

Land Between Lodge Road and Tape Lane, Hurst, Wokingham, RG10 0EG

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

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Wokingham Borough Council Ref: 242067

Volume 1: Text

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on behalf of

Mactaggart and Mickel Strategic Land

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Appendix 1: Extract of Table 1 from Technical Guidance Note 02/21 Assessing landscape value outside national designations.

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Section 1: Introduction

Introduction of the Witness

Qualifications

- 1.1 I am Clare Brockhurst, Director of Leyton Place Limited. I have had a career in landscape architecture and landscape planning spanning more than 35 years. Within my technical area of expertise, I specialise in landscape and visual planning matters and the design of strategic Green Infrastructure (GI).
- 1.2 I have a BSc (Hons) degree in Landscape Management from the University of Reading, and a postgraduate diploma in Landscape Architecture from the University of Central England.
- 1.3 I completed and passed my professional practice examinations and became a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) in 1997. In 2007, I was invited to apply for, and was awarded, Fellowship of the LI (FLI) in recognition of my contribution to the profession in the field of landscape planning.
- 1.4 I have sat on the Landscape Institute's (LI) Policy and Awards committees and have served as an elected member of Council. In June 2025, I was elected for a second time to sit on the LI's Council. I have been a judge for the LI on four occasions. I have been a guest speaker for the LI's Pathway Graduation Ceremony. I am a pathway mentor and examination moderator and support the development of newly qualified graduates.
- 1.5 I have been involved in the preparation of a number of the LI's policy and technical position papers in respect of Green Infrastructure and new housing, some of which I reference in my evidence.
- 1.6 My professional experience and expertise have been sought by a number of organisations for the purposes of training and development, including:
 - 1.6.1 In March 2020, I was invited to speak at the Planning Inspectorate's Annual Training Event held over two days. I assisted with the workshops on the latest visualisation guidance, sat on the panel discussing the landscape and visual assessment process and specifically addressed matters relating to the presentation of evidence at inquiries.
 - 1.6.2 February 2021, I was invited to speak at the Landscape Matters Debate on the published Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – a virtual event that was recorded and uploaded to YouTube.
 - 1.6.3 In October 2023, I was an invited speaker for the Southwest regional RTPi CPD training day.
 - 1.6.4 In April 2025, I was approached by the LI to lead and organise an Expert Witness Masterclass for the professional membership. This event was sold out, and held on the 30th June 2025.
 - 1.6.5 Recently I have been approached by a leading law firm to provide training to its members in respect of the process of landscape and visual impact assessment.

Career and Employment

- 1.7 I started my career as an in-house Landscape Architect for Bovis Homes, where I gained an understanding of the house-building process and the effects of development on the landscape from a construction and operational perspective.
- 1.8 I joined Countryside Planning and Management (CPM) as a Graduate in 1997. I became Managing Director of Waterman CPM in 2007, after the company was acquired by Waterman Group Plc. During this time, I worked with numerous developers on a range of housing, commercial and recreation projects.
- 1.9 During my career with Waterman CPM, I was the lead landscape witness for the Countryside Agency at the year-long inquiry into the designation of the South Downs National Park (SDNP). As part of that inquiry, I gave evidence at over 250 informal hearings and a number of formal inquiry sessions. In respect of this project, I gained extensive knowledge of protected landscapes, landscape characterisation and the process of assessing valued landscapes. I also addressed issues related to the concept of 'setting' of statutorily designated landscapes.
- 1.10 I set up Leyton Place Limited after I sold my ownership in Tyler Grange LLP, where I was a founding partner. I continue to focus on delivering landscape planning consultancy services to clients, in particular as an expert witness.

Experience

- 1.11 In the last 35 years, I have been involved with over 60 Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVAs) and over a hundred Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs), either as stand-alone reports or as chapters for Environmental Statements. I have been appointed by clients, including local planning authorities, to review and critique the work of others. My approach to LVAs and LVIAs has been subject to scrutiny through peer review and the public inquiry process over more than 25 years.
- 1.12 In addition to the yearlong SDNP inquiry, I have been called as an expert witness on more than a hundred occasions, including giving evidence on behalf of developers, private clients, district councils, and local community groups.
- 1.13 Specifically, as pertinent to this inquiry:
- 1.13.1 **School Road, Hurst¹** – I was appointed by the Appellant to provide written and oral evidence at the hearing into the refusal by Wokingham Borough Council into for 23 dwellings and school parking spaces. My evidence addressed issues relating to Landscape Character and Appearance, the Area of Special Character and relevant aspects of the planning policy context. The appeal was allowed.
- 1.13.2 **Land North of the A4, Twyford²** - I was appointed by the Appellant following refusal by Wokingham Borough Council for development of 230 new homes and infrastructure to the northwest of Twyford. My evidence dealt with issues of settlement integration (townscape

¹ Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3342812 - Land between School Road and Orchard Road, Hurst, Reading, RG10 0SD

² Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3350170 - Land to the North of the A4, New Bath Road, Twyford

character and evolution). Inspector Masters, in allowing the appeal, commented that my evidence on this matter was compelling (Para 18 of the Decision, **CD 7.2**):

"Contrary to the position presented by the Council, the Appellants evidence concerning the issue of physical separation was compelling in this regard. It demonstrates a clear understanding of the existing site context, the evolution of Twyford and its settlement form and the potential for the design approach to create physical and visual cohesion between the appeal site and the settlement edge."

Instruction

- 1.14 Neither the author of the Appellant's LVIA and associated documents, nor his senior colleague are available for the dates on which the inquiry is to be heard, hence my instruction. My appointment post-determination, without prior involvement in the project, is an arrangement that is typical for my practice. Since starting Leyton Place Limited in 2019 this has occurred for 32 of my 36 inquiry appearances.
- 1.15 I was approached by the Appellant in May 2025 to consider Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) reasons for refusal (Decision Notice, **CD 1.1**), the landscape officer's consultation response (**CD 8.3**), the Officer's Report to committee (**CD 1.2**) and review the LVIA, (**CD 8.1**). The Appellant asked whether I could provide expert evidence for an appeal in support of the Appellant's case, in particular to address matters pertaining to settlement integration.
- 1.16 Having reviewed the submitted material, completed a preliminary desktop study, and being familiar with the Appeal Site from my appearance at the appeal into the Council's reason for refusal for development of land off School Lane, Hurst, I concluded that I could appear on behalf of the Appellant. I consider the appeal proposals to be an acceptable form of development in relation to landscape and visual environment.
- 1.17 I have come to this inquiry with 'fresh eyes' and bringing different experience, so the evidence in my proof is based on my extensive professional judgment and informed opinions. In terms of the analysis contained in the LVIA I am content to adopt the conclusions by Pegasus Planning in the LVIA in respect of the landscape and visual effects (**CD 8.1**). My evidence is primarily focussed on the allegations contained in the Council's Decision Notice to be considered in the determination of the appeal, and analysis of the matters pertaining to the allegations made by the Council against the proposal.
- 1.18 In preparing my evidence, I have undertaken the following tasks (amongst other things):
 - Reviewed the relevant material prepared by the Appellant's professional consultants, particularly the landscape and visual impact components.
 - Reviewed the consultation responses provided by the statutory consultees.
 - Reviewed the relevant policies, published material and the Council's landscape and Evidence Base.
 - Drafted a Landscape Statement of Common Ground to establish the extent to which the issues between the parties can be narrowed; and
 - Visited the Appeal Site.

Submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 1.19 I consider that the approach and methodology employed in the assessment of landscape and visual effects, and preparation and presentation of the LVIA (CD 8.1) are in compliance with the Landscape Institute's published 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', 2013 (GLVIA, CD 8.4)).
- 1.20 The guidelines are not prescriptive and whilst I do not dispute the approach adopted by Pegasus, there are some components of the LVIA process which I supplement in my evidence, which I set out below.
- 1.21 Of relevance to the preparation and validity of the LVIA, 'Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third edition,' LI Technical Guidance Note – 2024-01 (CD 8.5) records:

"LVIA is a skill to be learned and mastered. It should always be remembered that the purpose for undertaking LVIA (or LVA) is to express clearly to decision-makers the landscape professional's judgement about changes to the landscape and views. In particular, the purpose is to explain which aspects of landscape and visual change are more important to the decision to be made (and why). Achieving this outcome is more fundamental to good LVIA than the detailed mechanics of specific assessment methodologies.

Landscape and visual resources (and changes to them) are not easily measurable. Therefore, those undertaking LVIA have to proceed by a process of description, analysis, and reasoning, leading to assessment conclusions.

GLVIA3 is guidance aimed at experienced practitioners to ensure a degree of consistency in what is taken into account in reaching professional judgements and how those judgments are documented..."

- 1.22 The team, and specifically the authors of the LVIA, at Pegasus are suitably experienced and qualified in the preparation of LVIA's. There is sufficient information before the inspector to determine the application in respect of the evaluation and ascribed landscape and visual effects which are the subject of the LVIA process.
- 1.23 Although I have read the documents, I have not prepared a detailed critique of the LVIA or the statutory consultee responses, nor have I prepared my own Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of the application for the following reasons:
- 1.23.1 The assessment is informed by observations recorded over multiple site visits and design meetings by the assessors at Pegasus Planning. The application documents already provide a thorough understanding of the issues and the analysis which underpins the conclusions reached on the effects.
- 1.23.2 From experience, additional and duplicate analysis leads to Inquiry time being spent debating nuances in different methodologies used in the drafting of such an assessment, the terminology used and the conclusions drawn, but that debate does not advance matters in

terms of the issues raised in the reasons for refusal, or the main issues identified by the Inspector at the Pre-Inquiry CMC.

- 1.23.3 During the determination period the Council did not request further information or suggest further analysis was required. The Council felt able to move to a recommendation (see committee report (CD 1.2)) on the basis of the submitted material.
- 1.23.4 The wording in the reason for refusal does not suggest any inadequacies in the existing material or necessitate the preparation of an LVIA for any other reason, evidence can therefore be focussed on addressing the matters between the parties which flow from the reasons for refusal.

Supplementary Points

Viewpoints

- 1.24 I note that there is criticism in the Officers Report, (CD 1.2, page 23) as to a purported omission in the LVIA in respect of the consideration of views from adjacent properties and neighbouring fields.
- 1.25 Clearly where land is in private ownership, or without public access then the assessment of visual effects is likely to be either, not possible, or not relevant. The approach taken by Pegasus is in line with that taken by practitioners across the UK.
- 1.26 In this instance, views from private dwellings should be understood in the context of such properties being within the settlement fabric and therefore primarily having a settled context. The Parameters Plan shows how new housing is set away from the site boundaries and within green spaces. This approach means that the new dwellings will not be prominent in views from those dwellings overlooking the Site and there is scope for increased tree planting to supplement the existing vegetated boundaries to minimise the visual effects.

