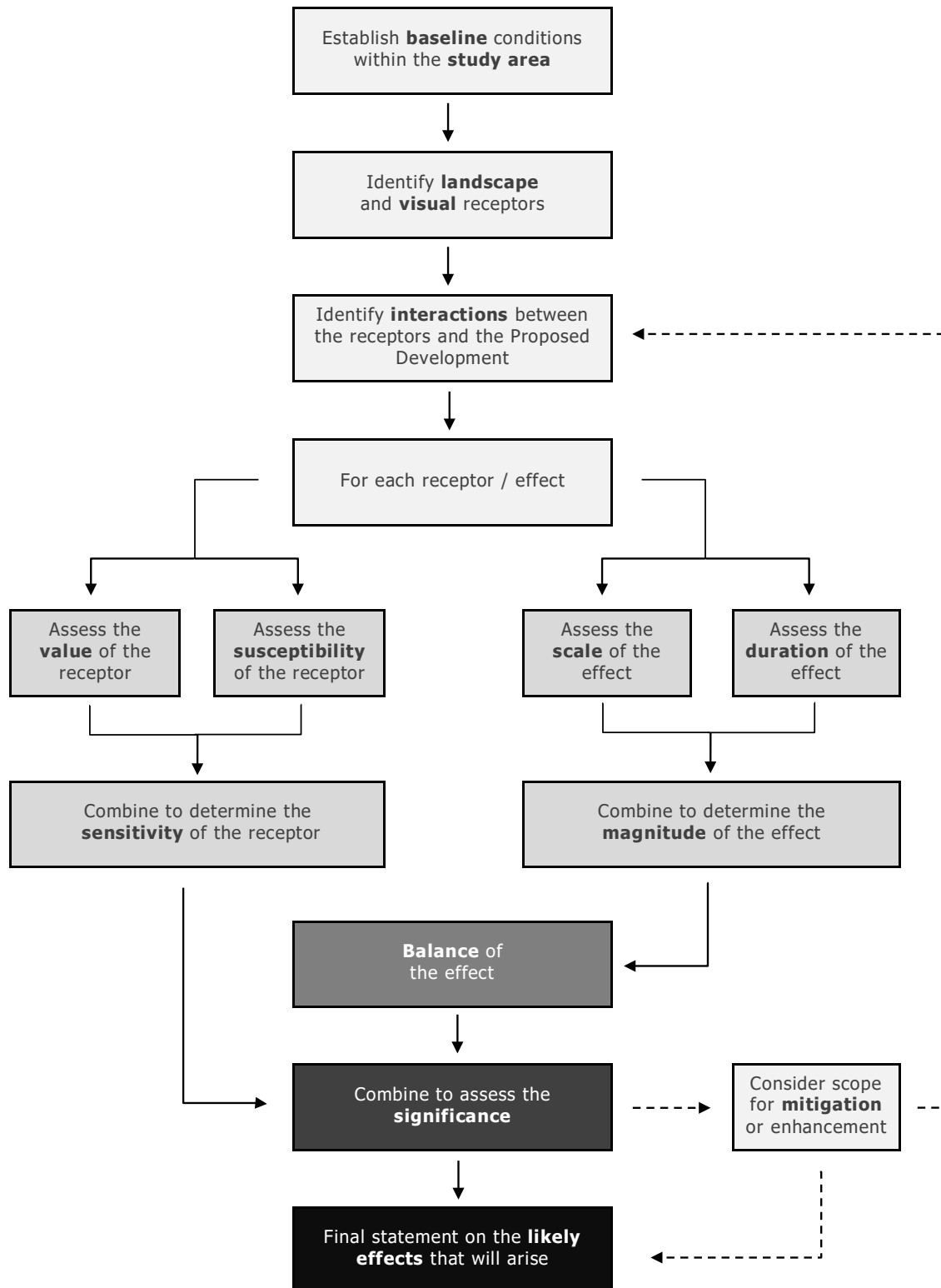
Introduction

- 1.1 The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (GLVIA 3), 2013, notes in Chapter 1 that Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) relates to:

