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Ducks Nest Farm, Arborfield

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of
David Wilson Homes

October 2024

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WILSON HOMES

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LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Icen Projects have been instructed by David Wilson Homes to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ('LVIA') in relation to the Proposed Development at Ducks Nest Farm, Arborfield, Wokingham (the 'Site'). A hybrid planning application is to be submitted for the development which entails an outline application for up to 135 dwellings, and a full application for the change of use from agricultural land to an area of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace ('SANG'), with associated landscaping, drainage, parking and walking routes (the 'Proposed Development').
- 1.2 The Site's location is shown on the plan in **Appendix A1** and **Appendix A2**. The Site lies within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough Council and is not located within any international, national or local landscape designations. However, it is located within the 'Farley Hill Valued Landscape', which is identified within the Wokingham Borough Council Emerging Local Plan Update published October 2024. Commentary on this proposed designation is provided in Section 5. The Site is also located within 'Countryside' within the Emerging Local Plan Update, although all land outside of the Proposed Settlement Hierarchy is afforded this designation.
- 1.3 This assessment describes the existing character and quality of the landscape on and around the Site and considers the potential landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development on the Site and wider area.

Methodology

- 1.4 The assessment is informed by a site visit, which was undertaken in December 2023, by a qualified and experienced Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute. The weather conditions at the time of the Site visit were overcast, with good visibility.
- 1.5 This report considers the potential impact on both landscape character and visibility, with a distinction drawn between landscape effects (i.e. direct and indirect effects on the landscape resource and character), and visual effects (i.e. the views that people have of the site and surroundings from publicly accessible places, and also residential views). The methodology utilised in this report is set out in **Appendix A8**.

2. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

- 2.1 The NPPF sets out the national planning policy, with section 15 dealing with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 180 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst others:

'a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland'.

- 2.2 Further guidance is set out within the Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG'), supported by the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code, which provide guidance on how well-designed places can be achieved.

- 2.3 The national planning policies and guidance of relevance to this Statement are summarised in **Appendix A5**.

Local Planning Policy Context

- 2.4 The following Local Planning policies are relevant to the Proposed Development, landscape and visual matters.

Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy – 2010

- 2.5 The following policies within Core Strategy are relevant:

- 2.6 Policy CP1 – Sustainable Development –

"Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that:

- Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment;*
- Avoid areas of best and most versatile agricultural land;*
- Provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes; and*

-
- *Demonstrate how they support opportunities for reducing the need to travel, particularly by private car in line with CP6.*

2.7 Policy CP3 – General Principles for development –

“Planning permission will be granted for proposals that:

- *Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life;*
- *Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses;*
- *Maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species; and*
- *Contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings including the use of appropriate landscaping.”*

2.8 Policy CP11 – Proposals outside of Development Limits (including countryside) –

“In order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:

- *It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside.”*

Managing Development Delivery – 2014

2.9 The following policies within Managing Development Delivery Local Plan are relevant:

2.10 Policy CC02 – Sustainable Development –

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

2.11 Policy CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping –

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

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

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

2.12 Policy TB21 – Landscape Character –

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

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

2.13 Policy TB21 – Landscape Character supersedes Policy WLL2 – Areas of Special Landscape Importance within the Wokingham District Local Plan (2010).

2.14 Policy TB23 – Biodiversity and Development –

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

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

-
- *Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation; and*
 - *Ensure that all existing and new developments are ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network.”*

Emerging Wokingham Local Plan – 2024

2.15 In October 2024, Wokingham Borough Council published their Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19). A number of policies are relevant to landscape and visual matters:

2.16 Policy SS5 – Development in the Countryside –

“All development proposals within the countryside must take a landscape-led approach to development in accordance with Policy NE5: Landscape and Design and, where applicable:

- a) Contribute to and enhance the local, natural and historic environment;*
- b) Be of scale, nature and location within the countryside that is appropriate with regard to its use;*
- c) Be sited and designed to minimise visual impact;*
- d) Not lead to the physical, visual or perceived coalescence of existing settlements either individually or cumulatively;*
- e) Not lead to isolated new dwellings;*
- f) Not lead to the need for additional buildings;*
- g) Maximise opportunities to make the location more sustainable;*
- h) Have no unacceptable adverse impacts on highway safety or have a severe residual cumulative impact on network capacity; and*
- i) Maximise opportunities to improve public access to the countryside.”*

2.17 Policy NE5 – Landscape and Design –

“Development proposals will be supported where they adopt a landscape led approach which protects and enhances the character and distinctiveness of landscapes using the most up-to-date landscape studies.

Development proposals should be demonstrably informed by, and respond to, the distinctive characters set out in the Landscape Character Assessment and other relevant assessments, which provide an understanding of the valued characteristics, features and quality of local landscape character areas.

Development proposals should be accompanied by a landscape and visual impact assessment. The level of information provided should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed and should be sufficient to allow an informed assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.

Development proposals on or in proximity to a Green Route will only be supported where existing trees, hedgerows and hedges are retained in depth and contribute to the improvement of Green Routes through landscape schemes, including tree and hedge planting.”

2.18 Policy NE6 – Valued Landscapes –

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

- a) Landscape quality (condition);*
- b) Scenic quality;*
- c) Rarity;*
- d) Representativeness;*
- e) Conservation interests;*
- f) Recreational value;*
- g) Perceptual aspects; and*
- h) Associations.*

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

Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan – 2020

2.19 The following policies within the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan are relevant:

2.20 Policy IRS1 – Preservation of separation of settlements –

“In order to protect the separation of settlements, development proposals outside of development limits designated in the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 will be required to comply with Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy and:

- *Preserve the character and appearance of the countryside; and*
- *Not lead to the physical, visual or perceived coalescence of existing settlements.”*

2.21 Policy IRS2 – Recognise, respect and preserve identity and rural setting of settlements –

“Development proposals must recognise, respect, and preserve the identity and rural setting of settlements, with regard to:

- *Scale and form of the development;*
- *Density of the development;*
- *Materials used in the development to reflect local character;*
- *Tree and hedgerow planting that reinforces and reflects local biodiversity in the parishes; and*
- *The distinctive character of the varied landscapes of the area and outstanding views.”*

2.22 Policy IRS3 – Protection and enhancement of the natural environment and green spaces –

“Development proposals should conserve and enhance the natural environment and green spaces of the area, specifically:

-
- *Ensure that there is no loss of biodiversity and normally provide a net gain. Where there is likely to be a loss of biodiversity, development will only be acceptable if mitigation measures can be put in place, through the creation of like-for-like habitats;*
 - *Take any opportunities to protect, enhance and extend wildlife corridors between existing open spaces and habitats as a means of mitigating the impacts of development on biodiversity;*
 - *Conserve the environment for nocturnal species, through the avoidance of lighting and mitigating the impact of external lighting likely to increase night time human presence; and*
 - *Contain measures that will help to mitigate the impacts of, and adapt to, climate change.”*

2.23 Policy AD3 – High quality development with generous open space, properly landscaped –

“All new developments must reflect the rural character and historic context of existing dwellings within the Plan Area. New development must deliver good quality design. In order to achieve this, all new development must wherever possible:

- *Recognise in the design of developments, the distinctive local character of the area and contribute sensitively in order to create dwellings of a high architectural and rural quality, referring to the published Village Design Statements;*
- *Consider the density of any new development which must be in character with the surrounding area, respect the rural nature of the area and be designed to give an impression of spaciousness and variety with uniform houses and plots being avoided; and*
- *Recognise possible impacts of climate change and consequently reflect sustainable development standards.”*

3. SITE CONTEXT

Site Context

- 3.1 The Site occupies approximately 17.3ha of agricultural land on the north-western edge of Arborfield Green. Its location and character are shown on the OS Map and Aerial Photograph contained in **Appendix A1** and **A2**, and photographs of the Site are included in **Appendix A4**.
- 3.2 The Site is composed of five pastoral fields associated with Ducks Nest Farm. The fields are largely geometric in shape but varied in scale. Their boundaries are generally made up of mature hedgerows interspersed with hedgerow trees, however, open boundaries exist in places, including along the newly formed boundary with Observer Way which marks the south-western edge of the Site. This is due to existing newly planted vegetation which is yet to establish.
- 3.3 To the north-west, the wooded estate of the Grade II Listed Arborfield Court adjoins Public Right of Way ('PRoW') ARBO17, and to the north-east, the southern edge of Arborfield Cross adjoins the Site at Harts Close.
- 3.4 Beyond the Site's eastern boundary, across Eversley Road, the landscape is characterised by geometric pastoral fields with mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees marking their boundaries. Approximately 300m east of the Site's eastern boundary lies the recent residential development of Arborfield Garrison.
- 3.5 The A327 / Eversley Road marks the south-eastern boundary of the Site. Ducks Nest Farm and a short row of houses along Eversley Road, Ducks Nest Cottages, are inset from the Site boundary.
- 3.6 To the south lies the settlement of Arborfield Green, a new village centred around the former army barracks. The phased development of Arborfield Garrison sits to the south and east of Arborfield Green.
- 3.7 To the west of the Site, the newly built Observer Way (A327), runs the length of the western boundary. Beyond this new road lies further pastoral fields interspersed with blocks of ancient woodland, as can be seen on the Designations Plan in **Appendix A3**.

Landscape Character Assessments

National Landscape Character

- 3.8 Natural England has produced profiles for England's National Character Areas ('NCAs'), dividing England into 159 different natural areas, which are defined by their unique combination of landscape,

biodiversity, geodiversity, cultural, and economic activity. The Site lies within National Character Area 129 – Thames Basin Heaths.

3.9 The Thames Basin Heaths character area is described as:

- *Plateaux of Tertiary sands and gravels in the London Basin, with intervening river valleys flooded by London Clay;*
- *High woodland cover, offering an array of colour in the autumn. Conifers and large plantations on former heathland are dominant features in the east, while the west is scattered with small, semi-natural woodlands on ancient sites;*
- *Acid, leached soils mean that farming on the plateaux is limited to rough pasture, and that alternative land uses (such as forestry, golf courses and horse paddocks) have emerged. Heather, gorse, oak and birch all thrive here. Arable land and improved pasture are found in the valleys, on alluvium;*
- *Beyond the large areas of heathland and woodland, there is a patchwork of small to medium-sized fields with woods. The legacy of historic hunting forests includes veteran trees, ancient woods, ancient hedgerows and parklands. Historic meadows remain as fragments along watercourses;*
- *Mosaics of open heathland and grassland with scrub, secondary woodland and plantation. Valley bogs, ponds and streams enhance diversity. Large, continuous mosaics are found in the east: they include Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Chobham Common National Nature Reserve (NNR);*
- *Historic commons offer tranquillity and unenclosed views, while other rights of access are enjoyed across farmland, canals and downland. Ministry of Defence ownership restricts (but does not entirely prevent) public enjoyment; and*
- *20th-century conurbations, including Camberley, sprawl along the Blackwater Valley, with associated roads (including the M3) dissecting heathland and woodland into blocks. Elsewhere, there are winding lanes and historic dispersed villages and farmsteads of traditional, locally-made brick and tile.*

District Landscape Character

3.10 At a District level, Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) places the Site within two Landscape Character Areas ('LCAs'). The south-eastern half of the Site is located within

LCA J2 – Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay, and the north-western half of the Site is located within LCA L2 – Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills.

3.11 The key characteristics of LCA J2 – Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay are:

- *“A gently undulating landscape between 50m and 65m AOD;*
- *Wooded context provided by characteristic mature hedgerow and in-field trees, combined with woodland belts, with BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills. This creates a loose sense of enclosure;*
- *Arable farming dominates, with pasture on higher ground and horse paddocks near settlement. Fields are large and geometric, bound by fragmented hedgerows supported by post and wire;*
- *A dense settled character influenced by modern development including the new garden village on the site of Arborfield Garrison and the southern edge of Wokingham which incorporates an industrial estate. There is little consistent style or form;*
- *Older scattered settlement of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages at Barkham and Arborfield Cross. The buildings have traditional vernacular of timber framing and clay tiles, exemplified by the Conservation Area at Arborfield Cross. A number of farmhouses are listed, including Grade II* Barlett’s Farmhouse;*
- *A network of busy local roads cross the area. They tend to be rural in character, with ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees, sometimes opening directly onto the arable fields. The A327 adds noise and movement to the area;*
- *Public rights of way run between the settlements, and provide access for recreational use; and*
- *A rural character away from development and roads, with views across to adjacent character areas including across the Loddon Valley”.*

3.12 Relevant elements of the valuable landscape attributes, landscape condition and landscape strategy for LCA J2 are described below:

- **Valuable Landscape Attributes:**

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- *“Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provides a rural character away from settlement, and creates an important separation between settlements.*
 - *Mature hedgerow trees and in-field trees which provide a wooded character and visual interest within the landscape.*
 - *Rural settlement pattern of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages outside the urban area which provides a rural character and a link to the past.*
 - *Recreational value of the network of rights of way between settlements.*
 - *Views across the landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south provides a loose sense of enclosure.”*
 - **Landscape Condition:**
“The landscape is in overall moderate condition, due to the pattern of arable and pastoral fields, and remnant wetland influences associated with Barkham Brook. However, the hedgerow network is fragmented and the introduction of further development through the Arborfield Garrison SDL and associated infrastructure will further fragment the rural settlement pattern altering the character of the area.”
 - **Landscape Strategy:**
“To maintain the landscape character of the Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the landscape. The key aspects to be conserved and enhanced are the field pattern with mature hedgerow trees, wetland and woodland habitats, rural lanes and historic features.
In terms of development, the aim is to integrate new development into its landscape setting and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements.”

3.13 The key characteristics of LCA L2 - Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hill are:

- *“Small undulating hills rising to 80m AOD at Farley Hill;*
- *Extensive woodland network of mixed, coniferous and deciduous woodland and copses, including areas of BAP priority habitat and ancient woodland, many of which are designated as LWS. Farley Hill Woods also contains small areas of remnant heathland habitat;*
- *Intricate small-scale landscape with small sinuous pastures enclosed by the woodland, and arable fields on lower slopes bounded by thick, overgrown hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Early enclosure field systems cover an extensive area;*

-
- *Marginal land uses including pony paddocks with associated stables bound by post and rail fencing and semi-industrial uses of farmland which influence the rural character;*
 - *Rural settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads, the hamlet at Farley Hill and 18th and 19th century country houses with a strong vernacular of brick, timber-framing, thatch and clay tile. A new estate development on the former Poperinghe Barracks disturbs this pattern;*
 - *Network of footpaths and bridleways and quiet rural lanes and tracks, some sunken, which wind through the woodlands, bordered by bulky hedgerows and often without kerbs or intrusive signage; and*
 - *Secluded, remote character of the landscape enclosed within woodland, with an experience of dark skies.”*

3.14 Relevant elements of the valuable landscape attributes, landscape condition and landscape strategy for LCA L2 are described below:

- **Valuable Landscape Attributes:**
 - *“Distinctive hilly landform and wooded skyline visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape;*
 - *Intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland provides scenic quality and visual diversity; and*
 - *Recreational value of the network of the tree-lined and enclosed byways and footpaths allowing access and enjoyment of the countryside in close proximity to urban areas.”*
- **Landscape Condition:**

“This is a distinctive hilly landscape with an intact pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farming interspersed with vernacular settlements. These provide a strong sense of place and strong perceptual qualities of seclusion and remoteness resulting in a good condition. However, increasing traffic levels are affecting the tranquillity of the area. The presence of large agricultural buildings and semi-industrial uses for farms is incongruous, as is the replacement of hedgerows with fencing.”
- **Landscape Strategy:**

“To maintain the landscape character of the Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing wooded and secluded character.