Design Process

- 1.27 Paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 of GLVIA state:

*"Design plays an increasingly important part in the development planning process. This has been emphasised by the introduction of statutory requirements for the production of design statements, or design and access statements, for many planning proposals in different parts of the UK. Such Statements explain the design principles and concepts underpinning the proposal and process through which it has evolved. **This includes the ways in which the context of the development, including the landscape, has been appraised or assessed and how the design of the development takes that context into account in relation to its proposed use.**"*

"EIA itself can be an important design tool. It is now usually an iterative process the stages feed into the planning and design of the project. The iterative design and assessment process has great strength because it links the analysis of the environmental issues with steps to improve the siting, layout, and design of a particular scheme." (My emphasis **emboldened**)

- 1.28 Although not a requirement of the LVIA, I find explicit analysis of how the design responds to the landscape is a helpful component in the design process and analysing the scheme in the broader policy context. Whilst Pegasus Planning set out the published landscape qualities and landscape guidelines in the LVIA, they do not consider each element in detail. Instead, they provide a narrative in general terms as to the manner in which the scheme has responded to the landscape character (**CD 8.1**, paragraphs 5.17 to 5.26). In my opinion, this underplays the many ways in which the appeal proposals have responded positively to the landscape (and the Council's evidence base), therefore, for completeness, in my evidence I deal with these matters in more detail
- 1.29 I consider this to be important as there can be a tendency to equate change to harm to the landscape character when in fact the change is cognisant and responsive to its context and the prevailing qualities and character of the open and settled qualities of an area.

Technical Approach and Structure of my Evidence

- 1.30 Within my proof of evidence, and where appropriate, I refer to published best practice guidance for considering landscape and visual matters as contained in:
- Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition, LI, and IEMA, 2013 (GLVIA 3)³ (**CD 8.4**).
 - An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England (AALCA), October 2014. (**CD 8.6**).
 - Townscape Character Assessment, Technical Information Note 05/2017, Landscape Institute, April 2018. (**CD 8.7**)
- 1.31 These are standard documents for the landscape profession, and I refer to those matters pertinent to the issues before this inquiry, quoting from the documents, as necessary.
- 1.32 At the outset of my evidence, I wish to make clear that I understand each development proposal needs to be determined on its own merits. In my evidence I refer to allocations, allowed appeals or consented developments near to the Appeal Site. I do this, not as a means of making a direct comparison of the landscape merits of that scheme, but to consider matters of consistency in decision making.
- 1.33 My evidence is structured as follows:

Volume 1: Text

Section 1:	Introduction
Section 2:	The proposals – an overview of the scheme from a landscape and visual perspective and a comparison of the proposals dismissed at appeal in 2023 ⁴
Section 3:	Scope of evidence and matters in dispute – providing the explanation as to which issues are addressed in my evidence.
Section 4:	Settlement and Landscape Character - Baseline Situation

³ A hard [clean] copy can be made available to the inspector if required.

⁴ APPEAL REF: APP/X0360/W/22/3309202, Land East of Lodge Road, Hurst, Reading

Section 5: Analysis of the propositions

Section 6: Summary and conclusions

Volume 2: Appendices

Professional Judgement

- 1.34 As a matter of professional judgement, I do not take the stance adopted by some of my professional colleagues that change in and of itself equates to harm, or that simply seeing housing is a negative experience. Change arising from development is not synonymous with 'harm'. Notably, our townscapes have always resulted from change to the character of the landscape and the creation of new character areas (GLVIA, para 4.37, **CD 8.4**)
- 1.35 Therefore, whilst LVIA's which follow the approach outlined in the published guidance, reach conclusions that housing is an *adverse* effect, I consider that if the new housing complements and respects its context, the change can be neutral, or indeed positive in nature, as the housing becomes part of the characteristic townscape that it is intended to be.
- 1.36 The landscape profession does not shy away from, or take an in-principal objection to, the provision of new housing, it is supportive of development on the basis that it should respond to its context and become a positive component of the evolving landscape. I note that GLVIA 3 does not contain the word 'harm', the guidance recognises that the landscape is changing, and development to meet the growing and changing population responding to drivers of change. Paragraph 4.26 notes that:
- "...It should also be remembered that well-designed new developments can make a positive contribution to the landscape and need not always be hidden or screened."*
(emphasis **emboldened**)
- 1.37 This Proof of Evidence contains my opinions and judgements on the landscape and visual consequences of the proposed development, which in turn are informed by my extensive professional experience associated with development of green and brownfield locations.
- 1.38 Given the volume of information before the inspector I have sought to keep my evidence focused on the key areas of disagreement. My silence on aspects of the landscape and visual context should not be taken to mean I have concerns and/or choose to set these matters aside. Having read the material and visited the Appeal Site I have drawn my own conclusions on the issues before this inquiry. I have not identified any matters which indicate that development should be resisted on landscape and visual grounds.

Declaration

- 1.39 The evidence I have prepared represents my informed professional opinion on the objective and subjective aspects of the development for the Appeal Site. Based on my knowledge, the facts stated in this evidence are true and accurate and I have complied with my professional Code of Conduct.

Section 2: The Proposals and Comparative Analysis

- 2.1 Typically, for landscape and visual issues in the application and appeal process, much time is invested debating the methodology and terminology used and judgements reached in the respective LVIA/LVIAs, particularly relating to the significance of effect. This draws attention away from the scheme proposals and the approach to delivering positive outcomes when providing well-designed new homes.
- 2.2 In this section, I explain the relationship and relevance of landscape and townscape characterisation in the design process. I also consider the delivery of Green Infrastructure as part of the scheme of development.

Design and Delivering Landscape Benefits – Mitigation and Green Infrastructure

- 2.3 The provision of new homes within Wokingham Borough is reliant on development of greenfield locations as illustrated by the adopted and emerging Local Plan and recent appeal decisions⁵. All of these developments will result in the partial or wholesale change of small to large tracts of open landscapes, from countryside to urban areas. The appeal proposals are not unique, nor is the magnitude of change incongruent or at odds with the prevailing strategy for housing delivery and the nature of change accepted by the Council and PINS via the appeal route.
- 2.4 In the context that development of greenfield locations inevitably will result in changes to the character and appearance of the landscape, it is important that scheme proposals are brought forward cognisant of the likely effects and incorporate measures to minimise or address the unavoidable consequences.
- 2.5 Whilst the application describes the totality of the proposals, from a landscape and townscape perspective the spatial arrangement of the development parcels gives rise to two discreet and distinct areas of settlement growth relating to the settlement edge at Martineau Lane to the south and Tape Lane to the northeast. Therefore, although the development is brought forward as a single entity it will be experienced as an area of common land between the newly established settlement edges.
- 2.6 There are a number of attributes of the development location which assist with moderating the potential effects:
- Avoidance of designated or sensitive assets and limited environmental constraints.
 - Aligning with the prevailing pattern of growth; and
 - Designing in a manner which would not represent an illogical or incoherent extension to the village.
- 2.7 The Appellant's LVIA contains a brief summary of the mitigation measures included in the appeal proposals (CD 8.1, paragraph 3.4). The approach to the design is explored in the evidence of Mr Adams on behalf of the Appellant.

⁵ For example, Land at Sandford Farm (allocated greenfield development), South Wokingham (Strategic Development allocation), School Lane (appeal), Hall Farm/Loddon Valley – emerging strategic allocation)

- 2.8 In my opinion, a comprehensive analysis of all of the mitigation measures is an important consideration considering the planning balance; therefore, I provide the following text to supplement the LVIA contents.
- 2.9 Mitigation measures are those measures, both incorporated into, or dismissed during the design process to:
- Prevent/avoid adverse effects,
 - Reduce effects; and, where possible,
 - Offset or remedy (or compensate for) any significant adverse landscape and visual effects.
- 2.10 Enhancement measures are subtly different, as they seek to improve the landscape resource and the visual amenity of the Appeal Site and its wider setting, over and above its baseline condition.

Prevention/Avoidance

- 2.11 As a point of fact, the Appeal Site is not covered by specific policies listed in the NPPF, paragraph 11, footnote 7, including:
- SSSI.
 - Green Belt.
 - Local Green Space.
 - Habitat Sites.
 - National Landscape.
 - National Park.
 - Heritage Coast.
 - Irreplaceable habitats.
 - Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change; and
 - Designated heritage assets.
- 2.12 Furthermore, the Appeal Site is not covered by the following additional policy constraints in Wokingham Borough
- Conservation Area/Area of Special Characters
 - National Historic Parks and Gardens
 - Valued Landscapes (emerging)
- 2.13 This ensures that the development avoids adverse impacts on those landscapes and features with ecological, cultural or landscape value. This is a significant part of the mitigation measures, particularly in a highly constrained borough.
- 2.14 In respect of the value of the landscape, Inspector Wildsmith⁶ concluded that the Appeal Site is of local value, there was no assertion that this is an NPPF, para 187 valued landscape made at the last inquiry, this is considered in more detail in section 5 of my evidence.

⁶ Para 49 of the appeal decision, **CD 7.1**

Reduction

- 2.15 There are a number of measures which have been incorporated into the scheme proposals to ensure that potential adverse effects are reduced through the placement and design of the proposed development. These measures include:
- 2.15.1 Placement of the development parcels to reduce the extent of visibility and reduce the number of vantage points from which the new housing will be visible, supplemented by spaces for new green corridors on the boundaries of the housing.
 - 2.15.2 Retention and enhancement of mature wooded elements within the site to reduce the visibility of the development.
 - 2.15.3 Maintaining undeveloped land alongside Tape Lane and Lodge Road.

Offset/Remedy

- 2.16 New tree planting is provided to compensate for the limited number of trees removed at the site access. The offsetting significantly exceeds the quantum of trees lost to development.

Enhancement

- 2.17 It is recognised within the landscape and wider planning profession that Green Infrastructure (GI) should be integral to the design and layout of new areas of housing. Furthermore, Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan requires development proposals to demonstrate how they have considered and achieved specified GI criteria. The first element of Policy CC03 (2) a) in consideration and achievement of the overarching objective in itself is not a criterion but a GI objective, namely:

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

- 2.18 The appeal proposals and wider design approach includes new GI assets and increases the functionality of the landscape beyond the limited contributions made by the land currently.
- 2.19 To assist in this regard GI is explored in the Landscape Institute's position papers (2009, 2011 and 2013) which I contributed to. The concept of GI is to provide multifunctional landscapes and landscape assets. The following table (**Table 2.1**) summarises the GI enhancements as shown on the Indicative Landscape Strategy plan (**CD 8.2**). These new assets and functionality are deliverable through the identified parameters and in line with the indicative strategy and design approach. There is scope of further enhance the GI provision in the detailed design.
- 2.20 Policy CC03 has a limited number of criteria, when compared to the approach by the LI, and adopted its professional members, not all of the C003 criteria relate to functionality of the elements to be retained and provided. Notably, CC03 3). Records:

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

- 2.21 On this point I note that the Parameter Plan (**CD 1.4**) clearly shows that the provision of new GI assets within the appeal scheme will benefit from a consolidated form and arrangement (spatially) which in

turn are connected internally and is contiguous with other areas of multifunctional GI including the allotments to the south, and linear features, such as hedgerows, for the purposes of wildlife corridors.