“...the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity”.
- 1.2 The methodology employed in carrying out the LVIA of the Proposed Development is in accordance with the Guidelines set out in GLVIA 3 and Natural England landscape character guidance. The guidelines are not intended as a prescriptive set of rules, and the approach has been adapted to the specific project.
- 1.3 LVIAs are undertaken by professionals who are also typically involved in the design of the landscape and the preparation of subsequent management proposals. This can allow the assessment to proceed as an integral part of the overall scheme design. Judgements are based on training and experience and supported by clear evidence and reasoned argument.
- 1.4 The purpose of an LVIA is to identify the likely effects of change resulting from the Proposed Development, which can be used as a tool to optimise the design of a scheme and minimise the potential for adverse change to arise and to maximise the benefit of positive changes. Landscape and visual assessments are separate, although linked, processes with a distinction made between:
 - Landscape - landscape character and the elements and features that contribute to the sense of place (landscape receptors); and
 - Visual - people who experience views within the landscape (visual receptors).
- 1.5 An LVIA is typically accompanied by illustrative material, including baseline mapping and photographs of the Site itself and from the wider context.
- 1.6 There are typically three key stages to the LVIA process, with a further two optional stages carried out as required:
 - Baseline studies;
 - Iterative design;
 - Assessment of landscape and visual effects;
 - Cumulative assessment (should this be required); and
 - Night-time assessment (should this be required).
- 1.7 An overview of the assessment process is set out in Diagram 1 below. the assessment of landscape and visual effects relies on identifying the interactions between the Proposed Development and the identified receptors, linking judgements between the sensitivity of the receptors and the magnitude of effect experienced.

- 1.8 The sensitivity of a receptor is determined by combining judgements on the value attached to the receptor alongside its susceptibility, while the magnitude of an effect is determined by combining judgements on size, scale, extent, duration and reversibility.

Diagram 1: Overview of the LVIA Process



Baseline Studies

1.9 The purpose of baseline studies is to record the existing landscape features, characteristics, the way the landscape is experienced, and the area from which the existing Site and Proposed Development may be visible to potential visual receptors. The following are typically undertaken as part of the baseline studies:

- Identification of the extents of the study area. This is based on professional judgement and may vary depending on the type of development proposed and landscape context.
- Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) modelling to assist in identifying potential viewpoints, should this be deemed necessary, dependent on professional judgement of the likely potential visual envelope of the Site/Proposed Development.
- Identification of potential representative viewpoints within the study area.
- A desktop study of patterns and scale of landform, land use and built development, relevant current planning policy (including landscape designations) and landscape character publications. Further localised character assessments may also be undertaken to supplement published assessments.
- A localised character assessment will normally also be carried out to supplement the published characterisation material to confirm whether the Site is representative of any of the key characteristics set out and to determine consideration of 'natural', 'cultural and social', and 'perceptual and aesthetic' factors. Factors typically considered may include the following, as relevant:
 - Landform and hydrology;
 - Land use and settlement;
 - Pattern/texture/line;
 - Scale and enclosure;
 - Historical development/time depth;
 - Activities and cultural association;
 - Spatial structure and built form;
 - Infrastructure;
 - Movement, connectivity, and accessibility;
 - Green Infrastructure;
 - Enclosure/views;
 - Tranquillity and remoteness; and

- Aesthetic or visual quality.
- 1.10 Where relevant, the future baseline of the Site and its context is also considered, in order to account for ongoing change in the landscape, for example developments that are under construction, and which will have altered the landscape context to the Site by the time the Proposed Development would be likely to be initiated.
- 1.11 For the avoidance of doubt, the future baseline context should not be confused with cumulative effects, which are addressed differently and assessed separately.