The key aspects to be conserved are the views, intimate pattern of pastures, tranquillity

and dark skies, woodland and arable farmland and rural settlement pattern linked by narrow lanes. There are opportunities to restore and actively manage the historic parkland, ancient woodland coppice and the connecting hedgerows. Marginal farmland and paddocks should also be enhanced.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern, and maintain the low density of development avoiding encroachment from the new development at Arborfield."

- 3.15 LCA J2 is noted as having a 'modest' landscape capacity, whereas LCA L2 is noted as having a 'limited' landscape capacity.
- 3.16 From our assessment of the Site and surroundings, we would note that the collection of fields which form the Site contain characteristics that are representative of the descriptions found in the landscape character assessment for LCA J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay. There are a number of detractors present on or in proximity to the Site which erode its rural character. These include movement and audible intrusion from the roads that form both the western and southern boundaries of the Site, partially reduce its tranquillity. This is particularly noticeable in proximity to the two roundabouts along Eversley Road that require vehicles to accelerate and decelerate. The facades of small to medium sheds used for light industry at Ducks Nest Farm stand out against the field boundaries in views across the Site. Existing pylons and overhead wires that cross through the centre of the Site from south-west to north-east also detract from its character. The rising landform towards the wooded ridgeline presents a more rural and open vista to the south-east, making it partially representative of LCA L2: Farley Hill Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills. From here, the settlement edges of Arborfield Cross and Arborfield Garrison are perceptible, overall contributing towards an urban fringe / semi-rural character across the Site.

Designations and Heritage Assets (Appendix A3)

- 3.17 The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape or heritage quality or value. However, it is located within the 'Farley Hill Valued Landscape', which is identified within the Wokingham Borough Council Emerging Local Plan Update published October 2024. Commentary on this proposed designation is provided in Section 5.
- 3.18 Ducks Nest Farm, which is inset from the eastern boundary of the Site includes a Grade II Listed 18th century farmhouse. Existing vegetation along the curtilage of the farmhouse filter views towards the Site. Within Arborfield Cross, approximately 200m north of the Site's northern boundary, the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area lies within the centre of the village, containing a number of Grade II listed buildings including Magnolia Cottage, Birch House, The Swan Public House, the Arborfield, Newland and Barkham War Memorial and The Bull Inn. However, due to the intervening undulating landform, vegetation and existing residential development, there is no intervisibility between the Site and the heritage assets within the village.

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- 3.19 There are no Local Wildlife Sites ('LoWS') or areas of Ancient Woodland within the Site, however these are both found within the wider landscape to the west of the Site. Spring Copse, Long Copse and Robin Hood Copse are three LoWS found within the surrounding landscape of the Site, with all three containing areas of Ancient Woodland.

Tree Preservation Orders

- 3.20 Within the Site there is currently one tree and one group of trees which are protected with Tree Preservation Orders ('TPO'). These are found within the southern portion of the Site and consist of an oak (TPO/1814) and group of oaks (TPO/1914).
- 3.21 In addition to the trees mentioned above, within the northernmost field, a veteran oak stands in the northern corner of the field, where the land rises to meet the woodland associated with Arborfield Court.

Public Rights of Way

- 3.22 There is one public right of way (PRoW) within the Site boundary. PRoW ARBO17 follows the north-western edge of the Site, from where there are longer distance views south-east across Arborfield Garrison and towards surrounding wooded hills, as well as north-west across the Loddon Valley.
- 3.23 PRoW ARBO14 runs south-east to north-west between Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Cross, running parallel to the east of Eversley Road, outside of the Site. Views towards the Site from here are screened by existing intervening vegetation. Within the confines of Arborfield Cross there are several smaller PRoWs, however, due to intervening landform and residential development, these have no intervisibility with the Site.
- 3.24 Additional PRoWs are located within the wider context of the Site and are shown on the base mapping of the Site Location Plan (**Appendix A1**).

4. SITE DESCRIPTION AND VISIBILITY

Site Description

- 4.1 The Site is composed of five pastoral fields associated with Ducks Nest Farm. The fields are largely geometric in shape but varied in scale. Their boundaries are generally made up of mature hedgerows interspersed with hedgerow trees, however, open boundaries exist in places. The fields are in varied condition with a predominant habitat of modified grassland. The condition of the hedgerows around the fields varies; with those abutting Ducks Nest Farm younger than the more mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees found around the rest of the Site. Vegetation along Observer Way is recently planted and still establishing.
- 4.2 The condition of the trees on Site is generally good, with the majority of them classed as B – Moderate Quality. Two trees within the Site boundaries are classed as A – High Quality, including a 5m high, multi-stemmed *Crataegus monogyna* and a veteran *Quercus robur*.
- 4.3 There is public access afforded by PRoW ARBO17 which runs along the northern boundary of the largest of the five fields which comprise the Site. Proposed access into the Site is proposed to be off Eversley Road at the roundabout with Langley Common Road, situated on the Site's south-eastern boundary.

Topography

- 4.4 The Site's internal topography rises from south-east to north-west where the Site meets the ridgeline which sits between Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield. Here the topography reaches a height of approximately 80m AOD before falling to the south-east at approximately 65m AOD. The land around the Site's south-east corner, where residential development is proposed, is relatively flat.

Visibility

- 4.5 An assessment of the visibility of the Site was undertaken, and a series of representative photographs taken from public vantage points, PRoWs and public highways. The viewpoints are shown on the plans in **Appendix A1** and the photographs are contained in **Appendix A4**.
- 4.6 From our assessment, it is apparent that the Site is quite contained, with long distance views obscured by intervening buildings, landform and vegetation. The key views of the Site are described below and in the tables contained in **Appendix A8**.

Near and Middle Distance Views

- 4.7 The Site is present in close views from Observer Way and its junction with Eversley Road, PRow ARBO17, including from the green bridge which crosses Observer Way, from some properties along Rickman Close, from some properties around Ducks Nest Cottage, and from some properties along Hart Close and Melrose Gardens within Arborfield Cross. These close views from Ducks Nest Cottages and Arborfield Cross are limited to fields included solely as SANG land. Filtered views towards the Site are possible from a handful of properties around the junction between Baird Road and Arbery Way in Arborfield Green. Views towards the proposed Site access are possible from properties located in proximity to the existing roundabout between Eversley Road / Langley Common Road / Baird Road.

Long Distance Views

- 4.8 The Site is otherwise well enclosed by existing vegetation, built form and the surrounding topography, meaning there are no longer distance views towards the Site.

Landscape Quality, Value and Sensitivity

- 4.9 The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape, ecology or heritage quality or value. However, it is located within the 'Farley Hill Valued Landscape', which is identified within the Wokingham Borough Council Emerging Local Plan Update published October 2024. Commentary on this proposed designation is provided in Section 5. It is ordinary in character and comprises five pastoral fields generally bound by mature, intact hedgerows and trees. Ducks Nest Farm is inset from the eastern boundary of the Site, and contains a listed farmhouse and five, small to medium sheds used for light industry and agricultural purposes. The Site is bound by Observer Way and Eversley Road on all but the northern boundary, which introduce some audible intrusion and the perception of movement into the landscape. A row of pylons and overhead wires cross through the Site from south-west to north-east, adding an infrastructure presence into the local landscape. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape quality.
- 4.10 The Site is not particularly scenic in itself, although there are longer views south-east from PRow ARBO17 which runs along its northern boundary. There is no public access to the Site other than PRow ARBO17, which provides access from Observer Way and the wider landscape west of the Site, as well as from Arborfield Cross to the east. The Site features several good examples of mature hedgerows with moderate to high quality trees dotted throughout. This is shown by a group and an individual tree being protected by tree preservation orders. Towards the northernmost corner of the Site, a veteran oak stands within the Site's largest field. The grassland within the Site is classed as modified grassland and the Site's use as pastoral land has seen it grazed, thereby reducing its condition. There are no heritage assets within the Site, and it has no particular ecological conservation value. The Site is not a rare landscape type, nor is it wild or tranquil being in close proximity to existing settlement edges with some visual and audible detractors. We are not aware of

any associations which would elevate the value of the Site. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape value.

- 4.11 Development of the Site could be well located within the southern portion of the Site, where the topography is lower and more visually contained by existing vegetation and built form. The southern portion of the Site is also located adjacent to the existing residential edge of Arborfield Garrison. Where the land rises towards the north of the Site, development would be more difficult to accommodate due to the more open and raised landform. Development could be accommodated without the need for removal of existing vegetation, with the exception of providing access. The Site is assessed as having a moderate ability to accommodate residential development. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape sensitivity.
- 4.12 North-west of the Site, Arborfield Court and its associated grounds and woodland abuts the northern boundary, whilst arable and pastoral fields fill the rest of the intervening land between the Site and Swallowfield Road. To the north-east lies the settlement of Arborfield Cross. Beyond this is the historic Bearwood Estate which includes large expanses of Ancient Woodland stretching across rolling hills. The landscape to the immediate east of the Site follows a similar pattern of geometric fields with mature hedgerows and trees. Ribbon development features further east along Langley Common Road with gardens backing onto pockets of mature woodland. South-east of the Site, the outer bounds of Arborfield Garrison meet with Langley Common Road. Beyond Arborfield Garrison is the Finchampstead Ridges and Blackwater Valley. To the immediate south of the Site, the residential edge of Arborfield Green is set back from Eversley Road by a strip of landscape buffer which sits between Baird Road and Eversley Road. The 2.5/3 storey houses that make up the northern edge of Arborfield Green lie further south, some 70m away from the southern boundary of the Site. To the west and south-west, the surrounding landscape is mixed, with areas of ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Sites around Farley Hill. A number of listed buildings lie within the confines of Arborfield Cross and are situated within its Conservation Area, as well as a listed building at Ducks Nest Farmhouse and Arborfield Court.
- 4.13 Given the mixed nature of the immediate surroundings of the Site, including residential, agricultural, industrial and ecological land uses, the landscape / townscape character of the immediate surroundings is assessed as being of medium sensitivity. The wider landscape is more rural in character with a number of special landscape qualities around Farley Hill, the Bearwood Estate and Finchampstead. The landscape character of the wider surroundings is therefore assessed as being of medium-high sensitivity.

5. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

The Proposed Development

- 5.1 The Proposed Development includes residential development to provide 135 homes on agricultural land north of Arborfield Green. This would make up approximately 40% of the Site, with the remaining 60% to be developed into a new Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace ('SANG') with associated landscaping, SuDS, public open space and space for biodiversity.
- 5.2 Key elements of the proposals include:
- 135 new homes designed to reflect the surrounding materiality and character of the wider landscape and townscape, helping to embed the Proposed Development into its surroundings and complement the unique characteristics of Arborfield;
 - 10.5ha SANG with 2.3km circular walking route, providing recreation opportunities and space for biodiversity, alongside sensitive interactions between the two;
 - Associated infrastructure, streets, green infrastructure and SuDS in line with the drainage hierarchy;
 - Play space integrated within the landscape, including a LEAP, 2 LAPs, and other informal natural play;
 - Edible landscape area, including space for community growing and a community orchard;
 - New access point off the Eversley Road/Langley Common Road/Baird Road roundabout, situated on the south-eastern boundary of the Site;
 - Improved pedestrian crossing points and new active travel routes through the Site, allowing for enhanced connections between Arborfield Cross and Arborfield Garrison, as well as with the wider countryside; and
 - Extensive native planting of new species-rich grasslands, trees, woodland, scrub and hedgerow, while retaining and enhancing a large proportion of on-site vegetation. New thicket planting combined with increased woodland and hedgerows will help mitigate against any necessary removal of vegetation, while also providing screening to new built form.

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- 5.3 Below, the effects of the Proposed Development on the landscape / townscape character and visual amenity of the area are considered.

Landscape Mitigation

- 5.4 The Proposed Development has evolved through an iterative design process which has been informed by the outputs of this LVIA. This has included the identification of landscape mitigation proposals to reduce the adverse landscape and visual effects that would result from the Proposed Development. These include:

- New tree and scrub belts along the southern and south-western boundaries of the Site to reinforce the structure of existing establishing hedgerows and hedgerow trees. This will soften views of the Proposed Development for users of Observer Way and Eversley Road, as well as for residents within the north of Arborfield Green.
- New tree and scrub belt along Eversley Road to the north of the Site access point to reinforce the Green Route Enhancement Area, as well as filtering views of the Proposed Development from properties along Rickman Close.
- New native hedgerow between the Site and Ducks Nest Farm to soften views of development from Ducks Nest Farmhouse.
- New hedgerow, woodland and scrub planting along the north-western boundary of the residential area to filter and soften views of built form from PRoW ARBO17.
- Use of shorter vegetation such as scrub and orchards beneath powerlines to adhere to recommended offsets, whilst providing mitigation along the north-western boundary of the residential area.
- Limiting building heights to 2.5 storey to reflect the character of existing development within Arborfield Garrison, whilst also being sensitive to the edge of settlement location.

Direct Effects on Landscape Features

Vegetation

- 5.5 A localised section of existing vegetation is proposed to be removed to accommodate the new Site access off the Eversley Road / Langley Common Road / Baird Road roundabout. It is noted that this vegetation forms part of the Eversley Road Green Route Enhancement Area, which is designated under Policy CC03 of the Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Document (2014). Removal of this vegetation would weaken the function of the Green Route Enhancement Area locally,

however, there would have a negligible effect on the function of the route as a whole. Furthermore, the Proposed Development offers the opportunity for additional enhancements to more fragmented sections of this Green Infrastructure corridor as it passes the Site. Elsewhere across the Site, existing boundary and internal vegetation would be retained.