2.22 Overall, the proposals deliver GI enhancements which are:

2.22.1 In compliance with MDD Policy CC03; and

2.22.2 Exceed and increase GI functionality beyond the policy requirements.

2.22.3 There will be no loss of functionality compared to the baseline situation.

Table 2.1: Green Infrastructure Provisions

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
Climate change adaption – Even a modest increase in tree canopy cover can significantly reduce the urban heat island effect via evapotranspiration and shading, as well as improving air quality, which often suffers because of higher temperatures Climate change mitigation, well-designed and managed GI can encourage people to travel in a more sustainable way, such as cycling and walking.	CC03 d) Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features	Limited tree cover	Tree loss within the Appeal Site will be minimal, by contrast new tree planting will be distributed through the Site, particularly within the open space and on the perimeter of the development parcels. Overall, there will be an increase in trees and canopy coverage (increasing overtime as the trees mature). This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals.
	CC03 e) Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.		The geographic location of the Site, in close proximity and adjacent to the existing network of rights of way and settlement facilities means occupants of the new development have the option to walk to local places within the villages and outlying spaces such as the cricket club. At this stage the Illustrative masterplan (CD 1.3) shows that a well-designed and comprehensive scheme of GI can be delivered alongside the housing. The quality and species to be used is in the control of the Council through an appropriately worded condition. Matters of sustainability are addressed in the evidence of other members of the Appellant's team.
Water management GI is a good approach for managing flood risk. This can involve placing	No relevant CC03 criteria	Presence of boundary ditch	The Proposed Development incorporates drainage ponds and swales as part of the water management strategy. The approach to the design will be part of a Reserved Matters Application (RMA). Sensitive, natural forms of ponds and swales are highly valued by engineers, ecologists and landscape architects.

⁷ GI Functionality taken from the Landscape Institute's Green Infrastructure Position Paper 2009

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
<i>sustainable drainage systems (SUDs) in developments to attenuate surface water runoff and enhance biodiversity and recreation.</i>			The inclusion of these features can ensure a sensitive, attractive, and positive feature in the landscape. The profile of the ponds can be designed to deliver a variety of new ecological habitats and incorporate different plants to enhance the visual amenity of the feature. Provision of seating within the open space will benefit the local community and make a positive contribution to the sense of well-being. Whilst the ponds are part of the drainage strategy for the development, they also enhance water management for the area and increase water management resilience, wildlife habitats and amenity aspects of the landscape. This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals.
Dealing with waste. GI assets can deal with waste in a sustainable way. A good example of this is the use of reed beds which remove pollutants from water.	No relevant CC03 criteria		There is potential to explore a variety of measure to manage the natural environment through the detailed design phase. The ponds and swales can incorporate marginal species that are approach for the location which provide environmental benefits.
Food production Creating space for food production through allotments and community gardens and orchards, increases access to healthy food, provides educational opportunities, contributes to food security, and reconnects communities with their local environment. Connecting local communities with these	No relevant CC03 criteria	Grazing pasture for horses and donkeys – no food value	The open space is positioned in close proximity to the community it serves and is accessible to the wider residential population through the provision of a network of footpaths. Subject to approval by WBC, the scheme can be designed to incorporate fruiting species (trees and shrubs, fruits, and nuts) to enhance the type of local cropping available to the community and provide a link to the former use. The appeal proposals provide for an extension to the Tape Lane allotments. The functionality will be changed and the potential grazing for food production lost, albeit the land is not used as part of an agricultural unit and in this respect this functionality is not realised. However, the nature of the food production

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
assets via footpaths and cycleways can encourage this reconnection further.			delivered through the development will be direct and accessible to residents and therefore minimises food miles and provides learning opportunities for food production, processing and management. Connectivity with the community beyond the Site is provided through new footpaths to allow wider access to these resources. Overall, an increase in this function.
<i>Biodiversity enhancement - corridors, and linkages. The role of GI in providing wildlife habitat in both urban and rural areas is well established but taking a landscape-scale approach to the planning, design and management of connected GI assets provides the framework within which species migration can more readily occur in response to environmental pressures such as climate change.</i>	No relevant CC03 criteria	Limited to field margins and hedgerows	The ecological assessment sets out the suite of ecological benefits which will be delivered as part of the Proposed Development. From a GI perspective, the potential benefits have the potential to include: • Retention and provision of new native plants and those of wildlife importance into landscaping scheme to provide foraging opportunities for a range of protected and priority fauna such as bats, birds and invertebrates. This can be achieved through the proposed creation of 'other neutral' grassland, traditional orchards, tree planting, SuDs features (bioswale) and pond creation as well as and enhancement and management of onsite woodland and trees. • Improved connectivity of existing green infrastructure with new native hedgerow planting and infill planting to enhance the existing hedgerow network. • Tree management for species and age diversity, with a particular focus on veteranisation and specialist management to ensure the longevity of the veteran trees and deadwood habitats on site. • The creation of new ponds and bioswales represents an enhancement within the local landscape for breeding amphibians and aquatic invertebrates as well as foraging opportunities for predators such as reptiles, bats and birds. • Enhancement of the existing watercourse through reduced encroachment and more favourable management • Provision of new bat roosting and bird nesting opportunities within new buildings and retained mature trees (numbers and specification to be determined at detailed design stage) and creation of habitat piles for

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
<i>Recreation and health, accessible GI provides important opportunities for informal and active recreation. Ensuring that these assets are provided in close proximity to people's homes, are maintained properly, and are designed with the needs of local communities in mind, is critical to their positive role in public health and wellbeing.</i> <i>Economic values</i> Quality green space can have a major positive impact on land and property markets, creating settings for investment and acting as a catalyst for wider regeneration.	CC03 b) Promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green corridors including public rights of way such as footpaths, cycleways and bridleways No relevant CC03 criteria	No existing recreational benefits	invertebrates and reptiles and deadwood habitat creation for notable saproxylic invertebrates. - Provision of hedgehog gaps in new fencing to promote habitat connectivity across and within the Site. Overall, the proposed development of the Site would, subject to detailed design and confirmation through the RMA, lead to a net gain in biodiversity. This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals. The appeal proposals provide the following recreational activities: - Pedestrian routes (linear and circular) within the site and providing opportunities to walk through green spaces as an alternative to local vehicular roads and lanes. - Pedestrian links to Whistley Green - Equipped play area - General open space for informal play and recreation. This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals. The Common and Community Orchard form the core of the proposals, delivering an open and high-quality green environment that provides the immediate setting for the new homes (see LVIA Visualisations, CD 8.1). This arrangement has the potential to contribute positively to this function. There is potential to enhance this function of the landscape

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
Local distinctiveness Well-designed and managed GI assets, particularly those that engage local communities, and which relate to landscape character and heritage, can enhance local sense of place and foster community spirit. Stronger communities GI can help in meeting a wide range of community needs. The spirit of the GI approach means that social, environmental, and economic potential is considered and optimised.	CC03 c) Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside		The layout and use of materials reflecting the local vernacular can make a positive contribution to the townscape of Hurst and create a distinctive sense of place on the edge of the settlement (see LVIA Visualisations, CD 8.1). There is no strong local vernacular to the village, although buildings are unified by the presence of red brick in the townscape. This function is maintained.
	No relevant CC03 criteria		With the assets and attributes noted above there are opportunities to build homes which can integrate with the existing community in terms of townscape, spatial links and the provision of new places to meet and recreate. The provision of new footpaths in proximity to the existing community has the potential to encourage social integration and enhance the sense of place experienced by the new residents. This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals.

Differences Between the Appeal Proposals and the 2023 Dismissed Appeal

- 2.23 I note that in respect of the previous scheme of development for approximately 200 new homes and associated infrastructure and open space, Inspector Wildsmith reached the conclusion that the effects would be at the upper level of moderate, adverse. The scales applied by the landscape assessors at that time differ from the methodology used by Pegasus Planning (**Table 2.2**):

Table 2.2: Comparison of Ascribed Effects

<i>2022 LVIA Ltd Methodology</i>	<i>Appeal Pegasus Planning Methodology</i>
Major	High
Major/Moderate	
Moderate	Moderate
Moderate/Minor	Low
Minor	
Negligible	Negligible

- 2.24 I interpret the effects of moderate (upper end) being below Moderate/Major and Major or High in this context.

- 2.25 The scheme before this inquiry has responded to the decision recorded by Inspector Wildsmith. I do not consider that his conclusions on the scheme before him can be directly applied to the current appeal scheme for the following reasons:

- Reduction in quantum of development
Clearly the reduction in the number of new homes will reduce the area of open land to be built upon. The extent to which urbanisation of the landscape will occur is limited within the Site and changes the proportion of undeveloped land from 35.4% (dismissed appeal scheme) to 62% of the site for this appeal.
- 'Green' treatment to site entrance and Lodge Road corridor
One of the key routes from which visual change would be appreciated on a frequent and daily basis for a relatively high number of people is Lodge Road. The dismissed appeal included housing fronting Lodge Road, and through the opening of the boundary hedgerow to access the site the housing would have been visible as part of the journey on Lodge Road, having an impact on the rural character of the road corridor and engendering a visual link with Whistley Green. The appeal proposals omit this housing and now include meadow grassland and a community orchard at the site entrance. This change to the scheme reduces the perceived and visual appreciation of the urban form of the development and any sense of urbanisation at the western approach to the village. Furthermore, the omission of housing in this part of site avoids any physical, visual or perceptual coalescence of Hurst and Whistley Green as appreciated from Lodge Road.
- Reduction in the primary road hierarchy – reduced sense of urbanisation
A simplification of the road network and reduction in the extent of the primary access route will reduce the comparative sense of urbanisation of the landscape (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).



Figure 2.1: Dismissed Appeal - Primary Road Comparison



Figure 2.2: Appeal Scheme - Primary Road Comparison

- Positive relationship between Tape Lane and the open space

*Addressing the concerns for users on Tape Lane, identified at the previous appeal, this appeal proposal has substantially pulled back from the lane and ensures that the majority of the land immediately west of Tape Lane is retained as naturalised green space in the form of a 'common' (see **Figures 2.3 and 2.4**). Where housing is provided west of Tape Lane there is an offset to reduce the prominence of the development as appreciated from the lane. In addition, this modification of the layout facilitates a new footpath for people to walk safely within open green space alongside the lane.*



Figure 2.3: Dismissed Appeal – Tape Lane Comparison



Figure 2.4: Appeal Scheme – Tape Lane Comparison

- Increased GI provision and functionality
With the decrease in the developable areas and increase in undeveloped land within the Appeal Site there will be a benefit in terms of the deliverable quantum and diversity of new habitats, quality of the new recreational opportunities and enhancement of the variety of GI assets and functionality.

2.26 Overall, there are demonstrable benefits and improvements arising from the appeal scheme when compared to the 2022 dismissed appeal proposals. I consider that it is incorrect for those objecting to the appeal scheme to simply adopt the findings of Inspector Wildsmith and apply them to the current scheme before this inquiry.

Section 3: Scope of Evidence and Matters in Dispute

Scope of Landscape and Visual issues relating to the Council's Decision

3.1 In section 5, I consider a number of propositions and the basis of exploring the matters between the parties. These propositions have been identified from the following sources:

- The main issues identified by the inspector at the CMC
- The Decision Notice and wording in the reason for refusal.
- The key landscape matters discussed in the delegated officer's reports.
- The response of Ms Crafer
- The council's Statement of Case
- The Parish Council's 'Appeal Hearing Statement'

Inspectors Issue

3.2 The Inspector has identified the following as a main issue (CMC summary note, paragraph 6, 2):

The effect on landscape character and appearance

3.3 This is a broad matter and will be addressed through the specific propositions set out below.

Decision Notice

3.4 My evidence addresses the third reason for refusal (**CD 1.1**), namely:

The proposed development will have a detrimental impact on the landscape and the character and appearance of the area by reason of the quantum, scale, parameters, and location of the development. It would result in the loss of characteristic landscape features and erode of the separation between existing villages and their rural setting. The development is contrary to policies CP1, CP3, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, the Borough Design Guide SPD and section 12 & 15 of the NPPF.