Design and Mitigation

- 1.12 LVIA's are undertaken by professionals who are also often involved in the design of the landscape, site design, and the preparation of subsequent management proposals. The design and assessment stages are iterative, with stages overlapping in part.
- 1.13 Mitigation measures are embedded within the design of the Proposed Development (or the development parameters for an outline application) arising from desk-based study and LVIA field work. These measures, such as the building layout, massing, height, and arrangement of open spaces and new structural planting, are termed 'Primary Mitigation'. Effective Primary Mitigation strategies avoid or reduce adverse effects by ensuring the key principles of the design of the development, as noted above, are sympathetic with the existing baseline.
- 1.14 Additional recommended measures to reduce adverse effects are termed 'Secondary Mitigation'. These may be illustrated in material accompanying the proposal, including a Design and Access Statement.
- 1.15 Typical Secondary Mitigation strategies can include:
 - Additional design detail including building materials or landscape design approaches, including indicative species;
 - A Landscape and Biodiversity Management Strategy to secure ongoing enhancement of landscape features;
 - A Construction Environmental Management Plan to minimise effects arising during the construction process, typically including tree protection; and
 - A programme of appropriate monitoring, agreed with the regulatory authority, so that compliance and effectiveness can be readily monitored and evaluated.
- 1.16 The contribution made by areas of planting introduced as part of the Proposed Development is also considered in terms of the effects at year 1 and the residual effects (allowing for growth of planting over time), and the height of this planting for assessment purposes is assumed to be as follows (based on an average growth rate of 1m in 3 years – the specific rate of growth varies according to species, soil, light, microclimate conditions and management):
 - Planting at Year 1: typically 1.5-4.5 metres; and
 - Planting at Year 15: typically 6.5-9.5 metres.
- 1.17 In addition, measures may be taken to offset or compensate for adverse effects, if these are not already built into the design proposals. Typical compensation measures are the

replacement of felled trees with new trees or off-site provision of public amenity or access where this may be lost within the Site.

Enhancement

- 1.18 Whilst distinct from mitigation of adverse effects, enhancement may be achieved through the Proposed Development (e.g. the creation of a new landscape or public amenity/access; enhancement in character or view; or improved management of existing landscape features secured through the Proposed Development). The beneficial changes resulting from these measures are incorporated into assessment of landscape and visual effects.

Assessment of Landscape Effects

- 1.19 GLVIA 3 Paragraph 5.1 states that:

“An assessment of landscape effects deals with the effects of change and development on landscape as a resource.”

- 1.20 Landscape effects occur as a result of changes to the physical fabric of the landscape that may give rise to alterations to its overriding character and how this character is experienced.
- 1.21 The significance of landscape effects is derived from a combination of assessments of the **sensitivity** of the landscape receptor and the **magnitude** of effect (change) experienced as a result of the Proposed Development.

Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors

- 1.22 The sensitivity of a landscape receptor is a combination of the **value** of the landscape receptor and the **susceptibility** (in other words ‘vulnerability’) of the landscape receptor to the type of change proposed, using professional judgement.

Landscape Sensitivity - Value

- 1.23 The value of a landscape receptor is established during the baseline stage. The assessment of value is based on a combination of the importance of landscape-related planning designations and the following attributes (drawn from the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21:
- Natural heritage – Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape;
 - Cultural heritage – Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape;
 - Landscape condition – Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure;
 - Associations – Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts;
 - Distinctiveness – Landscape that has a strong sense of identity;

- Recreational – Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important;
 - Perceptual (scenic) – Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense;
 - Perceptual (wildness and tranquillity) – Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies; and
 - Functional – Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape.
- 1.24 Landscapes, including their character and features, may be designated for their landscape and visual qualities at a range of levels (national, county, and local level).
- 1.25 As a matter of principle, all landscapes are considered, as enshrined within the European Landscape Convention (ELC) 2004. The overall value for each landscape receptor is categorised as either **High**, **Medium**, or **Low** (as described below in **Table 3.1**):

Table 3.1: Landscape Value

Level	Criteria
High	Landscape area of distinctive components and characteristics that may also be nationally designated for scenic beauty. A landscape feature that makes a strong positive contribution to landscape character e.g. a mature tree or woodland.
Medium	Landscape area of common components and characteristics that may be designated at county or borough level for its landscape and visual qualities. A landscape feature that makes some positive contribution to landscape character.
Low	Landscape area/feature of inconsequential components and characteristics, undesignated and with little or no wider recognition of value, although potentially of importance to the local community.

Landscape Sensitivity - Susceptibility

- 1.26 The susceptibility of the landscape is a measure of its vulnerability to the type of development proposed, without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation. Landscape character/features of low susceptibility would have a high capacity to accommodate change, and landscape character/features of high susceptibility would have a low capacity to accommodate change. The following criteria are taken into consideration in the assessment of the susceptibility of landscape character, although not all criteria are equally applicable or important within a given landscape / type of development proposed:
- Landform;
 - Pattern/Complexity;
 - Composition;
 - Landcover;
 - Relationship of a given landscape area or feature to the surrounding context and/or to existing settlements or developments; and