- 5.6 Existing vegetation patterns will be retained and enhanced on Site through additional tree, hedgerow and scrub planting, helping to reinforce the landscape structure of the Site. Individual trees and woodland edge planting is proposed alongside existing blocks of woodland and hedgerows to enhance ecological corridors through the Site, whilst native scrub will be used to add further structure to the landscape. New hedgerows and scrub are also proposed along the northern boundary of the residential area to help soften views of new built form from the SANG and PRow ARBO17. This will create an additional east-west ecological connection through the Site.
- 5.7 A mixture of species-rich grassland and wildflower grassland will improve on the habitat value of the existing modified grassland on Site. Grass paths mown through species-rich grassland will provide alternative pedestrian routes, whilst also creating better connections to the wider countryside. A 2.3km circular walking route as part of the SANG will provide enhanced recreation opportunities, including for dog walkers, with dog ponds strategically located to provide shaded areas for cooling in high temperature. Wetland areas will be created as part of the SuDS network to further diversify the provision of habitats on Site, whilst also contributing towards placemaking within the street scene.
- 5.8 Overall, while some existing vegetation will be removed, there will be a net increase in tree and vegetation cover on the Site, as well as an increased diversity of habitats, resulting in a beneficial change once vegetation has established.

Public Rights of Way and Access

- 5.9 There is public access to the Site afforded by PRow ARBO17 which runs along the northern boundary. This PRow is located within the proposed SANG and therefore is unlikely to be directly impacted by the Proposed Development. New recreational routes will connect to it, providing further recreational access to the Site.

Visual Effects

- 5.10 As set out in Section 4, surrounding topography, vegetation and built form contain the Site from the wider landscape and therefore views are limited to near and middle-distance views from adjoining roads and PRows. The visual changes are described below, and the effects are assessed in the tables in **Appendix A8**.

Residents

- 5.11 Close views of the SANG within the north-east corner of the Site would be possible from first floor, south-facing windows of some properties along the southern edge of Harts Close. These views would become increasingly filtered due to the gapping up of existing boundary hedgerows and the planting of new vegetation within the SANG. Views of the proposed residential development within the south of the Site would be heavily filtered by existing vegetation and would eventually become screened during summer months (see photograph 2).
- 5.12 Due to the orientation of the houses along Melrose Gardens, views of the Site will be limited to oblique views of the north-eastern corner, which includes part of the proposed SANG (see photograph 1). Due to the nature of the SANG proposals, this would not materially change the character of the existing view. Views of the SANG would become increasingly screened due to maturing boundary vegetation enhancements. Views towards the proposed residential development would be screened by existing intervening vegetation.
- 5.13 Filtered views of the proposed residential development within the south of the Site would be available through existing mature vegetation from south-facing first floor windows of the property at Ducks Nest Farm. These views would become increasingly screened as proposed vegetation along the Site's boundary establishes.
- 5.14 The proposed residential development will be screened by existing buildings associated with Ducks Nest Farm as well as existing vegetation. Filtered views north towards the proposed SANG in the north-eastern corner of the Site would be available from rear elevations. However, the character of these views would not materially change due to the nature of the SANG proposals. Views of the SANG would become increasingly screened due to maturing boundary vegetation enhancements.
- 5.15 Views of the proposed residential development will be possible from west-facing windows of properties on the northern end of Rickman Close. These views will include residential properties and associated landscaping and SuDS within the east of the Site. These views will become increasingly filtered and eventually screened once proposed vegetation along the eastern boundary of the Site establishes and matures. Views of the proposed development from the remaining properties along Rickman Close will continue to be heavily filtered or screened due to existing and proposed vegetation.
- 5.16 An existing newly planted hedgerow with hedgerow trees marks the southern and south-western boundary of the Site. Additional proposed vegetation along here would reinforce the structure and screening potential of this boundary and would reflect the existing tree belts along the Eversley Road Green Enhancement Route, once mature. At year 1, views of the proposed residential area within the south of the Site would be available from a handful of properties around the junction between

Bairds Road and Arbery Way due to the immature intervening vegetation. However, the establishing vegetation would increasingly filter views from these properties (see photographs 4a and 4b).

Users of the PRoW Network

- 5.17 The landform to the north of the Site rises towards a ridgeline which reaches its peak at Arborfield Court. This screens views of the Site from the wider landscape to the north. Views from the Grade II listed Arborfield Court are screened by intervening vegetation. PRoW ARBO17 follows the northern boundary of the Site along this ridge. From this footpath, there would be close views of the proposed SANG. The proposed residential development within the south of the Site would be visible in the middle ground. As proposed vegetation along the northern edge of the residential area establishes, views of built form would become increasingly softened and filtered. Eventually, only the rooftops of the Proposed Development would be seen extending above the treeline, helping to integrate the development into existing views of Arborfield Garrison (see photographs 6, 7 and 8). Due to the elevation of the footpath, distant views south, above the top of the Proposed Development, would be retained, creating no material change to the character of the existing longer distance views.
- 5.18 Due to the elevation of PRoW ARBO17, the Site is located in the foreground of a longer distance view across Arborfield Garrison and towards surrounding wooded hills. Policy IRS2 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (2020) requires development to respect and preserve any 'outstanding views', which are defined as *"an exceptional panorama of the landscape and including middle and distant features"*. The views from PRoW ARBO17 within the north of the Site are wide and include middle and distant features. However, we would not consider this view to be 'exceptional' due to it consisting of an ordinary landscape with detracting elements. Even if this view were to meet the 'outstanding view' threshold, the Proposed Development respects and preserves this view due to further residential development being introduced into the middle-ground, where existing residential development is already visible. Furthermore, the Proposed Development would not break the skyline or foreshorten the long views available from this path. Therefore, the existing character of the view would be retained.
- 5.19 As the land falls away from the ridgeline towards Arborfield Cross, views of SANG land within the north-east corner of the Site would be afforded above existing boundary vegetation for users of PRoW ARBO17 (see photograph 1). Due to the nature of the SANG proposals, the character of these views would not materially change.
- 5.20 Due to intervening vegetation, built form and topography, the Proposed Development would not be visible from other PRoW nearby to the Site.

Users of the Road Network

- 5.21 Views of the proposed development would be possible from a short section of Observer Way (see photograph 5). The proposed development includes new vegetation, alongside existing immature

vegetation, along the Site's south-western boundary. This will soften, and eventually screen, views into the Site from Observer Way as it matures. As most users of Observer Way are travelling by vehicle, these views will be experienced at speed where the primary focus is on the road, rather than the surroundings. Over time, the character of Observer Way on the approach to Arborfield Garrison will become more enclosed and treed, reflecting the existing character of the other roads on the approach to the settlement.

- 5.22 Transient views of the Proposed Development would be available from a short section of Eversley Road between the existing access to Ducks Nest Farm and the junction with Observer Way. Here, glimpsed and filtered views of the proposed residential development would be available through newly establishing vegetation (see photographs 4a and 4b). These views will become increasingly filtered and eventually screened as the vegetation matures. A brief glimpse into the Site would remain where the proposed access is located off the roundabout with Langley Common Road.

Effects on Landscape and Townscape Character

- 5.23 The character of the Site will change from pastoral fields to a new SANG in the northern three fields, and residential development with associated infrastructure and landscaping within the southern two fields. Although representing a material change in the southern part of the Site, the new residential development would be reflective of the surrounding settlement character of Arborfield Garrison to the immediate south. The landscape character of the northern part of the Site would not materially change, with the exception of additional ecological and recreational value which will create a long-term beneficial change.
- 5.24 Although new residential development would be perceptible from the northern part of the Site, including in elevated views from PRoW ARBO17, this would be seen in the context of existing development at Arborfield Green and Arborfield Garrison. Over time, as proposed vegetation establishes, the Proposed Development would become increasingly integrated into the surrounding landscape, reading as part of Arborfield Garrison in views south.
- 5.25 The residential area of the Proposed Development would be related to the northern edge of Arborfield Green and Arborfield Garrison located to the south-east of the Site, both visually and in terms of settlement character. As the vegetation along the southern boundary of the Site establishes, alongside some existing young planting within the buffer between Eversley Road and Baird Road (see photograph 4a and 4b), this perceived connection would be reduced. However, this interrelation would be retained at the Site's access point off the roundabout between Eversley Road / Langley Common Road / Baird Road.
- 5.26 Upgrades to the Eversley Road / Langley Common Road / Baird Road roundabout would introduce some additional urbanising influences along the northern edge of Arborfield Garrison, including a

new access road, signage and pedestrian crossings. However, this would be experienced at a junction which already exhibits a suburban fringe character with signage, streetlights and engineered junctions (see photographs for 3a and 3b). During our site visit in December 2023, new trees had been planted as part of the Eversley Road Green Route Enhancement Area at the junction between the Site and Rickman Close. Proposed pedestrian crossings as part of the Proposed Development could result in the need for the removal of one or more of these trees. The need for this would be determined through future detailed design work. Overall, the upgrades to Eversley Road would not represent a material change in the existing character of Eversley Road.

- 5.27 The perceived arrival into Arborfield Garrison would occur further north along Observer Way due to the presence of residential development within the south of the Site. However, the proposed tree and scrub belt along the south-western edge of the Site would increasingly soften and screen views of built form on the approach to Arborfield Garrison as it matures, alongside the existing establishing hedgerow in this location. Once established, this would contribute towards a more enclosed and wooded approach to Arborfield Garrison which is characteristic of other approaches to the settlement.
- 5.28 The residential component of the Proposed Development would be largely imperceptible from Arborfield Cross located to the north of the Site. Parts of the SANG would be perceptible from the southern edge of the village, however this would create no material change in the landscape setting to the village.
- 5.29 The Proposed Development would be perceptible from a small part of the landscape to the immediate south-west of Observer Way Bridge which is included within LCA L2. From here, residential development would be introduced into views of a semi-rural landscape which already include a number of urbanising influences and therefore would not materially change the character of the landscape in this location. Blocks of Ancient Woodland and other vegetation quickly truncate views of the Site from the wider landscape to the south-west, making the Proposed Development imperceptible from most of LCA L2.
- 5.30 Due to the wooded ridgeline around Arborfield Court, the Proposed Development would not be perceptible from the landscape to the north-west of the Site.
- 5.31 Due to the nature of the topography, vegetation cover and built form surrounding the Site, the Proposed Development would not be perceptible past its immediate surroundings, including from areas of higher landscape value at Farley Hill, the Bearwood Estate, the Loddon Valley, Blackwater Valley and around Finchampstead. This would make the Proposed Development imperceptible from the large majority of LCA J2, in which the proposed residential development is located, and LCA L2, in which the proposed SANG is located.

Settlement Coalescence

- 5.32 The Proposed Development would result in a small reduction in the physical gap between Arborfield Green and Arborfield Cross. However, an enduring physical gap between the two settlements would be secured through the allocation of the SANG land within the north of the Site. Furthermore, the perceived gap between Arborfield Green and Arborfield Cross would be only marginally reduced when travelling along Eversley Road, due to proposed vegetation along the south-west boundary of the Site, the location of the SANG, and the screening of residential development by existing built form and vegetation associated with Ducks Nest Farm. For users travelling along PRoW ARBO 17 between Arborfield Cross and Observer Way Bridge, the residential component of the Proposed Development would be screened from parts of the footpath where there is intervisibility with Arborfield Cross, due to existing intervening vegetation. Views of the residential development would be seen from parts of PRoW ARBO 17 which is located within the Site, where the development would be seen in the context of views south towards Arborfield Garrison, which the Proposed Development would be perceived to be a part of.
- 5.33 Overall, there would be a minor reduction in the physical gap between Arborfield Cross and Arborfield Green. However, an enduring physical gap would be secured through the creation of the SANG. There would be no actual or perceived settlement coalescence between Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Cross and therefore the separate identities of the settlements would be protected.

Assessment of the Site against Emerging Local Plan Policy

- 5.34 In October 2024, Wokingham Borough Council published their Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19). Policy NE6 identifies 13 Valued Landscapes across a large portion of the Borough, including the Farley Hill Valued Landscape. The proposed boundary for the Farley Hill Valued Landscape covers Farley Hill, as well as the agricultural land around it. This extends north-west beyond the A327 to cover the Site and the adjacent land around Arborfield Court.
- 5.35 Valued landscapes are not a new concept within Wokingham, with four Areas of Special Landscape Importance identified within the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy (2010). The Council-authored Valued Landscapes Topic Paper (2020) goes on to identify 11 Valued Landscapes, which does not include the designation at Farley Hill.
- 5.36 The evidence base to support the identification of Valued Landscapes within the Emerging Local Plan is set out within the Council-authored Valued Landscapes Assessment (September 2024) (extract in **Appendix A8**). The Assessment states that:

“Planning inspectors are able to identify valued landscapes as part of the planning appeal process. Where a decision from a planning inspector has identified a valued landscape, ... it has informed the

council's assessment of that landscape and its attributes. This has resulted in two newly identified valued landscapes: the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape and the Farley Hill Valued Landscape."

5.37 The appeal decision which was used to inform the identification of the Farley Hill Valued Landscape is not cited within the assessment and therefore the location of the site in question and the reasoning for its valued attribution cannot be scrutinised.

5.38 The Valued Landscape Assessment evaluates each Valued Landscape against the attributes presented in Box 5.1 of GLVIA3, as opposed to the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21 (TGN 02/21) – Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations (although the assessment does make reference to this guidance note). A short summary of the performance of the Site in relation to the attributes of the valued landscape are set out below.

Landscape Quality (Condition)

5.39 The Farley Hill Valued Landscape is largely associated within LCA L2: Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills which is noted as being of 'high quality' within the Landscape Character Assessment (2019). LCA L2 covers the northern part of the Site, as well as Arborfield Court. LCA J2, which covers most of the Site and its southern extent, is considered to be of 'moderate quality'.

Scenic Quality

5.40 The Landscape Character Assessment (2019) and Valued Landscapes Assessment (2024) set out a number of valuable landscape attributes that relate to scenic quality. We do not consider the Site to be representative of most of these attributes. The main scenic quality which is relevant to the Site is the hilly landform and wooded skyline which applies to the northern boundary only.

Rarity

5.41 The assessment discusses ancient woodland, Local Wildlife Sites, dark skies and tranquillity as rare features within this Valued Landscape. None of these apply to the Site. There is some rarity in the hilly landscape within the north of the Site.

Representativeness

5.42 The northern part of the Site is considered to be representative of the Farley Hill Valued Landscape due to its topography only, but otherwise is not considered representative. It is worth noting, the separate assessments of 'representativeness' and 'rarity' is generally now superseded by an overall assessment of 'distinctiveness', as set out in TGN 02/21.

Conservation Interests and Habitats of Principal Importance

5.43 There is no ancient woodland or Local Wildlife Site designations within the Site. There are also no habitats of principal importance within the Site.

Cultural Heritage

- 5.44 The Grade II listed Ducks Nest Farmhouse is located to the east of the Site, whereas the Grade II listed Arborfield Court is located to the north. These in themselves are not reasons for the identification of a valued landscape.