3.5 In respect of this reason, the propositions addressed will be:

Proposition 1: The Site is an important rural component of Hurst and its setting, including the Area of Special Character⁸.

Proposition 2: The degree of harm⁹ asserted by WBC as being 'detrimental' is such that the landscape harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits¹⁰¹¹.

⁸ Suggested as an indication of value by the landscape officer.

⁹ My opinion on the use of the word harm to describe landscape and visual change is noted above in my introduction. I include this word the context of the Council's position and use of 'harm' as a planning term.

¹⁰ NPPF, paragraph 11 (b) (ii)

¹¹ As set out below I do not undertake the planning balance but provide the information which informs the planning consideration.

Proposition 3: The degree to which the changes will alter the character, and appearance and has an effect on the 'area'.

Officer Report

- 3.6 The officer recommended refusal of the application for the 11 reasons listed in the Decision Notice (CD 1.1), specifically concluding, in respect of the landscape character and appearance:

The overall effect on the character and appearance of the area has multiple impacts. This impact is not simply a landscape objection of losing an attractive open field in the countryside - the proposed parameters, access road and quantum of development result in harmful impacts that will result in an incongruous form of development even without considering the good qualities of the existing landscape. [The scale of development is excessive in the context of the small village of Hurst. The location and isolation of the proposed main access road would be a poor outcome for any development, and this is appreciable compounded by the rural setting in which this new estate road would be situated. The fragmented parameters of the development would also result in piecemeal development and open spaces between Hurst and Whistley Green. These issues go to the heart of sustainable development.]

- 3.7 The first part of this quotation will be addressed through the exploration of Proposition 2. The [second part] will be explored in the evidence of Mr Adams and others. For completeness I will consider a further proposition arising from this summary:

Proposition 4: The consequence of the development has an impact on the spaces between Hurst and Whistley Green.

Landscape Officer's Consultation Response

- 3.8 The landscape officer's response (CD 8.3) covered a number of issues. The following topics addressed by Ms. Crafer are not discussed in my evidence as they are addressed by the appropriate specialist evidence:

- Trees (written statement from Mr Jamie Pratt, Tyler Grange)
- BNG and ecological matters (written statement from Ms Emily Major, Tyler Grange)
- Site Layout – the application is made in outline and matters of design will be the subject of a Reserved Matters Application (RMA), however, Mr Adams from JTP deals with design matters.

- 3.9 The comments made by Ms. Crafer which relate to landscape character and appearance can be summarised as:

- Summary of the published Wokingham Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) in respect of LCA C2.
- Listing the key characteristics of the character areas.
- Summary of the Landscape Guidelines for the LCAs.
- The presence of the veteran trees and the ascribed setting of the 'Area of Special Character' elevates the value of the landscape (see proposition 1).
- The development will be clearly visible in views around the site.

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Proposition 5: That the WBLCA is relevant to the determination of the appeal.

Proposition 6: That the value of the landscape is greater than moderate, local value

Proposition 7: That visibility is determinative of unacceptability.

Scope of Townscape Issues Relating to the Council's Decision

3.10 In my evidence I touch on the first reason for refusal relating to:

The proposal results in an unsustainable pattern of development by reason of the creation of a new unplanned large housing estate on a greenfield site in the countryside outside of settlement limits. It would be significantly out of scale with neighbouring small village of Hurst ...

3.11 This objection will be explored through the evidence of Mr Adam, but I address aspects of the settlement form as it pertains to the landscape.

Council's Statement of Case

3.12 The Council's Statement of Case summarises the issues in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.9 (CD 2.2). This overview does not give rise to any additional propositions to be considered in my evidence.

Parish Council's Appeal Hearing Statement

3.13 Section 3 of the Parish Council's Hearing Statement (CD 8.8) sets out the key matters, from the perspective of Hurst Parish Council in respect of landscape and character. Understandably, some of the wording is inconsistent with terminology used by landscape practitioners, such as referring to the 'inverted C' as an important landscape character, when the issue relates to landscape functionality (Proposition 5), regardless of the character of the landscape.

3.14 The issue of BNG is ecological and is addressed in the written evidence prepared by Tyler Grange.

3.15 The only additional matter identified by the Parish Council that appears to lie outside of the scope of the propositions set out above is the objection on the grounds that the character of the landscape changes from countryside to suburban estate. This will be explored in:

Proposition 8: Change through suburbanisation is in principle an unacceptable outcome of the development process.

Section 4: Settlement and Landscape Character - Baseline Situation

- 4.1 The *European Landscape Convention – A Framework for Implementation*, October 2007, contains the short definition of 'landscape' and provides supporting text at paragraph 1.2, namely:

*"The ELC definition is short, yet comprehensive: 'landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' The definition applies to the whole territory of states including all **urban** and **peri-urban** landscapes, towns, **villages** and rural areas, the coast, and inland areas. It applies to ordinary or even degraded landscape as well as those area that are outstanding or protected."* (My emphasis **emboldened**.)

- 4.2 I record this definition to reinforce the importance of considering all components of the landscape. LVIA's and Landscape Character Assessments typically focus on the undeveloped landscapes. However, the Appellant's team worked together to understand the townscape and landscape character and qualities. This is relevant to the comments made in GLVIA 3 (paragraphs 2.13 to 2.15) wherein change is driven by the need for development to meet a growing and changing population.
- 4.3 New homes are important and fundamental components of our wider environment; they are places we live in and value. Indeed, we celebrate and protect some of our most urban and densely settled townscapes through the application of Conservation Area policies. Whilst this reflects historic elements, this does not mean only historic properties are attractive and do not cause 'harm'. New developments win awards and are celebrated by communities.
- 4.4 The landscape profession does not shy away from or take an in-principal objection to the provision of new housing; it is supportive of development on the basis that it should respond to its context.
- 4.5 I reiterate the point I made previously, GLVIA 3 does not contain the word 'harm', the guidance recognises that the landscape is not unchanging, and development to meet the growing and changing population responding to drivers of change. Paragraph 4.26 notes that:

*"...It should also be remembered that well-designed new developments **can make a positive contribution to the landscape** and need not always be hidden or screened."*

- 4.6 In *Townscape Character Assessment*, Technical Information Note 05/2017, Landscape Institute, April 2018 the positive attributes of settlements are acknowledged in paragraph 2.2:

The term townscape first came into popular use in the UK in the 1940's and 1950's, when there was a concern amongst some architectural critics that the identity of our villages, towns and cities was being eroded by poorly planned post-war reconstruction. They derived their definitions of townscape from the Roman "genius loci," which translates as "the prevailing character or atmosphere of a place." It does not mean preservation however, and townscape was used as a way of

explaining how modern development could co-exist alongside historic buildings and areas, contributing positively to the evolution of a place. (My emphasis)

- 4.7 The existing settlement in the immediate environs of the Appeal Sites is not an historic settlement. As shown on the historic maps this is a relatively recent component of the landscape, resulting from development of former orchards and agricultural land.
- 4.8 Landscape comprises a number of elements illustrated by Figure 1 in An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England (AALCA), October 2014. This is typically referred to as the 'Landscape Wheel.'

Figure 1: What is landscape?



Figure 4.1: 'Landscape Wheel'

- 4.9 Critically, understanding the landscape relies on more than what can be seen and how policy is applied. Landscape is a concept that relies on perception and the manner in which features combine to create a sense of place.

The Settlement of Hurst and the Landscape Context - Townscape

- 4.10 Factually, 'Development Limits' is not a term which is interchangeable with the built-up area or settlement boundary. The following assists in demonstrating the difference between the sense of place manifest by the settlement (its components and qualities) and the drafting of policies as a means of spatial planning and development control.



Figure 4.2: Extract from OS mapping, Berkshire Sheet XXXVIII Surveyed: 1871 to 1872, Published: 1883

- 4.11 Historically, the village was dispersed and did not have a nucleus of housing, but comprised Hurst House, St Nicholas Church, Vicarage, the almshouses, lodge, brewery and a number of working farms and incidental elements, including the village school and a small collection of dwellings (Figure 4.2). Whilst spread over a relatively wide area, they were linked by association, creating a social cohesion despite the absence of a nucleated core of development.
- 4.12 As described and illustrated in the Design and Access Statement (CD 1.5, pages 27-38) Hurst has evolved through parcels of land being brought forward for development. The block structure has sub neighbourhoods each with different characters.

Wider Landscape Context and Character

- 4.13 Reference is made to the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA), 2019 by the landscape officer and in the committee report.
- 4.14 Firstly, it is helpful to understand what is typically meant by landscape characterisation as a matter of principle. This is a process whereby areas of similar character are classified, mapped, and described. It is a non-judgmental process and does not imply or confer value or 'rank' landscapes. It is not a qualitative judgement, and it takes a holistic approach to a geographic area rather than focusing on special features. The output tends to describe a landscape with characteristics that combine to make a place distinctive, even where localised variations may be different. Furthermore, the characterisation process typically focusses on the undeveloped landscapes outside of settlements, in effect they are drafted with 'blinkers' on in respect of towns and villages which form the boundary of landscape

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character areas (LCAs). In respect of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (CD 8.9) having identified key characteristics, the narrative explores the:

- Natural Landscape
- Cultural Landscape
- Perceptual Landscape

- 4.15 The urban elements are summarised in terms of the settlement pattern within the LCA.
- 4.16 'Landscape' is everywhere, and all landscape has character. The landscape has evolved and continues to evolve. Landscape character is therefore not an unchanging aspect of our environment. The landscape is also experienced at different scales and the process of characterisation can be undertaken at any scale.
- 4.17 By reference to the WBLCA the Appeal Site lies within C2: Hurst River Terrace Landscape Character Area. A summary description of the River Terrace LCA is included in the landscape officer's consultation response (CD 8.3). However, whilst part of the publication is extracted for the purposes of the officer's response there is no analysis by the officer as to the relevance of the text cited to the Appeal Site and consideration of the proposed development.
- 4.18 Published assessments cascade from the national through to the regional level, with the more local classifications and descriptions being of a finer grain and of great relevance.
- 4.19 However, reliance on these assessments should be caveated in this instance for the following reasons, bearing in mind the text in GLVIA, paragraph 5.13:

Existing assessments must be reviewed critically as their quality may vary, some may be dated, and some may not be suited to the task in hand. Before deciding to rely on information from an existing assessment a judgement should be made as to the degree to which it will be useful in informing the LVIA process...

It should be reviewed in terms of:

- *when it was carried out and the extent to which the landscape may have changed since then.*
- *its status, and whether or not it has been formally adopted, for example as supplementary planning guidance.*
- *the scale and level of detail of the assessment and therefore its suitability for use in the LVIA, while noting that larger-scale assessments can often provide valuable context.*
- *any other matters which might limit the reliability or usefulness of the information.*

Justification should be provided for any departure from the findings of an existing, established LCA.

- 4.20 In this instance the level of detail contained within the WBLCA, as explored below, is insufficient for the assessment of a single field within the context of an existing settlement and its capacity or suitability to accommodate housing. The scale and level of detail in the WBLCA is not sufficiently focussed to provide more than an overview of the landscape context.
- 4.21 In respect of the published key characteristic of the River Terrace LCA, the following observations are made in respect of the Appeal Site.