- Potential for appropriate mitigation within the context of existing character and guidelines.
- 1.27 With regard to landscape features, susceptibility relates to the potential for loss/retention of the relevant features in relation to the type of development proposed (for example trees within a Site are potentially highly susceptible to construction of an industrial shed, whereas they might not be to construction of residential units, as the latter provides more scope to mitigate by design); and the ease with which such elements may be replaced, where appropriate. The susceptibility of each landscape receptor is categorised as High, Medium, or Low (as described below in **Table 3.2**):

Table 3.2: Landscape Susceptibility

Susceptibility	Criteria
High	The receptor is likely to have little scope to accommodate the type of development proposed without undue consequences upon its overall integrity.
Medium	The receptor is likely to have some scope to accommodate the type of development proposed without undue consequences upon its overall integrity.
Low	The receptor is likely to be able to accommodate the type of development proposed with little or no consequences upon its overall integrity.

- 1.28 Based on the combination of value and susceptibility, an assessment of landscape sensitivity is reached, defined as High, Medium, or Low. Typically a high value and high susceptibility receptor would result in a receptor of high sensitivity; and a low value and low susceptibility receptor would result in a receptor of low sensitivity.

Landscape Magnitude of Effect (Change) - Scale

- 1.29 Factors contributing to the scale of landscape change include:
- The extent/proportion of the physical landscape elements that will be altered with reference to their immediate and local/ wider contribution to the landscape;
 - The degree to which aesthetic and/or perceptual aspects will be altered; and
 - The geographical area that will be directly and indirectly altered.

Landscape Magnitude of Effect (Change) - Duration and Reversibility

- 1.30 Factors contributing to the duration the change is experienced in the landscape (including consideration of management plans as appropriate) include:
- Whether the change is wholly reversible or permanent; and
 - Whether the change is temporary (and if so, for what period of time).
- 1.31 The landscape magnitude of effect is informed by judgements about the precise nature of the change brought about by the Proposed Development both in terms of the existing landscape character and landscape elements / features and the addition of new landscape elements / features, its scale and its duration and reversibility (as described below in **Table 3.3**).

Table 3.3: Landscape Magnitude of Effect (Change)

Magnitude	Criteria
Large	Pronounced change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect an extensive area. The change may be long-term or may be irreversible.
Medium	Partial change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect a relatively extensive area. The change may be medium-term or may be irreversible.
Small	Limited change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect a relatively limited area. The change may be short-term or reversible.
Very Small	Very slight change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect a limited area. The alteration may be short-term or reversible.
None	No change to the existing landscape receptor.

Assessment of Visual Effects

- 1.32 GLVIA 3 Paragraph 6.1 states that:

“An assessment of visual effects deals with the effects of change and development on the views available to people and their visual amenity.”

- 1.33 The significance of visual effects is derived from a combination of assessments of the **sensitivity** of the visual receptor and the **magnitude** of effect (change) experienced as a result of the Proposed Development.

Viewpoint Selection

- 1.34 In order to assess the effects on visual receptors, a selection of publicly accessible viewpoints is made. This could include representative viewpoints (e.g. representing views of users of a particular footpath) and specific viewpoints (e.g. a key view from a specific visitor attraction).
- 1.35 Views may be categorised as either near distance, medium distance, or long distance with the relevant distances dependant on the size and nature of the development, based on professional judgement.
- 1.36 Viewpoints fall into three broad categories:
- **Representative:** selected to represent the experience of different types of receptor;
 - **Specific:** chosen because they are key and sometimes promoted viewpoints within the landscape; and
 - **Illustrative:** demonstrating a particular effect or specific issues.
- 1.37 The type of view is typically described as transient (i.e. experienced when moving) or fixed (i.e. from a static location). It is also described in terms of the degree of screening or openness (e.g. open or uninterrupted; filtered (including where partially screened) by vegetation or other structures; or curtailed by intervening land form, built form or vegetation) and the angle of view (e.g. frontal or oblique).

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

- 1.38 The sensitivity of a visual receptor is a consideration of the **value** of the view and the **susceptibility** of the visual receptor, the latter being primarily based on consideration of the extent to which a visual receptor is focused on appreciation of the landscape.

Visual Sensitivity - Value

- 1.39 The value of a visual receptor is established during the baseline stage and is categorised as **High, Medium, or Low** as set out in **Table 3.4**.