Recreational Opportunities

- 5.45 There is no public access to the Site, however, PRoW ARBO17 is located along its northern boundary. This is not reflective of the 'network' of PRoW found across Farley Hill.

Perceptual Aspects

- 5.46 The Landscape Character Assessment (2019) and Valued Landscapes Assessment (2024) set out a number of perceptual attributes relevant to the Farley Hill Valued Landscape. We do not consider the Site to be representative of most of these attributes due to its general lack of remoteness, rural tranquillity and dark skies. Perceptual aspects which are relevant to the Site primarily relate to the rising topography and longer distance views available from PRoW ARBO17 in the north of the Site.

Associations

- 5.47 There are no known associations at or within the immediate vicinity of the Site.

Conclusion

- 5.48 Overall, the Site is considered to be a poor representation of the attributes of the Farley Hill Valued Landscape and therefore there is no compelling reason for its inclusion within the designation. Furthermore, for the reasons set out within Section 4, the Site is considered to be of medium landscape value and sensitivity and therefore we do not judge it to be a 'valued landscape' in the context of NPPF Paragraph 180.

- 5.49 Rationalising the boundary of the proposed Farley Hill Valued Landscape to remove areas of lower landscape value would improve the robustness of the designation. As such, we consider Observer Way to form a more robust north-east boundary to the Valued Landscape designation.

- 5.50 Should the designation be adopted with the current proposed boundary, the proposed Policy NE6 states that:

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

- 5.51 The Proposed Development would adhere to this policy due to its regard for the preservation of the open ridgeline and longer views within the north of the Site, which are identified as valuable attributes within the Valued Landscape Assessment. Furthermore, the Proposed Development focusses new

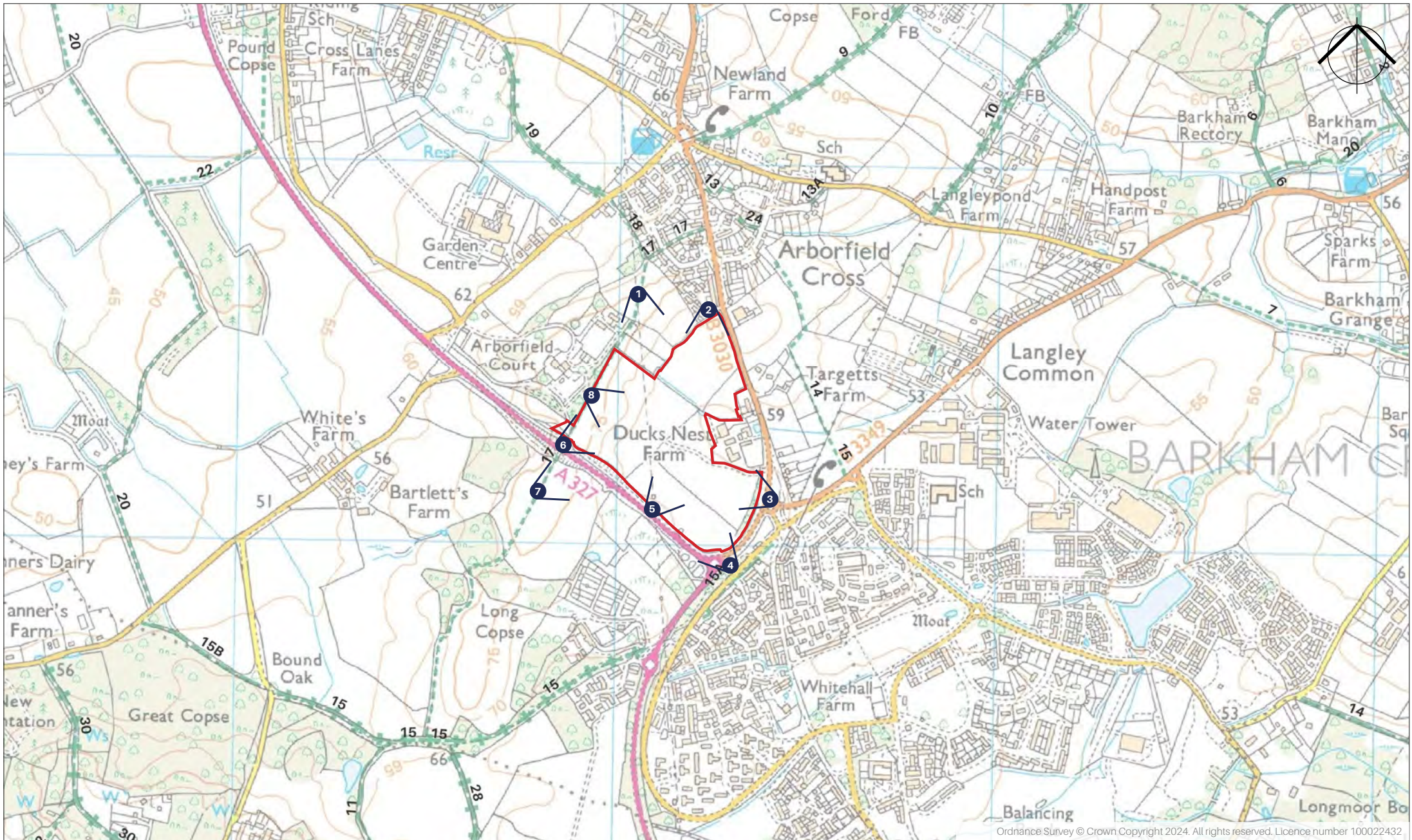
residential development within the lower value southern part of the Site, whilst enhancing the landscape, ecological and recreational value of the higher value northern part of the Site through the creation of the SANG.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Icení Projects have been instructed by David Wilson Homes to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ('LVIA') in relation to the proposed residential development at land at Ducks Nest Farm, Arborfield. The Site lies within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough. A hybrid application is being submitted with a full application for the change of land use from agricultural land to provide an area of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace ('SANG') within the north of the Site. The south of the Site is subject to an outline application with all matters reserved other than access into the Site for a residential development of up to 135 dwellings, open space, internal accesses and parking, drainage measures, landscaping and all other associated works.
- 6.2 The Site comprises five pastoral fields associated with Ducks Nest Farm extending to approximately 17.3ha. It is located on the north-western edge of Arborfield Green. The Site is bound by a mixture of mature hedgerows with hedgerow trees, as well as partially open and establishing hedgerows. There is public access to the site through PRow ARBO17, which runs along the northern edge of the Site within the area proposed as SANG land.
- 6.3 The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape, ecology or heritage. However, it is located within the 'Farley Hill Valued Landscape', which is identified within the Wokingham Borough Council Emerging Local Plan Update published October 2024. Commentary on this proposed designation is provided in Section 5. It is ordinary in character with some mature trees, including two Tree Preservation Orders and a veteran tree within the north of the Site. A row of overhead lines and a pylon cross the Site from south-west to north-east, adding an infrastructure presence into the local landscape. The Site is bound by the A327 Observer Way and Eversley Road to the south-west and south-east, introducing some audible intrusion and perception of movement into the landscape. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape quality.
- 6.4 The Site is not particularly scenic in itself, although there are longer views south-east from PRow ARBO17, which forms the Site's only public access. There are no heritage assets within the Site, and it has no particular ecological conservation value. The Site is not a rare landscape type, nor is it wild or tranquil being in close proximity to existing settlement edges with some visual and audible detractors. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape value.
- 6.5 The southern portion of the Site is located adjacent to existing residential development at Arborfield Garrison and has the potential to accommodate development without the need for structural vegetation removal, with the exception of providing access. Therefore, the southern portion of the Site is assessed as having a moderate ability to accommodate residential development. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape sensitivity.

-
- 6.6 As noted, the character of the Site will change from pastoral fields to a new SANG in the northern three fields and residential development with associated infrastructure and landscaping within the southern two fields. Although representing a material change in the southern part of the Site, the new residential development would be reflective of the surrounding settlement character of Arborfield Garrison to the immediate south. The landscape character of the northern part of the Site would not materially change.
- 6.7 Residential development within the south of the Site would be perceptible in views south from PRoW ARBO17. However, this would be seen in the context of existing views of Arborfield Garrison, alongside other urbanising influences including pylons, light industry at Ducks Nest Farm and audible intrusion from the A327. Over time, proposed vegetation along the northern boundary of the residential area and within the SANG will soften views of built form and integrate it into views of the wider landscape and the townscape of Arborfield Garrison.
- 6.8 The new access to the Site would result in the removal of a short stretch of existing vegetation along the Eversley Road Green Route Enhancement Area, however, this would not be detrimental to the function of the Green Infrastructure corridor. Furthermore, additional planting along the south-eastern boundary of the Site would reinforce this corridor once established. The creation of a new access point off the Eversley Road / Langley Common Road / Baird Road roundabout would introduce some additional urbanising features to the junction, which is already characterised by street lights, signage and engineered junctions. Therefore, this would not result in a marked change in its existing semi-rural / urban fringe character.
- 6.9 An enduring physical gap would be secured between Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Cross through the creation of the SANG. Furthermore, there would be no perceived reduction in the gap between the two settlements, therefore protecting their separate identities. Overall, there would be no substantial adverse effects on the character of the surrounding landscape and townscape as landscape mitigation establishes.
- 6.10 From our assessment, it is apparent the Site is relatively well contained, particularly the southern portion of the Site which is proposed for residential development. Visibility of the entire Site is limited to near and middle distance views due to the intervening topography, vegetation and built form. This includes for recreational users of PRoW ARBO17, users of Observer Way and Eversley Way, as well as for some residents along the Site's periphery. The Site is not evident in longer distance views.
- 6.11 As landscape mitigation on the Site establishes, views of the residential development will become increasingly filtered and eventually screened during summer, resulting in no substantial adverse visual effects.
- 6.12 In conclusion, there are no landscape or visual reasons why the Proposed Development on the Site would not be acceptable.

A1. SITE LOCATION PLAN



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Photograph number and
direction of view



Site Boundary



Public Right of Way
number

ICENI PROJECTS LIMITED
Da Vinci House 44 Saffron Hill
London, EC1N 8FH



PROJECT **Land at Ducks Nest Farm, Arborfield**
DRAWING **Site Location Plan**
CLIENT **David Wilson Homes**

SCALE @ A4	Not to Scale	DRAWING NO.	23_538_DL03
DRAWN BY	KL	REV	-
CHECKED BY	RH	DATE	September 2024

ICENI PROJECTS ACCEPTS NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY UNAUTHORISED AMENDMENTS TO THIS DRAWING.
ONLY FIGURED DIMENSIONS ARE TO BE WORKED TO.

A2. AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH



— Site Boundary

ICENI PROJECTS LIMITED
Da Vinci House 44 Saffron Hill
London, EC1N 8FH



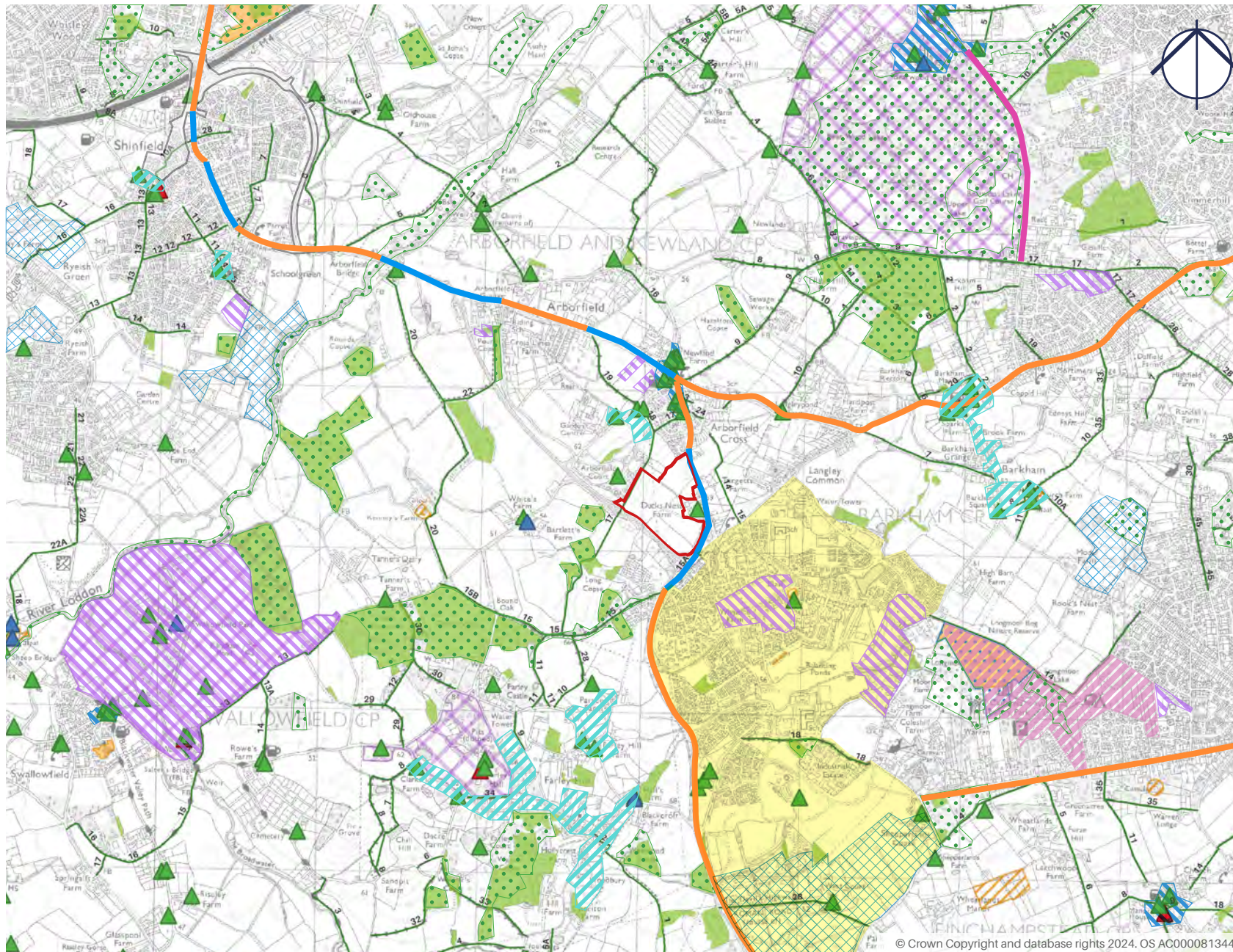
PROJECT **Land at Ducks Nest Farm, Arborfield**
DRAWING **Aerial Photograph**
CLIENT **David Wilson Homes**

SCALE @ A4	Not to Scale	DRAWING NO.	23_538_DL03
DRAWN BY	KL	REV	-
CHECKED BY	RH	DATE	September 2024