Table 4.1: Commentary on Key Characteristics of the River Terrace LCA

Published Key Characteristics	Observations/Commentary
Flat lowland landscape with gently shelving slopes down to the Loddon River valley.	As can be seen by the topographic analysis (LVIA, Figure 3, CD 8.1), this is a general description of the wider River Terrace LCA, Hurst and the Appeal Site are located on this landform. The proposals will not alter this characteristic.
Geologically varied, the area is underlain by clay with sand and gravel river terrace deposits with impervious soils affected by high groundwater and short-term flooding.	Similarly, this is a summary of the geology across the wider LCA. Notably (see Figure 4.3) the Appeal Site overlays the geological formation consistent with the existing settlement. There is very little variation in geology associated with Hurst in contrast to the wider LCA.
Network of water features from minor drainage channels radiating into the Loddon Valley; deep drainage ditches around the fields; and scattered farm ponds.	There is a small ditch within the western part of the Site. This is minor component of the landscape and will be retained.
Simple agricultural landscape of mainly arable farmland, with pasture enclosed in relatively large straight-sided fields, including smaller areas of horse and pony paddocks.	The Appeal Site is a remnant landholding associated with the wider agricultural land pattern and does not function as part of a farmed landscape.
Open character with relatively few boundaries marked by vegetation. Hedgerow or roadside trees are relatively scarce and scattered.	The Appeal Site is internally open but contained by settlement and vegetation. It is not part of a sweep of open countryside.
Villages located around historic cores including Whistley Green and Hurst, which has a Conservation Area. Newer linear development within these settlements is aligned along the network of roads and rural lanes. There is no strong local vernacular, although there are fine early buildings and building character is unified by the presence of red brick.	As can be seen from the historic mapping, Hurst is not formed around an historic core but has expanded over time through the development of clusters of new homes within historic land parcels. As illustrated in the Design and Access Statement there is a variety of townscape qualities but no strong local vernacular is evident.
Regular pattern of river terrace farmsteads along the rural lanes,	Not applicable to the Appeal Site

Published Key Characteristics	Observations/Commentary
some of which are listed. Many have large-scale modern agricultural buildings which are prominent in the landscape.	
A rural and tranquil area, with only southern edge affected by movement and noise of the M4 and its junction with the A329 (M) and crossed by pylons.	This is a fair description of the wider area and the settlement and its context. The Appeal site is not within the southern area affected by the M4 and/or A329(M). However, at a more local scale the relative tranquility is adversely affected by traffic on the local road network, the presence of settlements and the absence of any sense of remoteness.
Wooded horizons created by the wooded character of the adjoining Loddon valley and the woods and hedgerow trees of K1 and I4.	The main body text notes that: <i>“This area lacks woodland, but its verdant and open character is enhanced by the dark wooded horizons created by the adjacent LCAs. The openness is emphasised by the fragmented character of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.”</i> This is not a description which reflects the Appeal Site, which is contained by mature tree belts and wooded features (see image below). 

Published Key Characteristics	Observations/Commentary
	The woodland provides significant containment to the Appeal Site and the settlement edge of Hurst and, in effect, separates the settlement (and Appeal Site) from the wider landscape.

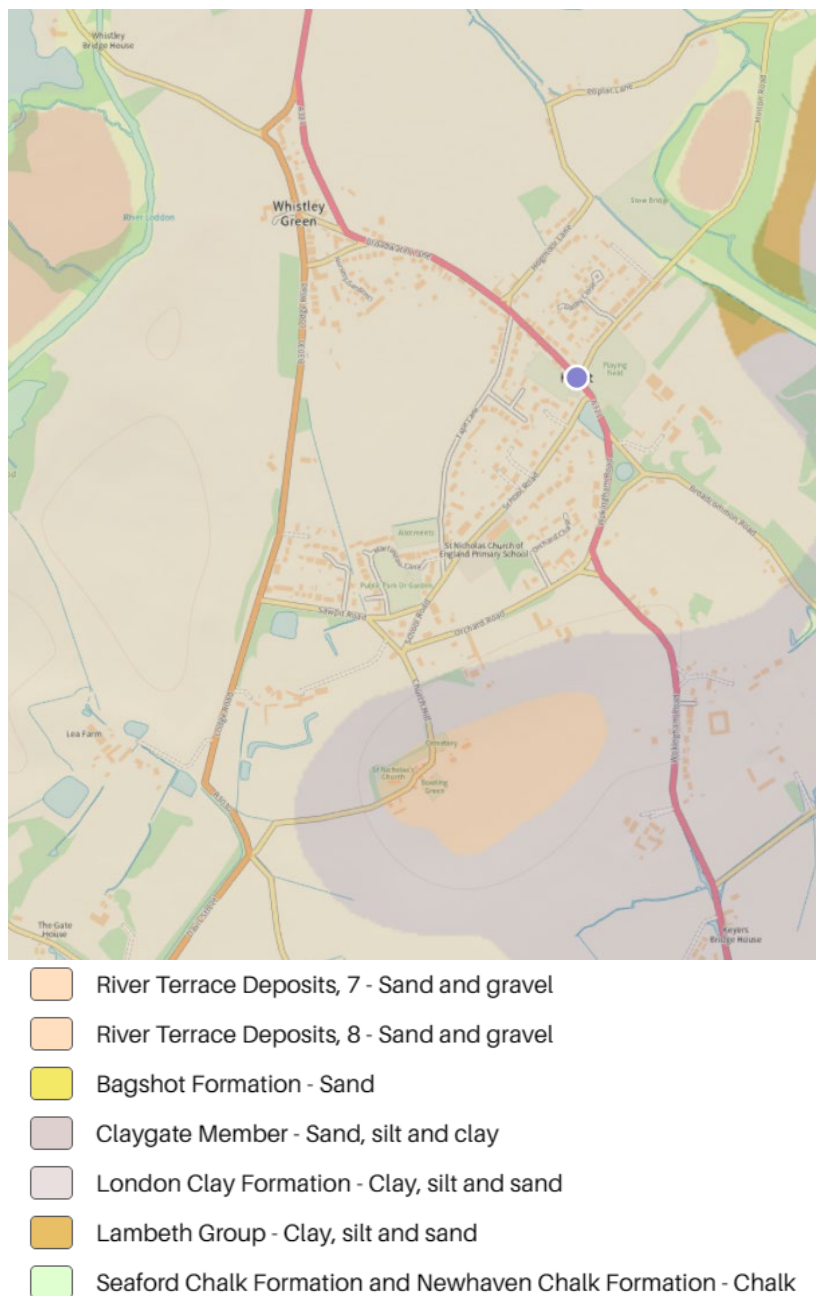


Figure 4.3: Geology¹²

¹² source: <https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk>.

- 4.22 Overall, the Appeal Site, as to be expected for a general description of unifying characteristics, reflects the wider context but there are local and specific variations so that the Appeal Site does not manifest all of the key characteristics of the River Terrace LCA. The Council's analysis is applicable to a wide area and as such all comments need to be read in relation to the area being assessed, for the reason outlined above reliance cannot be placed on contents of the River Terrace LCA when looking at the specifics of the Appeal Site.

Section 5: Analysis of the Propositions

- 5.1 The propositions addressed below and the rationale for their consideration are identified in Section 2 above.

Proposition 1: The Site is an important rural component of Hurst and its setting.

- 5.2 The use of the term 'rural setting' implies an elevated functionality and value to the land around the settlement. This is incorrect, the 'setting' referred to in this instance is simply land around Hurst. It does not serve the role of protecting any functional, character or visual 'setting' of Hurst (the historic elements are predominantly enclosed by contemporary development, **Figure 5.1**, nor does it facilitate a visual connection from the outlying landscape to the historic core.



Figure 5.1: Historic Mapping Overlain on Current Aerial Photography

- 5.3 As illustrated by **Figures 5.1** and **5.2** the Appeal Site is distant from the historic core. With the growth of Hurst there are no visual, physical or perceptual connections between the Appeal Site and the historic origins of Hurst. In effect the setting of Hurst has been suburbanised and developed.

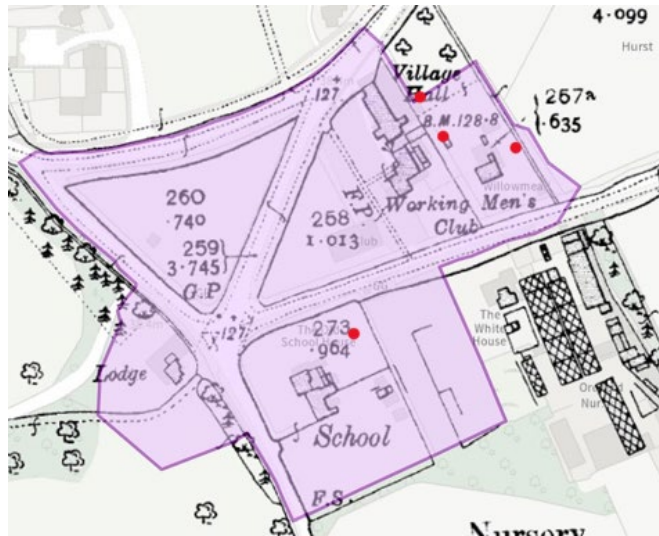


Figure 5.2: Extract from Historic Environment Topic Paper, Appendix C relating to The Old School House ASC

- 5.4 Although the site is grazed pasture and is therefore a rural land use on the edge of Hurst, it does not contribute to the 'setting' of Hurst or its historic core in a manner that elevates its functionality beyond that which occurs on the edge of the majority of settlements in the borough. There is no explanation by the Council as to how a 'setting' is necessary for the housing built since the 1960's to the east of Tape Lane.
- 5.5 The Council's landscape officer makes specific reference to the Hurst Village Centre Area of Special Character (**Figure 5.3**) in respect of the:

"...importance of the site's open character and mature trees as a setting to the Area of Special Character."



Figure 5.3: Extent of Village Centre (Hurst) Area of Special Character

5.6 This Area of Special Character is described¹³ as:

The Village Area of Special Character encompasses part of the settlement of Whistley Green and part of the settlement of Hurst, with Broadwater Lane being the primary road serving the AoSC and linking the two settlements. The AoSC lies approximately 1.7km south of Twyford and approximately 3km north-east of Winnersh. It incorporates part of Hinton Road, Hogmoor Lane and School Road in Hurst, as well as Whistley Green and Lodge Road to the north...

...The Village Centre Area of Special Character is situated within the parish of Hurst. The area has a largely linear layout, with the majority of built form concentrated on Broadwater Lane which links the settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst. The area is predominately residential, comprising two-storey semi-detached 96 and detached buildings of a variety of ages and designs, featuring a mix of brick and

¹³ Historic Environment Topic Paper Appendix C: Areas of Special Character pro-forma assessments

white render elevations. Broadwater Lane is heavily vegetated on the stretch of road between Hurst Village and Whistley Green, with many mature trees and open fields on the northern side of the street. The AoSC encompasses the Hurst Cricket Club to the south, as well as Hurst Lodge, a Grade II Listed Building and its adjacent Locally Listed Historic Park and Garden. There are also a number of Grade II Listed Buildings within the area, dating from the 16th to late 18th Century.*

5.7 From the Council's analysis of this ASC, I note the following:

5.7.1 The description is limited to the ASC and does not draw any conclusions as to the relationship of the ASC to its context. The designation is assigned irrespective of the land and context which surrounds it, or any 'setting'. In this regard the context to the ASC pertinent to consideration of the Appeal Site is:

5.7.1.1 Northeast of Broadwater Lane and northwest of Hinton Road the boundary of the ASC abuts the housing at Dalby Close.