Table 3.4. Value of Views

Value	Criteria
High	View of/from a location that is likely to be of national importance, either designated or with national cultural associations.
Medium	View of/from a location that is likely to be of local importance, either designated or with local cultural associations.
Low	View of/from a location that is not designated, with minimal or no cultural associations.

Visual Sensitivity - Susceptibility

- 1.40 The susceptibility of each visual receptor is a measure of their vulnerability to the type of development proposed, without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation. The following criteria are taken into consideration in the assessment of visual susceptibility:
- The extent to which the viewers' attention is focussed on the landscape;
 - The extent to which the view contributes to the viewers' amenity experience; and
 - The nature of the activity the viewer is involved in (or otherwise).
- 1.41 Professional judgement is used to determine these factors, based on considerations set out in **Table 3.5** below:

Table 3.5: Susceptibility of Visual Receptor

Susceptibility	Criteria
High	People at their place of residence; People engaged in outdoor recreation, including users of Public Rights of Way (PRoW), whose attention is likely to be focused on the landscape; and People travelling along recognised scenic routes or where their appreciation of the view contributes to the amenity experience of their journey.
Medium	People engaged in outdoor sport and recreation, where their appreciation of their surroundings is incidental to their enjoyment; and People travelling on secondary roads or country lanes, rail or other transport routes.
Low	People travelling on major roads; and People at their place of work.

- 1.42 The sensitivity of a visual receptor results from the combination of value and susceptibility and is rated as **High**, **Medium**, or **Low**. Typically a high value and high susceptibility receptor would result in a receptor of high sensitivity; and a low value and low susceptibility receptor would result in a receptor of low sensitivity.

Visual Magnitude of Effect (Change) - Scale

- 1.43 In the evaluation of the effects on views and the visual amenity of the identified receptors, the magnitude of visual effect is typically described with reference to:
- The scale of change in the view with respect to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition. Factors contributing to the scale of visual change include:
 - The angle of view in relation to the main activity of the receptor;
 - The distance of the viewer from the Proposed Development;
 - The extent of the area over which the changes would be visible; and
 - The degree of visual intrusion of the Proposed Development in the view.

Visual Magnitude of Effect (Change) – Duration and Reversibility

- 1.44 Factors contributing to the duration the change is experienced visually in the evaluation of the effects on views and the visual amenity of the identified receptors, the magnitude of visual effect is typically described with reference to:
- Whether or not the view is experienced in fixed or transient views and, in the latter, whether it is intermittent/glimpsed or continuous; and
 - The duration of the change, whether temporary or permanent, and how readily reversible it is likely to be.

- 1.45 The criteria for the magnitude of visual effects is set out in **Table 3.6** below:

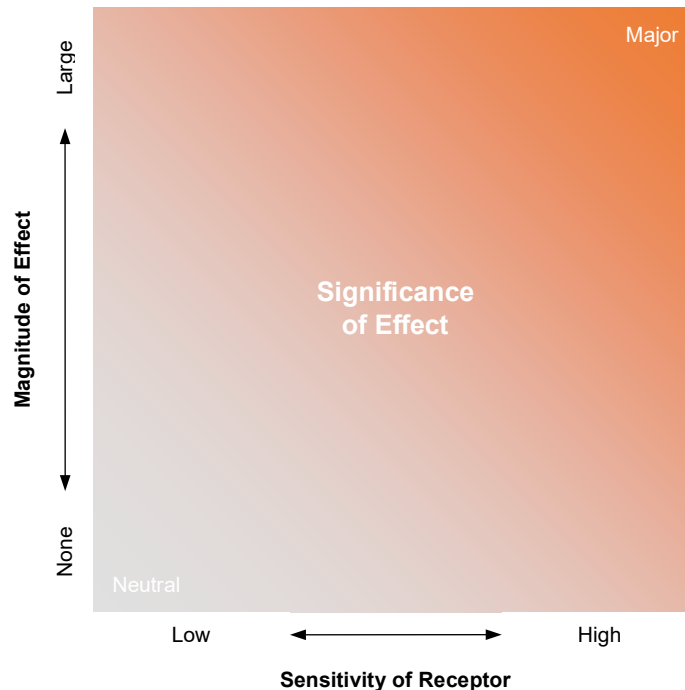
Table 3.6: Visual Magnitude of Effect (Change)

Magnitude	Criteria
Large	The proposals will cause a pronounced change to the existing view, resulting in the loss or addition of features that will substantially alter the composition of the view. The change may be long-term or may be irreversible.
Medium	The proposals will cause a noticeable change in the view, resulting from the loss or addition of features in the view and will noticeably alter the composition of the view. The change may be medium-term or may be irreversible.
Small	The proposals will cause a limited change in the view, which will not materially alter the composition of the view. The change may be short-term or reversible.
Very Small	The proposals will cause a barely perceptible change in the view. The change may be short-term or reversible.
None	No change discernible in the view.