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(c) Getmapping plc 2024

A3. DESIGNATIONS PLAN



- Site Boundary
 - Registered Park and Garden
 - Country Park
 - Ancient Woodland
 - Local Nature Reserve
 - Public Right of Way
 - Public Right of Way number
 - Grade I Listed Building
 - Grade II* Listed Building
 - Grade II Listed Building
- Wokingham Borough Development Plan -
Adopted Managing Development Delivery
Local Plan (February 2014)
- Areas of Special Character
 - Conservation Area
 - Scheduled Monument
 - Local Wildlife Site
 - Strategic Development Locations
 - Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace
 - Green Routes
 - Green Route Enhancement Areas
 - Proposed Green Route Enhancement
- Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan
2019-2036 (April 2020)
- Public Open Space

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0 1km

ICENI PROJECTS LIMITED
Da Vinci House 44 Saffron Hill
London, EC1N 8FH



PROJECT **Land at Ducks Nest Farm, Arborfield**
DRAWING **Designations Plan**
CLIENT **David Wilson Homes**

SCALE @ A4	Not to Scale	DRAWING NO.	23_538_DL02
DRAWN BY	KL	REV	-
CHECKED BY	RH	DATE	September 2024

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A4. PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph no. 1 View south from PRoW ARBO17 crossing the ridgeline to the north of the Site

Visualisation type 1
Planar projections
75% @ A3, 150% @ A1
Canon EOS 2000D

Canon IS 18-55mm
Looking direction: South
HfoV: 180 degrees
12.12.2023, 10:00 -12:00

ICENI PROJECTS LIMITED Da Vinci House 44 Saffron Hill London, ECN1 8FH 	PROJECT	Land at Ducks Nest Farm, Arborfield Garrison	DRAWN BY	RH	DRAWING NO.
	DRAWING TITLE	Photographs	CHECKED BY	SG	23_538_DL01
	CLIENT	David Wilson Homes	DATE	December 2023	REV
				-	-

A5. NATIONAL LANDSCAPE POLICY SUMMARY

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE POLICY SUMMARY

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023)

- 1.1 In December 2023, the government published the updated National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF'), which maintains the focus on sustainable development that was established as the core of the 2012 NPPF. Those parts relevant to this assessment are summarised below.
- 1.2 Paragraphs 10 and 11 of the NPPF state that at the heart of the framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be applied in relation to both plan-making and decision-taking.
- 1.3 Paragraph 20 of the NPPF states that strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for, among other elements, the **conservation and enhancement of the natural built and historic environment including landscapes and green infrastructure and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.**
- 1.4 Section 12 of the NPPF sets out that planning policies and decisions should support the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places. Paragraph 132 states that **design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each areas defining characteristics.** Paragraph 133 requires Local Authorities to prepare design guides and codes which act as a framework to reflect local character and design preferences to create high quality designed places which are beautiful and distinctive.
- 1.5 Paragraph 135 states that planning policies and decisions, should ensure that developments, amongst others:
 - will function well and add to the overall quality of the area not just or the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
 - are visually attractive as a result of good architecture layout and effective landscaping
 - are sympathetic to local character and history including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

- 1.6 Paragraph 136 highlights the importance of new and retained trees to the character and quality of urban environments, with appropriate species chosen for the location and the needs of all users.
- 1.7 Paragraph 137 states that design quality should be integral to the evolution and assessment of proposals, and paragraph 139 goes on to state that poorly designed development should be refused, particularly where it does not follow local or government design guidance.
- 1.8 Section 15 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 180 of the document states that the planning system should contribute to the protection and enhancement of the natural and local environment through, among other things, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, **in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan.** The paragraph also outlines that the planning system should recognise **the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land and of trees and woodland.**
- 1.9 Paragraph 181 highlights that plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international national and locally designated Sites allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value here consistent with other policies in this framework take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plan or the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.
- 1.10 Paragraph 186 notes that in the process of determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply several principles. Among these, the paragraph notes that **development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.**
- 1.11 Section 14 of the NPPF focuses on climate change, flooding and coastal change. Paragraph 157 states that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and should help to support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 1.12 Paragraph 160 of the document asks that plans should:

- provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts);
- consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and
- identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for collocating potential heat customers and suppliers.

1.13 Paragraph 183 states that **permission should be refused for major development** within the National Parks, the Broads and Areas of outstanding Natural Beauty apart from where exceptional circumstances and public interest can be demonstrated. Such applications will require assessments of the need for the development, other options for the location of the development outside the designated area and any detrimental effects on the environment, landscape and recreational opportunities.

1.14 The definition of major development for the purposes of paragraphs 182 and 183, is noted as being a matter for the decision maker, and should be considered in terms of its **nature scale and setting and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes or which the area is designated or defined.**

Draft National Planning Policy Framework (July 2024)

1.15 In July 2024, the government published the draft NPPF which is currently being consulted on. Relevant proposed changes to the NPPF are set out below.

Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG'; July 2021)

1.16 The Planning Practice Guidance PPG as relevant to this assessment covers landscape and the natural environment, and the design of new developments. The PPG may be out of date in its reference to NPPF paragraph numbers, and where this is the case, the latest paragraph number has been included in the text in square brackets.

1.17 Paragraph 001 ID 26-001-20191001 of the Design process and tools section sets out the purpose of the guidance, which aims to explain the process and tools that can be employed to achieve well-designed places. The guidance refers to paragraph 130 – 134 [131 – 135] of the NPPF which relates to ensuring good design, and states that the section should be read in conjunction with the National Design Guide published October 2019, which it notes should be used in both plan-making and decision making. Ten good design characteristics are identified in the National Design Guide, and these are set out as follows in the PPG:

- Context
- Identity
- Built form
- Movement
- Nature
- Public spaces
- Uses
- Homes and buildings
- Resources
- Lifespan.

- 1.18 Paragraph 006 and 007 deal with masterplans, stating that they should be site specific and should **set the vision and implementation strategy for a development**. Paragraph 006 notes that they may need to be accompanied by other technical reports including landscape assessment and proposals for securing biodiversity net gain.
- 1.19 The Natural Environment section of the guidance aims to explain the key issues to consider in relation to the implementation of policies to protect and enhance the natural environment, including local requirements.
- 1.20 Paragraph 004 defines Green Infrastructure, while in paragraph 005 it explains its importance as a natural capital asset that provides multiple benefits, including enhanced biodiversity, landscapes and urban cooling. In paragraph 006 the guidance sets out the planning goals green infrastructure can assist in achieving, and these are:
- Building a strong competitive economy;
 - Achieving well designed places;
 - Promoting healthy and safe communities;
 - Mitigating climate change flooding and coastal change;
 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- 1.21 The final paragraph 008 in the green infrastructure sub-section notes that green infrastructure opportunities and requirements need to be considered at the earliest stages of development proposals as an integral part of development and infrastructure provision and taking into account existing natural assets and the most suitable locations and types of new provision.
- 1.22 Within the Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Ecosystems section, the topic of net gain has been included. Paragraph 020 describes net gain as **an approach to development that leaves**

the natural environment in a measurably better state than it as beforehand. Net gain is an umbrella term for both biodiversity net gain and wider environmental net gain.

- 1.23 In the Landscape section of the guidance, paragraph 036 refers to that part of paragraph 170 - 174 [180 – 184] of the NPPF which deals with the recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside in local plans, and the need for strategic policies to **provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally designated landscapes but also the wider countryside.** Paragraph 036 goes on to note that:

'Where landscapes have a particular local value it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals or development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures such as appropriate design principles and visual screening where necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.'

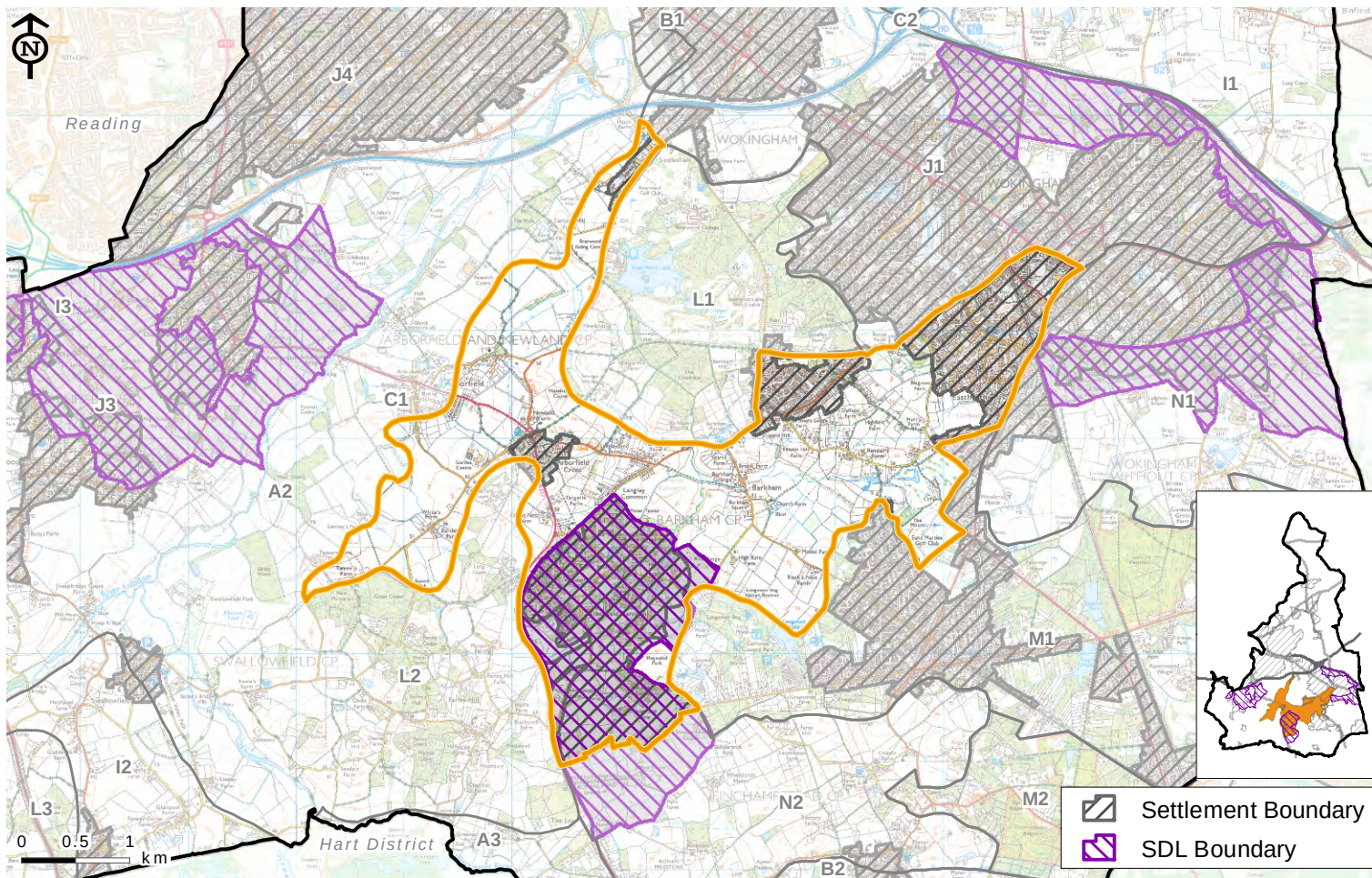
National Design Guide 2019

- 1.24 The National Design Guide 2019 provides guidance to illustrate how well designed places that are beautiful enduring and successful can be achieved in practice.
- 1.25 The guidance identifies ten good design characteristics and the following are of most relevance to landscape and visual assessment.
- Context is described as the location of the development and the attributes of its immediate local and regional surroundings. The Guide goes on to state that: *'An understanding of the context history and cultural characteristics of a site neighbourhood and region influences the location siting and design on new developments. It means they are well grounded in their locality and more likely to be acceptable to existing communities. Creating a positive sense of place helps to foster a sense of belonging and contributes to well-being, inclusion and community cohesion.'*
 - The identity or character of a place comes from the way that buildings streets and spaces landscape and infrastructure combine together and how people experience them. It is not just about the buildings and how a place looks but how it engages with all of the senses. Local character makes places distinctive. Well-designed sustainable places with a strong identity give their users occupiers and owners a sense of pride helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods.

- Nature contributes to the quality of a place and to people's quality of life and it is a critical component of well-designed places natural features are integrated into well designed development. They include natural and designed landscapes, high quality public open spaces, street trees, and other trees, grass, planting and water.

1.26 The National Model Design Code, July 2021 expands upon the ten characteristics of good design providing an overarching framework for design.

**A6. EXTRACT FROM WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL LANDSCAPE
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT (2019)**



SUMMARY

A gently undulating landscape, principally in agricultural use. Large arable fields bound by hedgerows dominate, with smaller fields of sheep pasture and horse paddocks close to settlements.

The western boundary abuts the lower lying C1: Arborfield River Terrace defined by the 50m AOD contour line. Higher areas of Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills (L1 and L2) confine the clay to the north and south and the boundary follows the base of the hill slope. The eastern boundary extends to Wokingham, while the south-eastern boundary is the well-defined edge of the forested area of M1: Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands.



Key Characteristics

- A gently undulating landscape between 50m and 65m AOD, underlain by London Clay with localised areas of River Terrace Gravels. Shallow wooded valleys follow the course of the Barkham Brook, which is geologically marked by areas of alluvium.
- Consistent pattern of water bodies including streams, drainage channels, ditches and open water bodies of various sizes resulting from the clayey and loamy soils which impede drainage.
- Wooded context provided by characteristic mature hedgerow and in-field trees, combined with woodland belts, with BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills. This creates a loose sense of enclosure.
- Arable farming dominates, with pasture on higher ground and horse paddocks near settlement. Fields are large and geometric, bound by fragmented hedgerows supported by post and wire. Fields used for paddocks are often subdivided with horse tape.
- Small-scale wet woodland and wetland habitats scattered on the edge of the area, often designated as LWS. BAP priority habitat wet woodland is found at Bottle Copse and The Moors, with wet meadow and wet grassland found at Brook Farm Meadow LWS.
- A dense settled character influenced by modern development including the new garden village on the site of Arborfield Garrison and the southern edge of Wokingham which incorporates an industrial estate. There is little consistent style or form.
- Older scattered settlement of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages at Barkham and Arborfield Cross. The buildings have traditional vernacular of timber framing and clay tiles, exemplified by the Conservation Area at Arborfield Cross. A number of farmhouses are listed, including Grade II* Barlett's Farmhouse.
- A network of busy local roads cross the area. They tend to be rural in character, with ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees, sometimes opening directly onto the arable fields. The A327 adds noise and movement to the area.
- Public rights of way run between the settlements, and provide access for recreational use.
- A rural character away from development and roads, with views across to adjacent character areas including across the Loddon Valley.
- A historic road, now represented by footpaths, lanes and Victorian carriageways, that appears on Norden's map of 1607, connecting Swallowfield Park via Arborfield Cross and the Coombes (in LCA L1), with Wokingham.