5.7.1.2 The play area and playing field within the ASC is contained by housing on Tape Lane and Barker Court and Cranford Drive.

5.7.1.3 South of Whistley Green consent has been granted and subsequently developed for housing at Nursery Gardens.

5.7.2 These areas of housing which directly abut the boundary of the ASC have not diminished the setting, quality, integrity or importance of the ASC, this local designation has not been amended as a result of changes to the context.

5.7.3 The Council's evidence base does not identify any relationship with regards to the character of the Appeal Site, or ascribe any value or importance of the ASC by reference to the Appeal Site (its character or proximity)

5.7.4 The ASC in the vicinity of the Appeal Site is within the urban environment. Housing and roads are clearly not a 'harmful' component of the character and appearance of this locale. They are elements which collectively exhibit 'Special Character'

5.7.5 In light of Proposition 4, the Council's analysis records "*The area has a largely linear layout, with the majority of built form concentrated on Broadwater Lane **which links the settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst***" Indeed, the fact is that Hurst Village Centre includes Whistley Green.

5.8 There is no evidential basis for Ms Crafer to assert that the site is important in terms of the setting of the ASC. From the negotiations in respect of the Landscape Statement of Common Ground the Council's approach in this regard relates to views between buildings on Broadwater Lane into the Appeal Site. However, in this regard I note:

5.8.1 The streetscene to the southwest of Broad Lane is characterised by building, walls and dense vegetation. As a result, the vantage points from where any view can be appreciated are substantially limited.

- 5.8.2 That part of the existing settlement closest to the Appeal Site (Broadwater Lane) comprises relatively new housing which lies outside of the ASC.
- 5.8.3 Where there is a gap in the street scene (relevant to the Appeal Site) it is the foreground of the visual composition that manifests local value, not what lies beyond. To the left of the view (**Figure 5.4**) the housing that is a component of the streetscene is not within the ASC, yet it has not diminished the ASC designation.



Figure 5.4: View from Broadwater Lane towards the Site¹⁴

- 5.9 Ms Crafer states that *'Significant change, or removal of these landscape elements would constitute a diminishing of that setting and integrity and importance of the designation.'* Clearly, the appeal proposals are set behind the housing on Broadwater Lane, beyond the housing which is already present between the ASC and the Appeal Site and further set back by a green corridor. As a result, there will be no significant, change or removal of the elements noted in the Council's evidence which have led to the ASC designation. The changes outside of the ASC boundary are consistent with the townscape characteristics which currently exist, and more importantly, directly about the ASC.
- 5.10 Based on my analysis **I do not agree with this proposition.**

Proposition 2: The degree of harm asserted by WBC as being 'detrimental' is such that the landscape harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

- 5.11 I accept that the site is not currently the subject of an adopted development plan allocation, however the proposals are brought forward in the context of a recognised national and local need to deliver new homes. This is a matter addressed by the evidence of Mr Slatter.
- 5.12 My exploration of this matter does not undertake the planning balance to conclude on the extent to which the effects may or may not outweigh the benefits. However, I do explore the extent of the effects and the benefits so that others can consider in the context of the Council's allegations in this regard.

¹⁴ This is an image from Google Streetview and is provided as a representation of the view.

- 5.13 A significant number of new homes are being, or will be, delivered on greenfield sites, within a range of landscapes, including National Parks, AONBs, and their settings, Green Belt, and general open countryside. Such development finds support from Councils, the planning inspectorate, and the Secretary of State. There is no in-principal objection that the inevitable changes and consequences that arise from the loss of open land to development, and changes to views from the immediate area are a barrier to development and the delivery of new homes.
- 5.14 Wokingham Borough is subject of a number of environmental designations which significantly constrain development opportunities, including, but not limited to:
- Ancient Woodland
 - SNCIs, Local Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves
 - Thames Basin Heath SPA mitigation Zones
 - SSSIs
 - Green Belt
 - Sites of Urban Landscape Value
 - Conservation Areas
 - Areas of Special Character
 - Local Historic Parks and Gardens
 - National Historic Parks and Gardens
 - Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- 5.15 Where areas lack any form of environmental or landscape protection, they tend to be rural areas detached from areas of settlement and infrastructure wherein development would be isolated and unconnected and likely to give rise to substantial landscape and visual effects by dint of being incongruent in a predominantly countryside location. The Appeal Site is countryside but abutting and associated with the settlement of Hurst. Its location is a positive aspect of the planning and siting of development in respect of the landscape context.
- 5.16 It is also pertinent to note that this landscape is recognised as having moderate capacity to accommodate change (**Figure 5.3**). in respect of new housing such capacity to accommodate change of course will be greater in association with existing settlements.

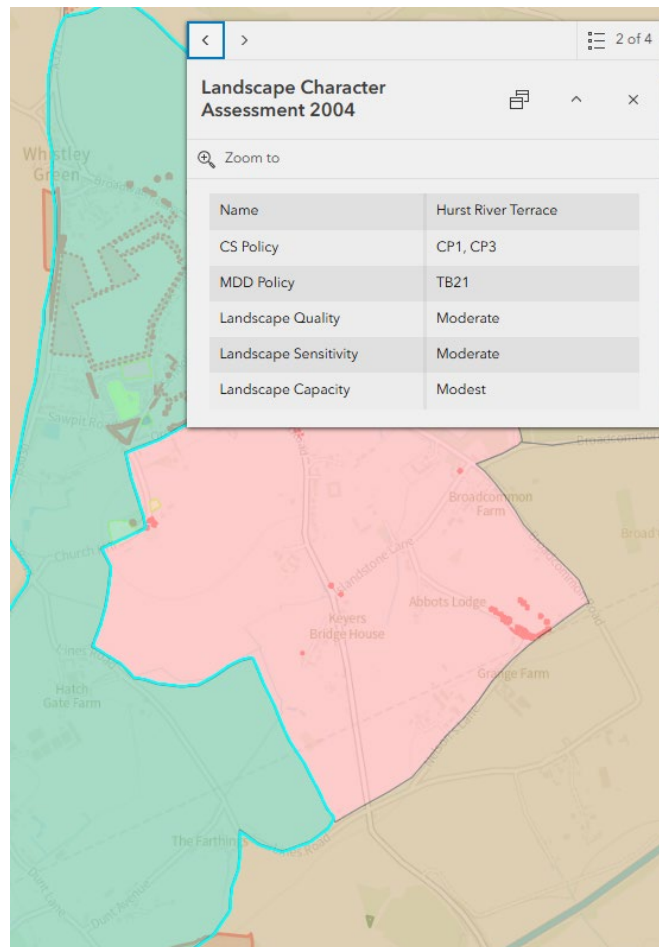


Figure 5.5: Extract from 2004 published Landscape Character Assessment

5.17 In terms of the adverse landscape and visual effects of the proposals, the LVIA (CD 8.1) records effects (moderate, adverse or greater) in respect of the following (see Table 4 in the LVIA):

Landscape Effects

5.17.1 Changes to land cover within the Appeal Site

5.17.2 Change to the landscape character limited to the Appeal Site

Visual Effects

5.17.3 Construction phase and at year 1 for those living and travelling on Tape Lane and Martineau Green open space

5.17.4 Construction phase and at year 1 for users of the allotments

5.18 These adverse effects are localised and primarily confined to the site and its immediate environs. I would also add that the visualisations (CD 8.1) illustrate that the introduction of new homes within in the view has the potential to be of a high quality in terms of landscape foreground and architectural treatment, and therefore visually attractive. Seeing housing with the landscape is a characteristic of the locale.

5.19 Furthermore, paragraph 4.37 of GLVIA, (CD 8.4) records the following:

Enhancement proposals should be based on a sound baseline assessment of the landscape and visual amenity of the area and of any trends likely to bring about future change. The following questions could usefully be considered, but local circumstances may vary, and different questions may also be relevant:

- *Can the development help improve the visual amenity of the area?*
- *Can it help restore, reconstruct, or provide **new local landscape character and local distinctiveness**?*
- *Can it assist in **meeting landscape management objectives for the area**?*
- *Can it help address specific issues and/or opportunities, for example restoration of damaged or derelict land, **opportunities for habitat improvement** and the scope for heritage benefit?*

5.20 In this instance the emboldened points are relevant, notably the loss of one character does not mean a new character is unacceptable.

5.21 Specifically in relation to the landscape of LCA C2: Hurst River terrace the guidelines do not preclude new development; the guidelines are outlined in the context that change may occur and needs to be responsive to the landscape. In **Table 5.1** I set out the LCA guidelines for the Hurst River Terrace LCA and the manner in which the scheme proposals address these points, where appropriate.

Table 5.1: LCA Landscape Guidelines and Development Response

Published Landscape Guidelines	Observations/Commentary
Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland , using locally occurring native species in order to create a more wooded character and provide screening of the M4. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.	There will be an increase of deciduous tree cover, woodland and enhancements to the hedgerows. The species selected will be the subject of the detailed design, but it is envisaged and recommended through the Appellants landscape and ecological strategies that native species are chosen. There is no need or intention to provide coniferous boundaries or shelterbelts.
Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.	Whilst the land will not be agricultural land use, the landscape strategy is to enhance the wildlife interest of the retained open spaces, development margins and avoid the requirement of intensive amenity management regimes.
Conserve and manage hedgerows and hedgerow trees as important wildlife habitats and landscape features , as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinststate or repair hedgerows and hedgerow	Hedgerows are retained are key features of the landscape and settlement edge. Breaches will occur to accommodate the site access and footpath links. These breaches have been minimised to that necessary for safe access and localised. New hedgerows are recommended

Published Landscape Guidelines	Observations/Commentary
trees with native species where there are opportunities to do so.	and can be accommodated within the layout to enhance the presence of these features, consistent with the existing settlement and increase wildlife connectivity.
Manage the integration of equine activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and hedgerow trees and control of associated built development.	Not relevant to this appeal
Conserve, enhance and manage wetland and resist infilling of ponds and drainage ditches due to development or changes in land use.	The proposals will enhance the provision of wetland features and conserve the existing ditches.
Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of villages and dispersed farms through control of new development, avoiding further linear spread of development.	The proposals will not add to the linear spread of development. Development parcels are located in proximity to the contemporary clusters of development on the edge of Hurst and maintain a contained form within the enclosing form of Hurst.
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.	This is an aspect which is subject to the detailed design phase of the project. There is scope to positively responds to this guideline.
Conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the open landscape between adjacent village centres , to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining between Hurst and Whistley Green.	As manifest by the development of Martineau Lane, the provision of housing and a new village green does not alter the general sense of peaceful enjoyment of the area. The approach to development shown on the Parameters Plan will emulate this character and ensure visual and physical separation of the two settlements (beyond the acknowledged connectivity which already exists.
Conserve the scenic value and rural character of the villages and the listed and historic buildings throughout the area, including within Hurst Conservation Area.	There is no reason for refusal or allegation of harm to the listed and historic buildings within Hurst or to the Hurst Conservation Area made by the Council. This guideline is not considered to be offended by the proposals.
Avoid detracting tall or large structures as well as high plantings of coniferous hedges , which would be very prominent in this open area.	There are no tall structures or coniferous hedges proposed.
Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.	There are no 'obtrusive elements' within the proposals. The built elements are consistent with the existing components of the settlement edge and therefore will blend into the visual character of the settlement edge.
Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways modifications,	Tape Lane will retain its character as a narrow and well vegetated lane, housing is placed within the Appeal Site where it relates to and will be

Published Landscape Guidelines	Observations/Commentary
road widening, passing bays, infrastructure and signage.	perceived alongside the existing settlement edge, so appearing as a sympathetic extension to Hurst. Lodge Road has a different character with large domestic properties fronting the road, with fences and brick walls defining the property entrances, devoid of vegetation. By comparison the new access to the Appeal Site will be more 'natural' and dominated by grassland and trees.
Ensure restoration plans for gravel extractions sites are in keeping with the character of the landscape and encourage opportunities for habitat creation. Resist proposals that would impact on the intactness or integrity of the landscape or habitats.	Not relevant
Maintain views to the wooded backdrop of the Loddon valley. Consider the impact of any development on the views to the wooded horizon. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts, other vertical elements, and very large agricultural or domestic buildings which have the potential to be highly visible.	Not relevant
Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate major roads, particularly the M4/A329 (M) on the boundary of the area.	Not relevant
Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity in the landscape, ensuring development and associated infrastructure does not spread onto the river terrace.	The placement of the development in the context of the settlement edge and to the east of Lodge Road prevents any discernible change to the tranquillity of the landscape and will not result in development spreading into the river terrace.