Significance of Effects

- 1.46 In order to draw conclusions about the significance of landscape or visual effects, the combination of the sensitivity of the receptors and the magnitude of effect are considered for the Proposed Development at **Day 1** of the operational phase (once the Proposed Development has been completed); and, depending on the assessment, also at a point where planting associated with the Proposed Development will be establishing e.g. **Year 15**. In certain circumstances, it may also be appropriate to consider effects at construction and on decommissioning of the Proposed Development.
- 1.47 The significance of effects are rated on a scale of Neutral to Major. The assessment of significance of effects is subject to professional judgement but in broad terms, where a receptor of High sensitivity experiences a Large magnitude of effect as a result of the Proposed Development, the significance of effect is likely to be Major.
- 1.48 Conversely, where a receptor of Low sensitivity experiences a Very Small magnitude of effect as a result of the Proposed Development, the significance of effect is likely to be Negligible or Neutral.

Figure 3.1: Significance of Effects



- 1.49 Where it is considered that there is potential for both beneficial and adverse changes, these magnitudes of effect (change) are noted and are defined as beneficial, adverse, or neutral. This consideration is termed the 'balance of effects', factoring in both the potentially beneficial and adverse aspects associated with a given change and is used and the balance of these considerations used to inform conclusions on significance of effect.
- 1.50 The assessment of residual effects refers to the likely effects of the Proposed Development that will remain once Secondary Mitigation measures are applied and also considers the growth of planting introduced within the Proposed Development (including where this is part of Primary or Secondary Mitigation).
- 1.51 For schemes subject to Environmental Impact Assessment, as governed by the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2011/92/EU), an assessment of whether or not the effect is considered 'significant' is required. This is relative to each scheme but, in general, effects of Major or Moderate (adverse/beneficial) significance are deemed 'significant'.

Table 3.7 Significance of Landscape Effects – Criteria

Significance	Criteria
Major Beneficial	Alterations that would be substantially characteristic and result in a pronounced improvement of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be restored or reintroduced as part of the Proposed Development.
Moderate Beneficial	Alterations that result in a partial improvement of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be partially restored or reintroduced.
Minor Beneficial	Alterations that result in a limited improvement of the existing landscape resource. Characteristic features would be restored to a limited degree.
Negligible Beneficial	Alterations that result in a very slight improvement to the existing landscape resource, not uncharacteristic within the receiving landscape.
Neutral	Neither beneficial nor adverse effects on the existing landscape resource.
Negligible Adverse	Alterations that result in a very slight deterioration to the existing landscape resource, not uncharacteristic within the receiving landscape.
Minor Adverse	Alterations that result in a limited deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Characteristic features would be lost to a limited degree.
Moderate Adverse	Alterations that result in a partial deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be partially lost.
Major Adverse	Alterations that would be substantially uncharacteristic and result in a pronounced deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be wholly lost.

Table 3.8: Significance of Visual Effects – Criteria

Significance	Criteria
Major Beneficial	Alterations that typically result in a pronounced improvement in the existing view.
Moderate Beneficial	Alterations that typically result in a noticeable improvement in the existing view.
Minor Beneficial	Alterations that typically result in a limited improvement in the existing view.
Negligible Beneficial	Alterations that typically result in a barely perceptible improvement in the existing view.
Neutral	Neither beneficial nor adverse effects on the existing view.
Negligible Adverse	Alterations that typically result in a barely perceptible deterioration in the existing view.
Minor Adverse	Alterations that typically result in a limited deterioration in the existing view.
Moderate Adverse	Alterations that typically result in a noticeable deterioration in the existing view.
Major Adverse	Alterations that typically result in a pronounced deterioration in the existing view.