Natural Landscape

- J2.1 The area is gently undulating at between 50m and 65m AOD. In some areas it is more rolling with steeper slopes, for instance where it narrows between the two areas of hills to the west forming a shallow valley between Barkham and Arborfield. Locally these shallow valleys and the wooded area around them are known as 'The Coombes', which extends into L1.
- J2.2 Predominately underlain by London Clay with the sand of the Bagshot Formation in the east and localised Fourth and Fifth River Terrace gravel deposits in the far northern tips. Small areas of Alluvium follow the courses of the network of streams associated with the Barkham Brook.

- J2.3 The soils tend to have impeded drainage or high groundwater and there is a consistent pattern through the area of drainage channels, streams, ditches and open water bodies of varying sizes. There are small-scale wetland characteristics around the water bodies, including wet meadow, wet grassland and BAP priority habitat wet woodland at Brook Farm Meadow and The Moors, both designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).
- J2.4 The principal land uses are settlement and agriculture. Arable cultivation dominates agricultural land use in large geometric fields with sheep pasture on higher ground. Post and wire fencing is a common replacement for gaps in the hedgerows. Smaller horse paddocks with post and rail fencing are associated with settled areas such as the fringes of Wokingham. The large-scale landscape acts as an important separation between settlements.
- J2.5 Trees are an important element in the landscape, including mature hedgerow trees and remnant hedgerow trees in fields. These combine with woodland belts and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills to create a rural character to the area, which is influenced by modern development on the urban fringe. Shelterbelts and small farm woodlands are typical lowland oak woodland, some with hazel coppice. Pound Copse and Bottle Copse are both LWS, comprising BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland and ancient woodland of neglected coppice, dominated by oak (*Quercus robur*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

Cultural Landscape

- J2.6 It is likely that the clay soils, being difficult to work, remained predominantly wooded until Saxon times and were not settled during the prehistoric or Romano-British periods. There was a Domesday settlement at Barkham, although the present village has shifted. Its original site is marked by the position of the church, and a late medieval/post-medieval moat manor at Church Farm. There is a second possible moat at the site of the former Biggs Farm, now within the Arborfield Garrison.
- J2.7 Wokingham (described more fully in J1) was first recorded in 1146, and was granted a market in 1219. Although the village of Arborfield Cross developed at a major junction of roads, the area as a whole contained few rural villages and settlement outside Wokingham consisted mainly of dispersed farms.
- J2.8 Parliamentary enclosures produced the regular, straight-edged field boundaries that are particularly prevalent in the areas of former commons, such as at Langley Common and Barkham Common, areas of which remain well-preserved. Across the rest of the area, however, the predominantly irregular field boundaries indicate the voluntary enclosure of earlier field systems.
- J2.9 Later developments have considerably changed the landscape. In particular the development of the Army Remount Depot during the First World War and later the headquarters of the Corps Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Training Establishment in World War II led to the formation of Arborfield Garrison. Second World War pillboxes are to be found secreted in the countryside. Apparently designed to defend the garrison and routes to London the most evident today is the one covering Barkham Bridge on the B3349. The military moved out of Arborfield Garrison in 2016 and the site, and land to the south which was not part of the former garrison, is being developed as part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL, which once completed will provide up to 3,500 homes.
- J2.10 Modern estates of large 'executive style' homes at Arborfield Garrison have little consistent character or form, although brick is the most common material. The suburbs of Wokingham extend into this character area at Eastheath, and there are industrial estates on the edge of Wokingham and near Hogwood Farm. The built edge of Arborfield Garrison SDL is currently abrupt, however SANGS to the south and east will integrate the settlement within the wider countryside as planting matures.
- J2.11 An older pattern of farmsteads and villages includes part of Arborfield, Arborfield Cross, and Barkham. The rural farmsteads and hamlets are largely traditional buildings, timber framed or brick with clay tiles, with weatherboarded barns, as shown by the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area. Many of the farmhouses are now listed buildings, including the Grade II* 16th century Barlett's Farmhouse.

- J2.12 There is a regular network of roads throughout the area which tend to have a rural character with ditches, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, although increased traffic is having a negative impact. Rural tracks, bridleways and, less frequently, footpaths give access for recreational use, for instance to the ancient settlement of Barkham and to fishing ponds. Opportunities for formal recreation are provided by Greenfields Carp Fishing and the Sand Martins Golf Club, both on the edge of Finchampstead.
- J2.13 The A327 runs along much of the edge of the Arborfield Garrison SDL, and is much busier than other roads. New roads proposed as part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL will link the settlement to the A327 west of Arborfield, extend Nine Mile Ride from Finchampstead and upgrade the single lane Barkham Bridge.

Perceptual Landscape

- J2.14 This landscape has a wooded context from hedgerow trees and wooded horizons outside of the area, which creates a loose sense of enclosure to the north and south. There are views across the adjacent character areas to the east and west, including across the Loddon Valley.
- J2.15 The A327 introduces noise and movement to the area, however as it is now bounded by the Arborfield Garrison SDL it is less disruptive to rural character. Away from the settlements there is generally a rural character, enhanced by hedgerows and the large fields which act as separation between settlements.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Barkham Brook and associated wetland which provide important ecological habitats including wet meadow and BAP priority habitat wet woodland.
- Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provides a rural character away from settlement, and creates an important separation between settlements.
- Mature hedgerow trees and in-field trees which provide a wooded character and visual interest within the landscape.
- Historic Second World War pillboxes and other defence works, which are now a scenic part of the landscape.
- Rural settlement pattern of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages outside the urban area which provides a rural character and a link to the past.
- Recreational value of the network of rights of way between settlements.
- Views across the landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south provides a loose sense of enclosure.

Landscape Condition

The landscape is in overall moderate condition, due to the pattern of arable and pastoral fields, and remnant wetland influences associated with Barkham Brook. However, the hedgerow network is fragmented and the introduction of further development through the Arborfield Garrison SDL and associated infrastructure will further fragment the rural settlement pattern altering the character of the area.

Key Issues

- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland and wet woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change. Climate change is also likely to result in increased seasonal variation in river flows.
- Hedgerow loss and replacement with fencing associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Loss of structure and species diversity of the woodland belts has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture.
- Lack of the recruitment of young trees (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.
- Pressure for more horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to an accumulation of shelters, vehicles and equipment.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure impacting landscape character. Rapid rate of change due to ongoing redevelopment and expansion of Arborfield Garrison including development of 3,500 homes as part of the Arborfield Garrison strategic development but includes two areas of SANG to the south and the east of the SDL.
- Continuing pressure for new roads including the proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road, Nine Mile Ride Extension and upgrading the Barkham Bridge will increase the fragmentation of the landscape and visual intrusion of transport corridors.
- Increased traffic on rural roads due to expanding residential development in the area leading to loss of tranquillity, erosion of road verges and increased levels of air pollution in rural areas.
- Light pollution at night causing 'sky glow'.
- High demands for recreation continue to threaten the tranquillity of the landscape. Recreational pressure can lead to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features and is a continuing problem in this well-populated borough.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the landscape. The key aspects to be conserved and enhanced are the field pattern with mature hedgerow trees, wetland and woodland habitats, rural lanes and historic features.

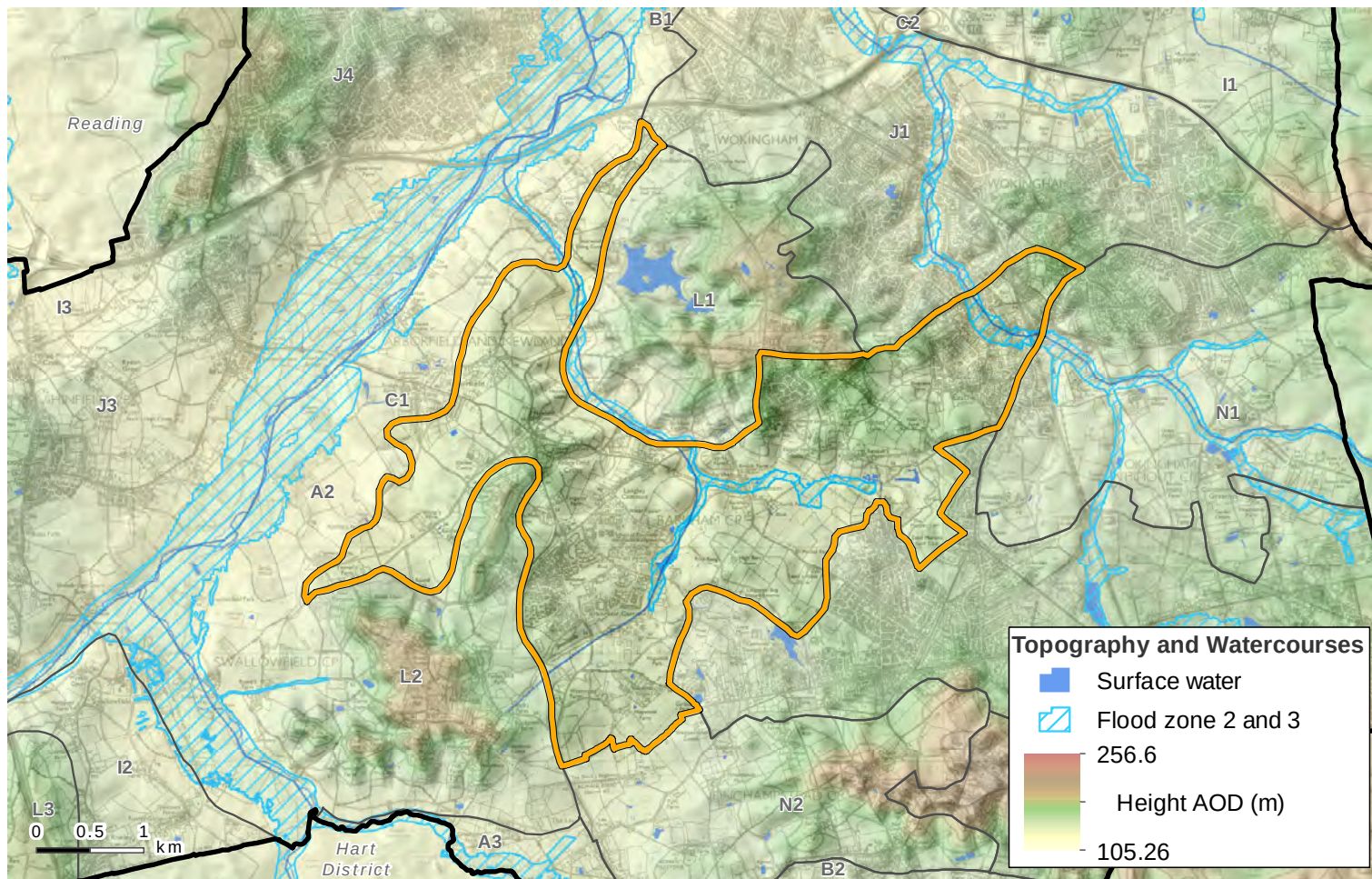
In terms of development, the aim is to integrate new development into its landscape setting, and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements.