- 5.22 In my opinion, the appeal proposals have acknowledged the character of the landscape and minimise or avoid detrimental effects and respond positively to the guidelines for the LCA.
- 5.23 To be weighed in the planning balance (addressed by others) are the following landscape and visual benefits delivered as part of the landscape and Green Infrastructure strategies, in compliance with the criteria in MDD Policy CC03:
- 5.23.1 A substantial increase in tree cover and extent of hedgerows delivering benefits locally and wider in respect of climate change adaptation.
 - 5.23.2 Improved water management resilience.
 - 5.23.3 Local sources for food production, coupled with learning opportunities and personal development.
 - 5.23.4 Increase and diversification of ecological habitats.

- 5.23.5 Increase and expansion of recreation facilities and opportunities to improve health and well-being for individuals and the local community.
- 5.23.6 Provision of new homes closely associated with their landscape context, placing people in the community and engendering a strong relationship with the sense of place and community ownership.
- 5.24 From my perspective as an experienced landscape practitioner there are a variety of landscape benefits arising from the proposed development to be weighed against the partial loss of open grazing land. **I cannot comment on the overall balance and conclude on this proposition and direct the inspector to the evidence of Mr Slatter on this matter.**

Proposition 3: The degree to which the changes will alter the character, and appearance has an effect on the 'area'.

- 5.25 The third reason for refusal ascribes any likely harm to being in respect "...of the area." In fact, that 'area' is limited to the Site and its immediate environs, as demonstrated by the information contained with the LVIA (CD 8.1).
- 5.26 There are no wider effects, and these effects do not impact on the area classified as 'River Terrace' LCA identified by WBC. The general description of the LCA will continue to apply to the landscape of the area post construction of the appeal proposals.
- 5.27 This proposition is not substantiated by reference to the features that limit the area over which change will be experienced. **I do not agree with the proposition**

Proposition 4: The consequence of the development has an impact on the spaces between Hurst and Whistley Green.

- 5.28 I accept that the Appeal Site lies in an area of land between Hurst and Whistley Green, however this was an issue addressed in Inspector Wildsmith's¹⁵ decision, namely:

*The A321 Wokingham Road/Broadwater Lane forms the main road through the developed area, and I saw at my site visit that houses and other buildings line more or less its complete length, although the development is somewhat sparser to the immediate north-west of Hogmore Lane, with some open fields to the north-east of Broadwater Lane. **Because of this it is my view that although the 2 former separate villages of Hurst and Whistley Green do now read as one**, the Council's description of 'lightly touching', expressed by Mr Hannington, seems to be more appropriate than any suggestion of full coalescence. Be that as it may, the fact remains that development in the area is characterised as being in the shape of a 'reversed C', wrapping round the appeal site and other adjacent, undeveloped land, from Sawpit Road in the south to Whistley Green in the north. (CD 7.1, para. 47)*

- 5.29 Typically, the sense of separation of settlements is experienced by people as they move through the landscape and as rightly mentioned by Inspector Wildsmith in respect of Broadwater Lane the

¹⁵ APPEAL REF: APP/X0360/W/22/3309202, Land East of Lodge Road, Hurst, Reading

settlements have now apparently merged, supported by the evidence contained in the ASC analysis (see above) wherein Whistley Green is included in the Hurst Village ASC.

- 5.30 However, as noted in section 2 of my evidence, the changes to the scheme proposals when considered against the dismissed appeal scheme, include the removal of development at the site entrance on Lodge Road. This means that in respect of the physical, perceptual or visual appreciation of the settlements from the west there will remain a break in the urban form and therefore avoids the urbanisation of Lodge Road and therefore the conclusion reached by Inspector Wildsmith at paragraph 58 no longer apply.
- 5.31 Furthermore, the nature of the new site entrance, absent of housing and incorporating new tree planting and meadow grassland will result in a form of development which is consistent with other junctions in Hurst such as Broadcommon Road/Wokingham Road, Sawpit Road/Church Hill, or Sawpit Road/Martineau Lane, albeit with a more enclosed road junction framed by mature hedgerows and trees than compared to some existing junctions. In my opinion this change to the scheme and positive landscape treatment long Lodge Road means that the conclusions of Inspector Wildsmith at paragraph 59 no longer apply, namely:

"This would be compounded by the presence of new dwellings which, although set back into the site behind existing and new vegetation and behind the new access road, would still be visible as shown in the submitted AVRs."

- 5.32 Finally, the changes to the quantum and distribution of development within the site will ensure that the form of Hurst will retain the general 'reverse C' character wrapping around an open landscape (**Figure 5.4**). The 'reverse C' form is not an historic or characteristic aspect of Hurst, it is the result of previous growth and settlement expansion (see Figure 5.5), the preservation of this edge shape has no rationale beyond being the fact that is the current situation. The majority of the spaces between the settlements will be retained to ensure visual, physical and perceptual coalescence will not be compounded beyond the existing situation.



Figure 5.6: Settlement Form Post-Development



Figure 5.7: Aerial Photograph 1944-1950 Showing the Absence of a 'Reverse C'

5.33 Having concluded my analysis, I **do not agree with this proposition.**

Proposition 5: That the WBLCA is relevant to the determination of the appeal.

5.34 As explored in Section 4 of my evidence, the general description of the River Terrace LCA has limited application to specific sites, particularly where the site is a single field on the edge of a settlement, not forming part of a sweep of open countryside.

R003c_2507_Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence
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- 5.35 Turning to the Landscape Guidelines for the River Terrace LCA relating to new development the published guidance records the following (detailed in **Table 5.1** above):

Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of villages and dispersed farms through control of new development, avoiding further linear spread of development.

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.

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

- 5.36 The overarching landscape strategy is to “conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green.” The provision of two clusters of development associated with the settlement of Hurst separated by a substantial area of enhanced grassland and tree planting will maintain the low-density pattern of the settlement edge. This is addressed in more detail in the evidence of Mr Adams.
- 5.37 The Appeal Site will not take the form of linear development; it is a nucleated form consistent with the nature of the settlement’s historic growth (clusters of new housing within a road/hedgerowed framework). The development will not extend Hurst along the road which would be linear growth (akin to Broadwater Lane).
- 5.38 The distribution and pattern of settlements in the River Terrace LCA will be unchanged, as the proposed development will be within the settled cluster defined by Hurst and Whistley Green rather than a new settlement cluster. Whilst Hurst will increase in size, settled elements will remain dispersed.
- 5.39 In terms of lighting, current light sources associated with the Site relate to domestic lighting (light spill from properties and external features and security lighting). The local roads and streets (excluding the perimeter the open space at Marineau Lane) are not lit, there would be no need to introduce lighting into the cul-de-sacs of the Appeal Site.
- 5.40 Because the development is contained by the existing settlement:
- 5.40.1 The identity of the settlements within the River Terrace LCA, each will remain distinctive.
- 5.40.2 The physical and visual separation between settlements will be maintained; and
- 5.40.3 Open land between Hurst and Whistley Green will continue to occupy the substantive gap between the settlements and is positioned to separate the internal form of the western edge of Hurst.
- 5.41 Overall, whilst the Landscape Officer cites the River Terrace LCA in her response, the extracted text is provided without critical analysis. As explored above, the identification of key characteristic provides a context to the analysis but has little relevance when being applied at a site level. Similarly, the

guidance for new development is better understood in relation to the wider context, in any event the appeal proposals can be delivered in line with the guidance for this LCA.

- 5.42 I **partially agree with the proposition**, the use of the published material has a limited relevance to the Site and determination of the acceptability of the proposals, but it provides some useful contextual analysis.

Proposition 6: That the value of the landscape is greater than moderate, local value.

- 5.43 Again, this is a matter which has been explored by Inspector Wildsmith:

*I am not persuaded that any of the features referred to by Mr Hannington could be considered as raising this land above 'ordinary' countryside. It is clear that this open area is valued locally, but it seems to me that its value arises more from its current condition as undeveloped land and from the setting it provides for this western side of the settlement, than from any specific features or physical attributes it may possess. None of the features referenced are unusual or special, and **in my assessment, they do not elevate the land into the category of a valued landscape as referred to in paragraph 174(a) of the Framework** (CD 7.1, para. 49)*

- 5.44 Value relates to a wide range of attributes, the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing landscape value outside national designations (**Appendix 1**), explores these in detail. I have considered these attributes in relation to the site below in **Table 5.2**. In my professional opinion the Council's landscape officer has overestimated the value of the landscape, which is a component of the landscape sensitivity and ultimately determines the level of effect. As a result of overestimating the value the level of effect is also overestimated.

Table 5.2: Commentary on Valued Landscape Factors Pertaining to the Appeal Site

Factor ¹⁶	Definition ¹⁷	Observations/Commentary
Natural heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological, or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape	There is no evidence of any notable or distinctive interest beyond the presence of soils and geology that occur across the wider area. No aspect of the natural environment has any greater influence on the landscape than typical of any greenfield site.
Cultural heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical, or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape	There are no known archaeological or heritage value associated with the Site. The Appeal Site is not connected or related to the Area of Special Character or the historic origins of Hurst.

¹⁶ Table 1 in **Appendix 1**

¹⁷ Table 1 in **Appendix 1**

Factor ¹⁶	Definition ¹⁷	Observations/Commentary
		By reference to the appeal decision ¹⁸ for development at the junction of Sawpit Road and School Road, such as designation does not preclude change through the provision of new housing.
Landscape condition	Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure	The hedgerows and trees are in reasonable condition, but typical of field boundaries across the landscape. By reference to historic mapping (see Figure 5.1) there has been some loss of field boundaries within the Appeal Site and the context has become settled.
Associations	Landscape which is connected with notable people, events, and the arts	There are no evidential associations between the site and notable events and people.
Distinctiveness	Landscape that has a strong sense of identity	The site is representative of fields adjoining the settlement. There are no rare or unusual features that confer a strong sense of place.
Recreational	Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important	In its current form and use, the Appeal Site does not positively contribute to the recreational qualities of the area.
Perceptual (Scenic)	Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense	The Appeal Site does not possess any features or combination of features which are above that encountered within the wider areas, beyond the settlement. The land is not associated with any distinctive, memorable, or long views or landmarks.
Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity)	Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity, and/or dark skies	There is a sense of quietude within the Site and the village of Hurst, however, the passing traffic disrupts this, and the land cannot be described as being tranquil. There is an absence of 'wildness'
Functional	Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape	The Appeal Site, and adjoining land does not form part of a natural hydrological system, nor is the ecological function of note to be the subject of a local designation. The functionality of the land is limited to that of a single field, with limited diversity of vegetative cover.

¹⁸ APP/X0360/W/21/3280255, Land East of Lodge Road, Hurst, Reading

- 5.45 Having completed my analysis and consistent with Inspector Wildsmith's comments, I **do not agree with the proposition** that the value is greater than local and moderate value.

Proposition 7: That visibility is determinative of unacceptability.

- 5.46 There is a simple point to be made in respect of this proposition and that is, being able to see change is in and of itself a negative attribute of new housing. Issues to be consider in respect of visual acceptability include:

5.46.1 Nature of the visual change, will the development be fully, partially or glimpsed visually.

5.46.2 What is the proportion of the view that will be changed (for example full, most, small part, or none).

5.46.3 The prominence of the development in the view.

5.46.4 Impacts on the skyline character and profile.

5.46.5 Whether the visual change will detract from existing valued or focal elements in the view.

5.46.6 Whether the change is consistent with the visual composition characteristic of the relevant viewpoint.

- 5.47 As noted previously in my evidence, visual change and therefore the visual effects are limited to vantage points on the boundary of the Site. As a result, and by reference to the above criteria, the following can be noted:

5.47.1 From the local roads, in the majority of instances (LVIA visualisations for viewpoints 4 and 9 as an example, **CD 8.1**) only a small part of the development will be visible, typically the nature of the change will be partial or glimpsed, the minimisation of this aspect of the visual experience primarily arises from splitting the new housing into small and separate clusters within the Appeal Site. For the relevant viewpoints only a small part of the view/view cone will be affected by the change.

5.47.2 The development is typically set back from the site boundaries or retains open areas alongside those routes which will experience the greatest quantum of movement and therefore a comparatively large number people who will experience change. As a result, the housing will not appear prominent in the view, the foreground will be dominated by the existing hedgerows and filtered by new tree and hedgerow planting. The internal views (LVIA visualisations for internal views A and B, **CD 8.1**), which will be made accessible because of the development, however the spatial placement of the housing and the extensive common will ensure that the visual composition is balanced and primarily open. The new housing will sit in front of the existing housing within Hurst; there are no incongruent or alien visual components resulting the proposals.

5.47.3 The skyline profile will be consistent with the baseline situation; the development will not puncture the skyline in a manner to alter the balance or prominence of the visual composition.

- 5.48 Whilst visual change will be experienced from localised viewpoints, it will not introduce detracting elements, nor will it be inconsistent with the general character and composition of views, nor will it block or obscure valued views or views of important landmarks. There will be change, but not harm, I therefore **do not agree with this proposition**.

Proposition 8: Change through suburbanisation is in principle an unacceptable outcome of the development process.

- 5.49 The terms 'urbanisation' or 'suburbanisation' are typically used as a pejorative term in the planning process as a means of expressing contempt or disapproval, it is frequently combined with the word 'harmful.' My own reading of the Parish Council's statement confirms my opinion that the starting point taken by those objecting to the appeal proposals is that provision of new homes and the change from managed grazing land to settlement is inevitably harmful. As explained above I do not take this as my starting point.
- 5.50 That is not to say development is always without adverse consequences, but this is primarily an issue when new built form is inconsistent with the receiving context and without due regard to the prevailing character and appearance of the locale.
- 5.51 I accept that the proposals are suburban in nature, however as described above they respond positively to the local context and incorporate beneficial areas of open space and contribute to the provision of multifunctional Green Infrastructure. The housing reflects the heights, pattern, and grain of the properties in Hurst. The open spaces and linear green routes would be attractive for the enjoyment of the existing community as well as the new residents.
- 5.52 The appeal proposals will change the Appeal Sites from agricultural land to settlement. This transition, as the illustrative masterplan demonstrate, can bring positive elements to the townscape. The changes will not inevitably give rise to harm in accordance with the nomenclature adopted within the profession. With the appropriate design approach, the proposals can deliver a high quality and attractive scheme which will be desirable to future occupants.
- 5.53 Accordingly, **I do not agree with this proposition**. The objectors overstate the rurality of the receiving landscape in order to substantiate an objection. The change from agricultural land to settlement is no different to that found to be acceptable in this landscape, where a housing need is identified.

Section 6: Summary and Conclusions

- 6.1 The application was accompanied by a guideline compliant Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Landscape Statement of Common Ground, **CD 3.2**, paragraph 1.1). The LVIA sets out the assessor's conclusions in respect of landscape and visual effects. However, the assessment process and judgements operate independently of policy¹⁹.
- 6.2 How those judgments relate to the decision-making process requires further analysis and application particularly in the context of specific policy-based objections as asserted in the Decision Notice. My evidence provides this scrutiny of those specific allegations made by the Council in refusing the planning application.
- 6.3 Development of the Appeal Site will avoid change occurring in respect of any protected, valued and important landscapes at both a national, borough and local scale.
- 6.4 In respect of the natural environment, as a point of fact, the site is not covered by specific policies listed in the NPPF, paragraph 11, footnote 7, including:
- SSSI.
 - Habitat Sites.
 - Green Belt
 - National Landscape.
 - National Park.
 - Heritage Coast.
 - Irreplaceable habitats.
 - Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change; and
 - Designated heritage assets.
- 6.5 It is not an NPPF Valued Landscape, nor is it in an area considered to be of value in the council's emerging Valued Landscapes evidence base.
- 6.6 Additional locational benefits of the Appeal Site can be summarised as:
- Located adjacent to the settlement edge, utilising the existing infrastructure.
 - Out with any national statutorily designated landscapes and their settings.
 - Not within or near other designated landscapes, such as Ancient Woodland or Registered Historic Parks and Gardens.
 - Not within or abutting a Conservation Area or Area of Special Character.
- 6.7 For the reasons set out above I consider that the Appeal Site is:
- Well located within the context of the existing settlement edge.

¹⁹ 'Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third edition,' LI Technical Guidance Note – 2024-01 (CD 8.5, 1 (2), page 3.

- Physically, visually, and perceptually associated with the settlement edge and will be appreciated as a new part of the townscape of Hurst.
 - The approach to the detailed design is capable of being sensitive and respectful to the various constraints, avoiding unsuitable locations and impacts on a variety of landscape resources.
- 6.8 The development proposals have responded to the previous appeal decision and provide for two distinct areas of settlement expansion separated by, and framing, a substantial area of green space.
- 6.9 The resulting landscape and visual effects are largely confined to the site, with the existing external site boundaries on Lodge Road and Tape Lane providing visual and physical containment. The greatest degree of visual change occurs in respect of close-range views associated with the boundaries of the Appeal Site, views from public rights of way are not affected.
- 6.10 Landscape and visual impacts beyond the immediate environs of the Appeal Site would be minimal.
- 6.11 In contrast to the previous dismissed appeal, less than half of the site is developed for housing, the undeveloped land has the potential to significantly and positively contribute to and exceed Green Infrastructure requirements, and the criteria set out in MDD Policy CC03.
- 6.12 In respect of the policies cited in the Decision Notice (**CD 1.1**), specifically, Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3²⁰, and MDD Policies TB28 having drafted my evidence I make the following points:

CP1 – Sustainable development

- 6.12.1 This high-level policy seeks positive outcomes from development across a number of aspects of the built and natural environment.
- 6.12.2 Pertinent to landscape and visual matters is clause CP1 1) which seeks to “*Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment*”. As I record in paragraph 4.1 landscape is not a term that applies solely to undeveloped greenfield locations. Landscape includes townscapes and urban environments. Therefore, whilst there will be a change to the landscape within the Site, there will be diversification and an enhancement of the functionality of the existing and new landscape assets. There is also potential to maintain and enhance the qualities of the townscape character of Hurst through the delivery of well-place homes set within a designed framework of green space. The pattern of which is consistent with the character of managed and natural spaces within the existing settlement.
- 6.12.3 Change is not in and of itself harmful, place creation is an important element when considering this policy.
- 6.12.4 Conclusions on compliance with this policy is not wholly based on consideration of the landscape outcomes.

²⁰ In respect of the Decision Notice, Mr. Slatter deals with Core Strategy policy CP11 and MDD Policy C002 as spatial development control policies. The extent of the Development Limits and application of the policy related to policy boundaries regardless of landscape character.

CP3 - General Principles for development

- 6.12.5 Similarly, this policy is addressing high level concepts associated with the landscape and visual environment.
- 6.12.6 In terms CP 3 a), Mr Adams deal with the appropriateness of the scale, massing etc.
- 6.12.7 With reference to CP3 c) and the need to have no detrimental impact upon important landscape features, as noted above the proposals avoid impacting on important landscapes and landscape assets. The impacts which result from the appeal proposals are localised.
- 6.12.8 Also relevant is CP3 h) and the need to 'Contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities.' In this respect the proposals will provide linked natural environments assessable to the existing and new communities within Hurst and Whistley Green.

MDD Policy TB21 – Landscape Character

- 6.12.9 As set out in the DAS (CD 1.5) and evidence Mr Adams and me, it is clear that the appeal proposals have taken account of and recognised the character of the landscape (NPPF, para 187 b)), and specifically the elements and qualities of the site, and the townscape character of Hurst, which in combination relate to landscape character.
- 6.12.10 Important features have been identified, in this instance these include the trees, hedgerows, grassland and grain and form of the contemporary settlement edge. There are retained and incorporated/supplemented in the appeal proposals.
- 6.12.11 Key features have been retained, and new landscape measure will enhance the condition and functionality of the landscape and increase the diversity of landscape assets in a positive manner.
- 6.13 Overall, the issue is not whether there is a change, development of greenfield locations inevitably leads to changes in landscape character and visual effects, a matter that is not an absolute impediment to granting consent and allocating land for new housing. From a landscape planning perspective, the key issue is whether the development results in undue²¹, ²² and significant effects.
- 6.14 In my professional opinion the proposals are consistent with the existing context, through their incorporation of accessible greenspace, inclusion of dwellings in a form consistent with the existing situation and response to the settlement pattern, grain and form that prevails in this location. They are neither excessive nor disproportionate.
- 6.15 Critically the proposals adhere to the Council's guidelines in respect of Green Infrastructure delivery (MDD Policy C003 explored in detail above). Furthermore, the proposals conserve and enhance the landscape on the settlement edge through the delivery of:

²¹ Unwarranted or inappropriate because excessive or disproportionate (online dictionary definition). Disproportionate, or excessive (Oxford dictionary).

²² GLVIA, paragraph 5.40 (CD 8.4)

- 6.15.1 New areas of multifunctional green infrastructure.
- 6.15.2 Increased tree cover and softening the edge of the settlement, ensuring the longevity of the wooded components of the landscape.
- 6.16 In conclusion, the landscape aspects of the third reason for refusal are unsubstantiated and provide no basis for refusing the appeal proposal.