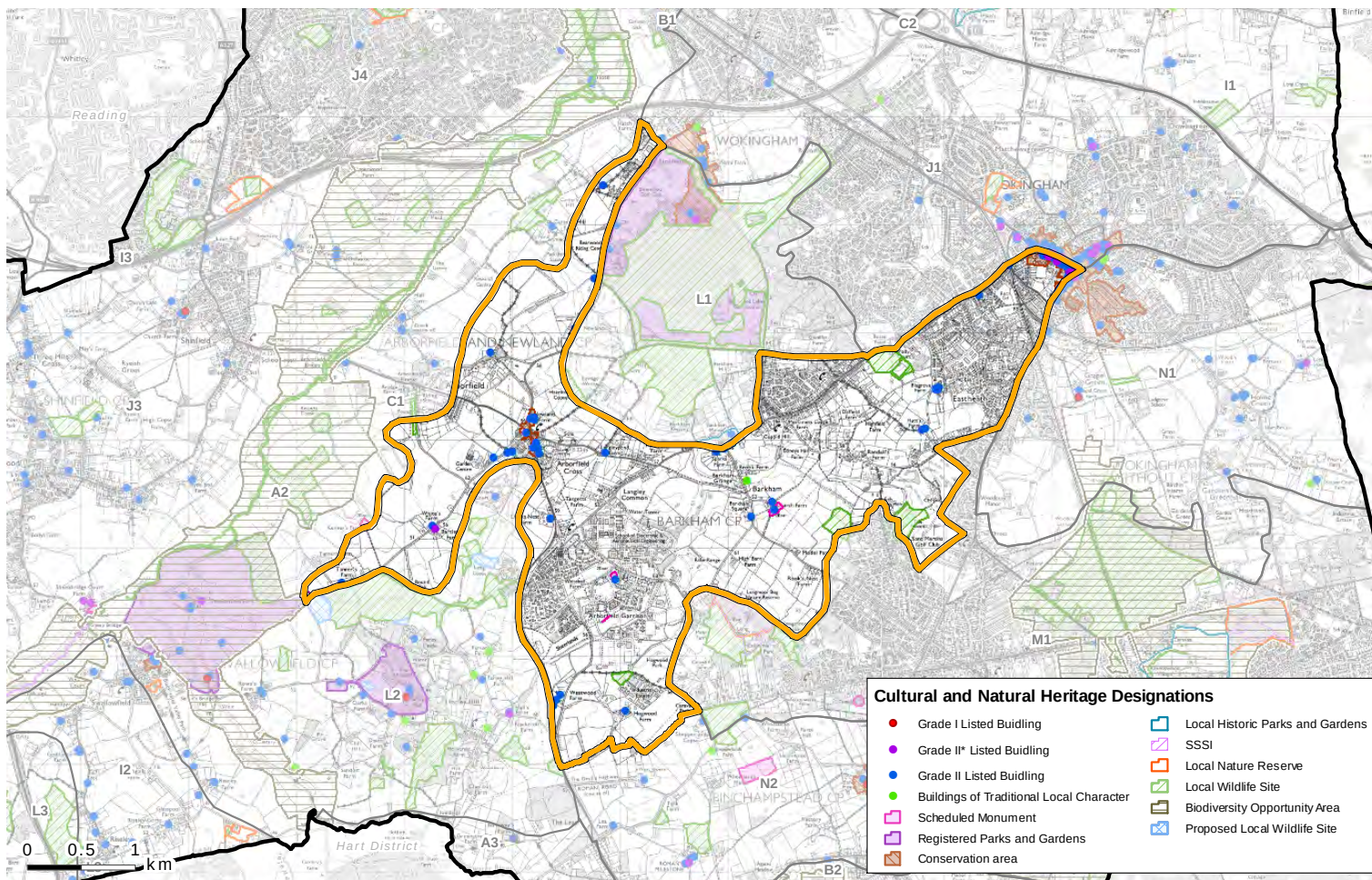
Landscape Guidelines

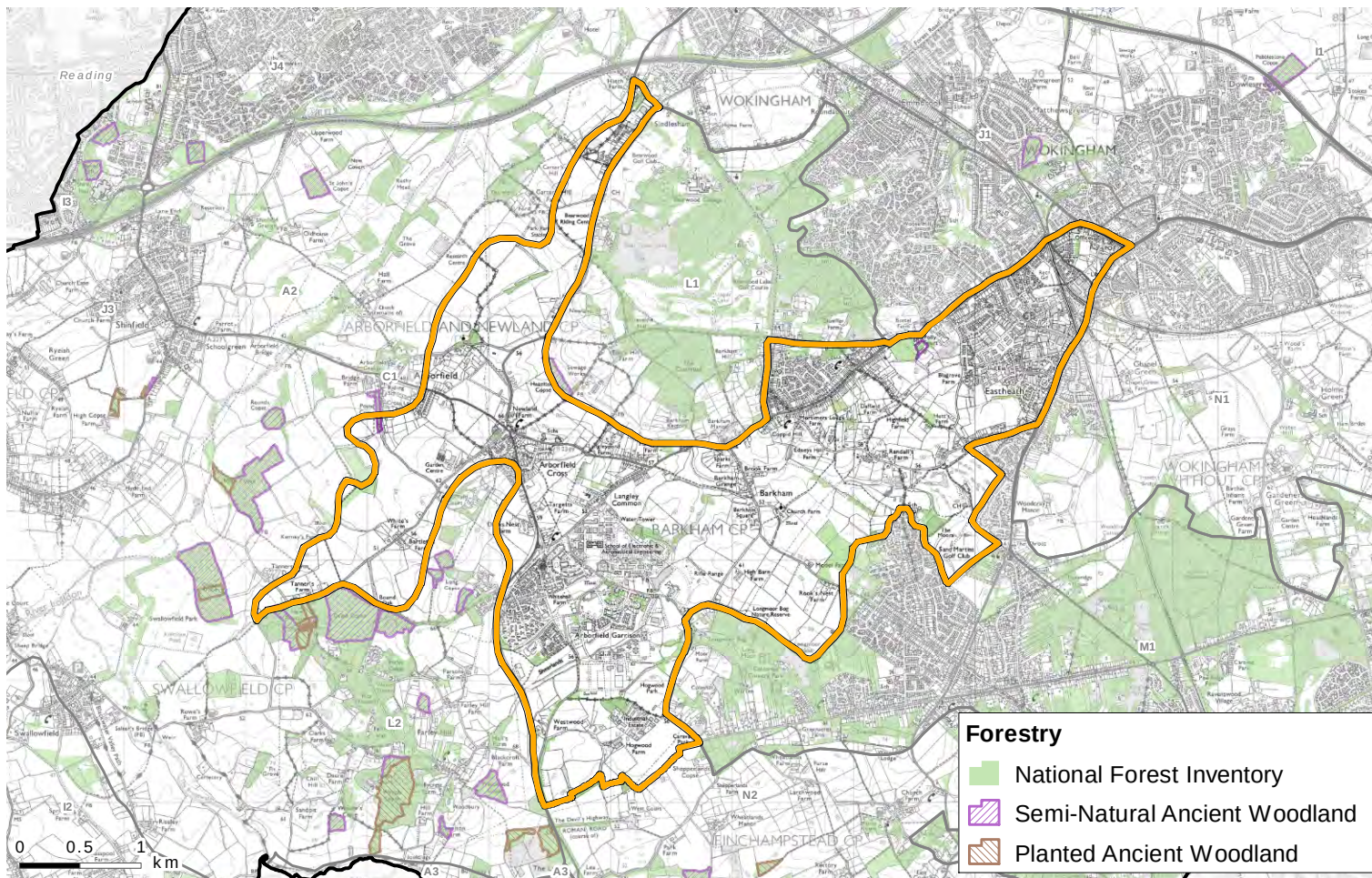
- Conserve the scenic quality and naturalistic character of the Barkham Brook.

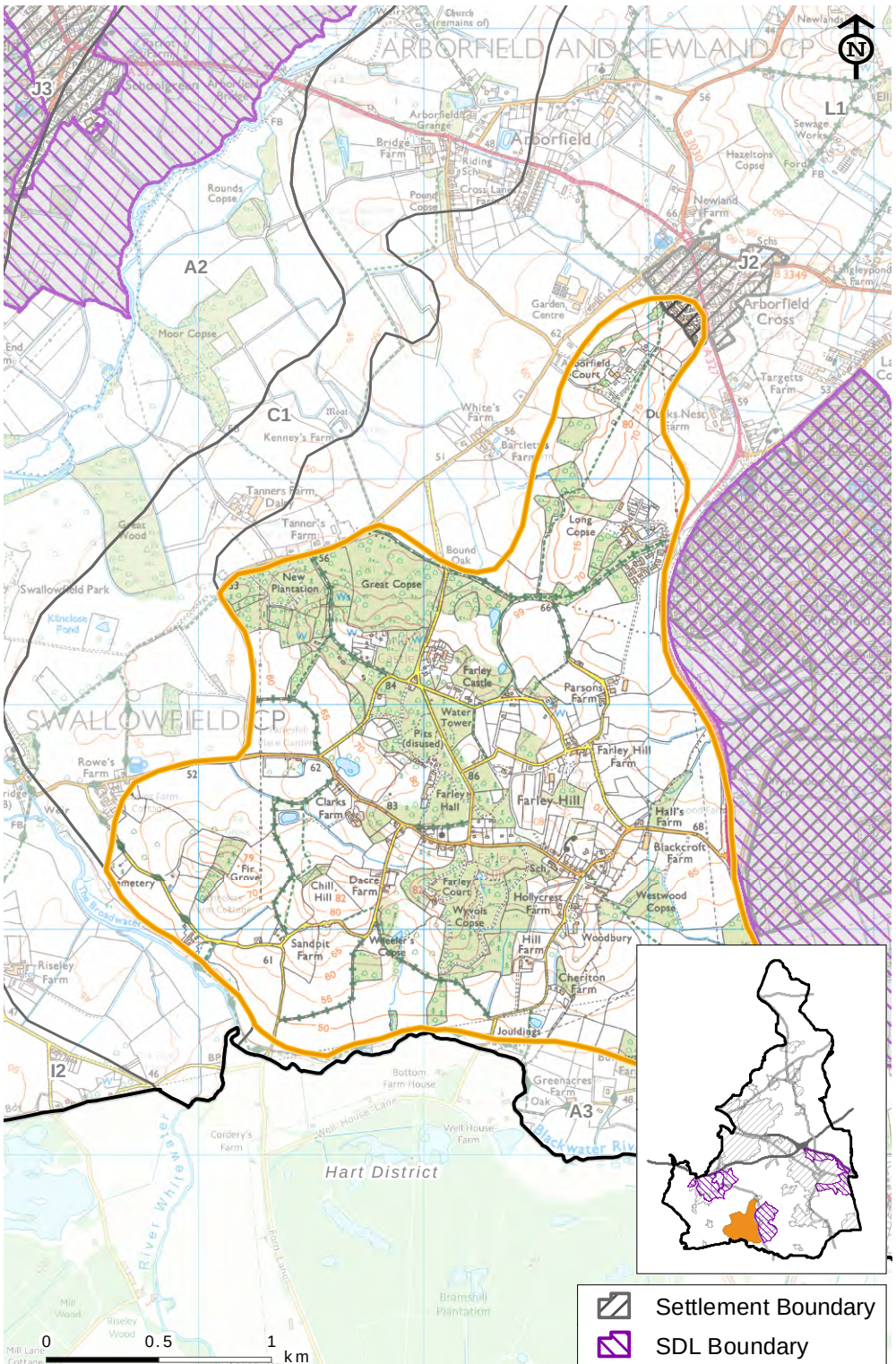
- Conserve woodlands, including ancient woodland, BAP priority habitats and remnant standard trees. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to provide screening of roads and development and linking woodland habitats. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape which provides a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements. Protect the individual identity of towns and villages, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land between Arborfield Garrison and Barkham, and Barkham and Wokingham town, and Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Cross.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows with standard trees as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstall or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and control of associated built elements.
- Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve, enhance and manage wetland and woodland habitats including within LWS. Protect the habitats from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. An appropriate wetland and woodland management regime is critical.
- Consider undertaking character appraisals/village design statements of key settlements such as Arborfield and Barkham to identify distinctive features worthy of conservation such as local style and vernacular. Conserve the value of Arborfield Cross Conservation Area and the listed and historic buildings, including farmhouses, and non-designed heritage assets such as Second World War defences.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and create a positive interface between the built up and rural areas particularly around Wokingham town, Arborfield Garrison, and Finchampstead.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the potential impacts of any new development on valuable attributes.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage particularly in the most rural areas.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate new roads in relation to proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road and the extension of Nine Mile Ride. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.
- Conserve views to distinctive wooded horizons. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.

- Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution through the sensitive siting of any new development, including infrastructure, and especially any proposed night-time lighting.





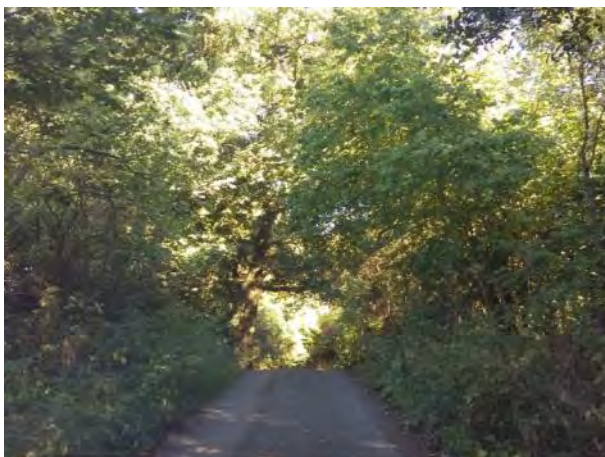




SUMMARY

A discrete elevated landscape of small hills and knolls. The higher areas are wooded, with a distinctive coniferous element interspersed with pastures with arable farming on the lower slopes. Timber framed farmhouses and brick built cottages are linked with a network of winding rural roads and lanes.

The Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills character area is located in the south of the borough and rises from the surrounding lower land of A2: Loddon River Valley and A3: Blackwater River Valley in the west and south and from J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay and N2: Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland to the north and east. The boundaries of the area largely follow the base of the slopes along the 50m contour line. To the east and west of the area where the slopes are not so distinctly defined the boundaries follow a series of minor roads and the A32.



Key Characteristics

- Small undulating hills rising to 80m AOD at Farley Hill. The islands of higher land express the underlying geology, of London Clay overlain by Bagshot Formation sands and Sixth River Terrace deposits, which produce poorer soils making it unsuitable for agriculture. The lower clay slopes support mixed agriculture.
- Small ponds and open water bodies, possibly from former gravel or clay pits are scattered throughout the area, including Farley Hill West pond, a proposed LWS.
- Extensive woodland network of mixed, coniferous and deciduous woodland and copses, including areas of BAP priority habitat and ancient woodland, many of which are designated as LWS. Farley Hill Woods also contains small areas of remnant heathland habitat.
- Intricate small scale landscape with small sinuous pastures enclosed by the woodland, and arable fields on lower slopes bounded by thick overgrown hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Early enclosure field systems cover an extensive area.
- Marginal land uses including pony paddocks with associated stables bound by post and rail fencing and semi-industrial uses of farmland which influence the rural character.
- Some large agricultural buildings which are highly visible within the small scale landscape.
- Historic parkland associated with Farley Hall (Grade I listed). The parkland was laid out in early-mid 18th century, with possible contribution from Charles Bridgeman, and is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden.
- Rural settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads, the hamlet at Farley Hill and 18th and 19th century country houses with a strong vernacular of brick, timber-framing, thatch and clay tile. A new estate development on the former Poperinghe Barracks disturbs this pattern.
- Network of footpaths and bridleways and quiet rural lanes and tracks, some sunken, which wind through the woodlands, bordered by bulky hedgerows and often without kerbs or intrusive signage.
- Views to the river valleys of the Blackwater, Broadwater and Loddon, with this area forming a wooded backdrop to views from the surrounding landscape.
- Secluded, remote character of the landscape enclosed within woodland, with an experience of dark skies.

Natural Landscape

- L2.1 The area comprises a convoluted series of small knolls or hills rising to 80m AOD centred on Farley Hill, expressing the geology of London Clay overlain by sands and gravels of the Bagshot Formation, Sixth River Terrace Gravels and Head Gravels. Water shed from the higher land has eroded valleys down the sides of the hills forming a complex and small scale landscape. Streams still flow down these valleys and there are drainage ditches in others. There are disused gravel pits on Farley Hill, and a number of small open water bodies may have been gravel or clay pits. The Farley Hill West Pond is a proposed Local Wildlife Site (LWS) for its very high toad population.
- L2.2 On the central area of Farley Hill the poor fertility of the soil makes it unsuitable for agriculture and here the land use is largely woodland, which ranges across the area both on the hill tops and the sides of the slopes. The woodland is mixed deciduous with conifers, and Scots pine is

particularly noticeable in the Farley Hill area, along with beech, birch, holly, yew and rhododendron. The woods are irregular in outline and vary in size including small blocks loosely connected to the larger areas. These woodlands often have heathy elements as they developed on slightly sandy soils, for example the small remnant area of heath at the Farley Hill Woods complex. Seven of the woodlands are designated as LWS, for the BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

- L2.3 On the more fertile soil over the London Clay, the lower slopes of the hills support arable farming mixed with pasture. Areas of rough grazing and paddocks are also evident. Fields are small and sinuous in outline following the varied topography of the hill slopes and often enclosed or partially enclosed by woodland. The hedgerows and hedgerow trees add to the rural, wooded character of the area with their overgrown appearance. The paddocks detract from the unity of the landscape as they are geometric in outline with post and rail fences rather than hedges, although they are small scale. There are large agricultural buildings, and farms with semi-industrial use, including an anaerobic digester plant at Hill Farm and substation and breakers yard south of Ducks Nest Farm, which also disrupt the small-scale field pattern.
- L2.4 The historic parkland of Farley Hall occupies a central block of Farley Hill, bounded by public lanes, with gardens and an early to mid-18th century landscape park possibly designed (at least in part) by Charles Bridgeman, and designated as Grade II Registered Park and Garden. The Hall stands at the edge of the woodland with views across to Swallowfield Park and the Loddon valley. The woodland to the east of the hall may have been part of the pleasure gardens, and the more open terraced lawns to the west give way to parkland running down to the lake. The park extends its influence on the landscape through the lodges, two of which survive, and the holly, yew and laurel hedge along Bunglers Hill. There is BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland recorded.

Cultural Landscape

- L2.5 The Roman road between London and Calleva (Silchester), known locally as the Devil's Highway, enters the area at Lea Copse where it can be traced for a short length. There is however, little evidence of either prehistoric or Romano-British settlement. Place names such as Farley and Langley containing "-leah" (a woodland clearing) indicates settlement in the forest landscape which later formed part of the Royal Forest of Windsor. The area is characterised by a low level of settlement of closely spaced farmsteads linked by a network of lanes, including the former Wokingham Lane which runs west from Langley Common.
- L2.6 The piecemeal clearance of woodland to form cultivatable land by assarting, and later by agreement, can be seen in the pattern of small irregular fields intermixed with woodland around Farley Hill. This early enclosure landscape covers an extensive area, once contiguous with adjacent lands around the Loddon (A2 and C1) and Spencers Wood (J3). A considerable amount of this early field system remains well-preserved.
- L2.7 Later development has also influenced landscape character. The elevated ground at Farley Hill became the site of the 18th and early 19th century country houses and landscaped parks at Farley Hall, Farley Hill Court and Farley Castle (formerly Wragg Castle). The possible 'motte' at Farley Hill Place may be a landscaping feature. Some of the woodland represents 19th century plantation – such as New Plantation at Farley Castle, while the small Farley Hill Common was not enclosed for farmland until 1865.
- L2.8 Settlement in this area is in a regular pattern of farms dispersed on the hill slopes, with the scattered hamlet of Farley Hill crowning the central higher area. Grander historic houses are on the high ground around the village (Farley Hall, Farley Castle, Farley Hill Court and Arborfield Court) backed by the woods, with views out over the hillsides.
- L2.9 There is a rich variety of vernacular materials and architectural styles with timber framed farmhouses and cottages, some infilled with red brick and with thatch or clay tiled roofs. There are also Victorian polychromatic Reading brick houses with clay tiles or slate roofs and decorative barge boards in the hamlet of Farley Wood. Farley Hall is an early 18th century red brick Queen Anne style house, listed at Grade I. The historic parkland around the Hall includes small brick

lodges and the former kitchen garden with a brick gardener's cottage set into the north wall (listed Grade II).

- L2.10 More recent development includes the estate development on the site of the former Poperinghe Barracks off the A327 Eversely Road (formerly part of the Arborfield Garrison) and the conversion of the early 19th century gothic style brick built Farley Castle to apartments.
- L2.11 An intricate network of winding rural roads and lanes, bridleways and footpaths links the farms and hamlets, and are used for recreation. The lanes are highly rural in character, a small proportion are sunken, bordered by bulky hedgerows and by woodland. They are without kerbs, sometimes with rough grassed triangular islands at junctions and with little intrusive signage. The roads are becoming busier, and traffic is now an issue. Informal passing places have also been created.

Perceptual Landscape

- L2.12 The woods form a wooded horizon, framing views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys and strengthening the wooded character of the borough. The enclosure given by the woods on the hills themselves adds drama to the open views out across the valleys.
- L2.13 There is a quiet and rural ambiance, and although the landscape is accessible, it still feels secluded and tranquil, with dark skies.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- Distinctive hilly landform and wooded skyline visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape.
- Variety and complexity of mixed broadleaved woodland, some of which is ancient in origin, with high biodiversity value reflected in BAP priority habitats and LWS designations.
- Intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland provides scenic quality and visual diversity.
- Recreational value of the network of the tree-lined and enclosed byways and footpaths allowing access and enjoyment of the countryside in close proximity to urban areas.
- Rural pattern of farms and hamlets, which are well integrated into the wooded landscape and display a strong vernacular of timber-framed farmhouses and cottages, with polychromatic Reading brick, clay-tiled or thatched roofs.
- Sunken winding rural lanes and tracks with mature hedgerows are visually appealing and add rural character to the landscape.
- Historic parkland landscape associated with the Farley Hill estate, designated as a Registered Park and Garden, provides a cultural record of the past and layers of history within the landscape.
- Contrast between the enclosure created by the woods and framed views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys.
- Areas with a strong sense of seclusion and rural tranquility, with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement.

Landscape Condition

This is a distinctive hilly landscape with an intact pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farming interspersed with vernacular settlements. These provide a strong sense of place and strong perceptual

qualities of seclusion and remoteness resulting in a good condition. However increasing traffic levels are affecting the tranquillity of the area. The presence of large agricultural buildings and semi-industrial uses for farms is incongruous, as is the replacement of hedgerows with fencing.

Key Issues

- Loss of structure and species diversity in deciduous woodland has occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree health or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species into native deciduous woodland is threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.
- Influence of woodland management on wider landscape character, in particular affecting wooded ridgelines.
- Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Loss of remnant of heath habitats as a result of scrub encroachment.
- Changes in agricultural practice, including conversion of livestock grazing to horse paddocks, are leading to a decline in traditional management regimes and loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Temporary fencing and structures resulting in a decline in rural intactness.
- Lack of recruitment of young trees (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.
- Potential pressure for more paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a fragmentation of the rural landscape.
- Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special ecological features and other landscape features.
- Demand for new residential development and supporting infrastructure outside the area impacting on landscape character. The proximity of development in relation to the Arborfield Garrison SDL development (in adjoining LCA M1) may affect the tranquillity and character of the area.
- Infrastructure associated with new development outside and inside the area, particularly the Arborfield Cross Relief Road which crosses the north of the area, and increased traffic on the Eversley Road.
- Increase in traffic on small lanes leading to a loss of tranquillity and resulting in unofficial passing places and erosion of verges. This may lead to demands for upgrading the network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening which threatens their intimate rural character.
- Demand for densification and infill within existing settlements leading to loss of features such as trees, woodland and historic features, such as the small estate on the former Poperinghe Barracks.
- A modern trend towards close-boarded fencing of garden boundaries leading to the loss of green infrastructure and biodiversity at the local level.

- Pressure for further semi-industrial uses of farmland e.g. anaerobic digestion plant at Hill Farm, which can cause loss of landscape features, and increase traffic to and from the site.
- Potential pressure for built development on the skyline leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the local landscape.
- This character area contains a reservoir of 'dark skies', particularly to the south of the area. Light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the elevated landscape.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing wooded and secluded character.

The key aspects to be conserved are the views, intimate pattern of pastures, tranquillity and dark skies, woodland and arable farmland and rural settlement pattern linked by narrow lanes. There are opportunities to restore and actively manage the historic parkland, ancient woodland coppice and the connecting hedgerows. Marginal farmland and paddocks should also be enhanced.

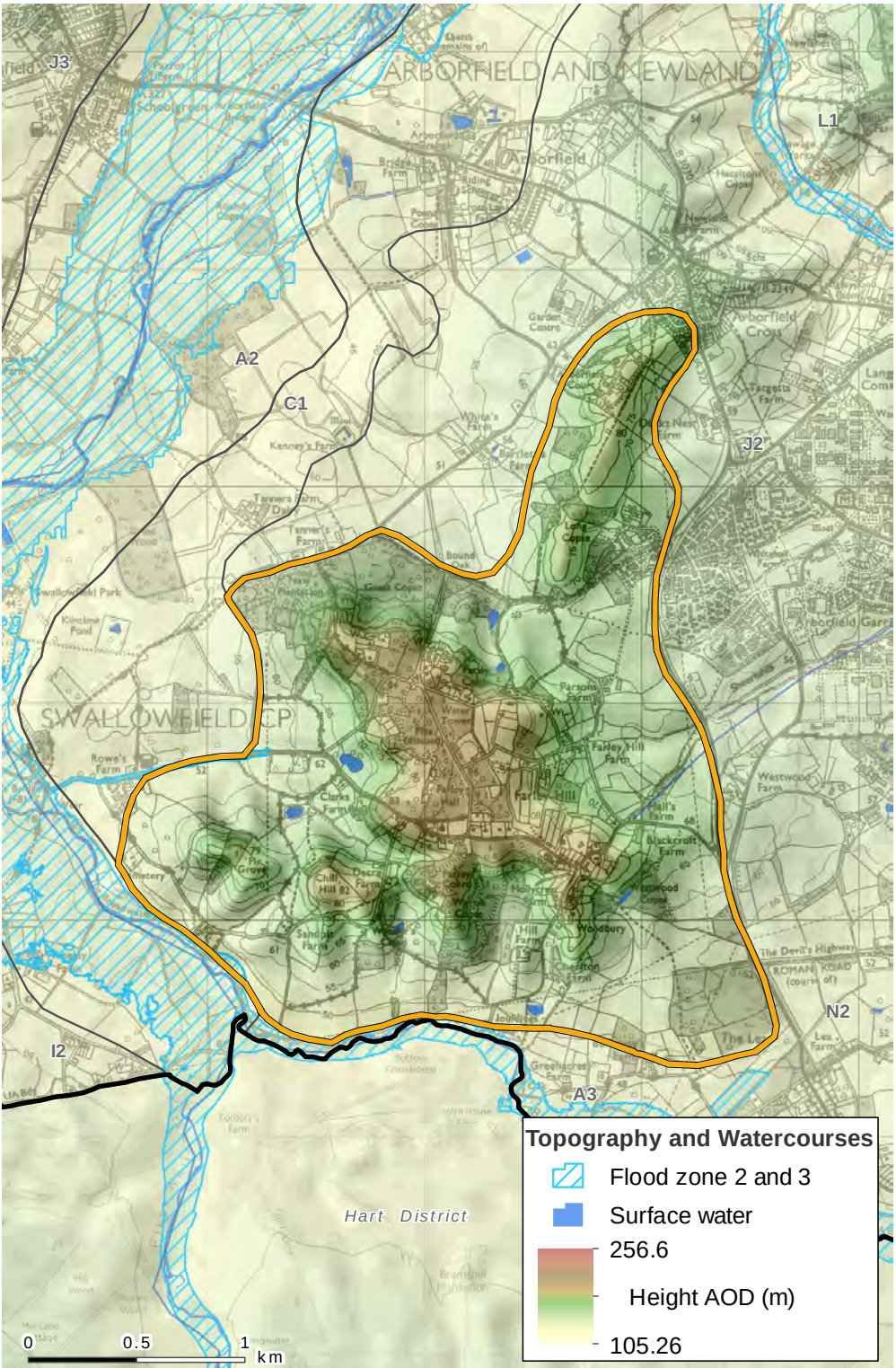
In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern, and maintain the low density of development avoiding encroachment from the new development at Arborfield.

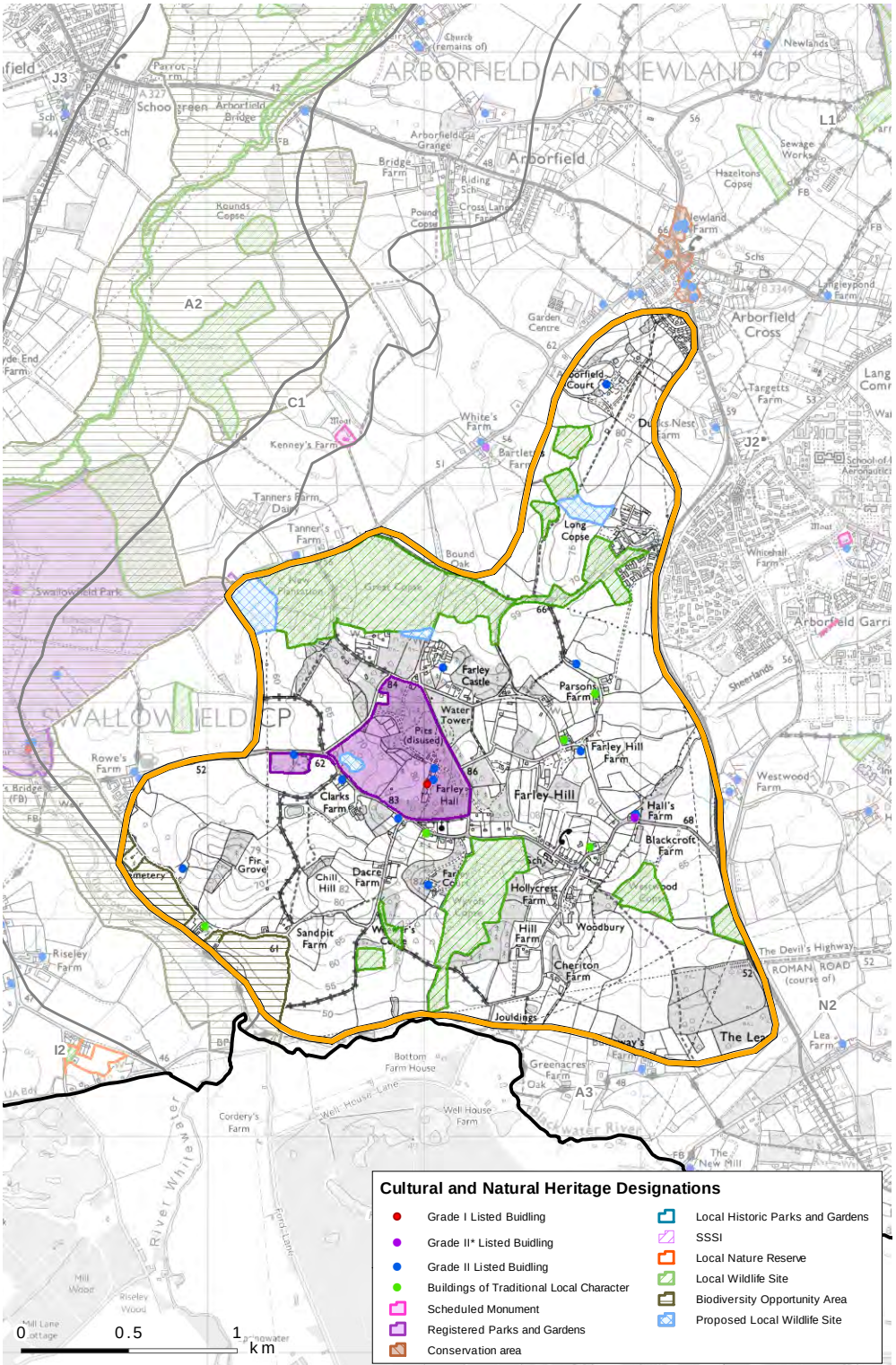
Landscape Guidelines

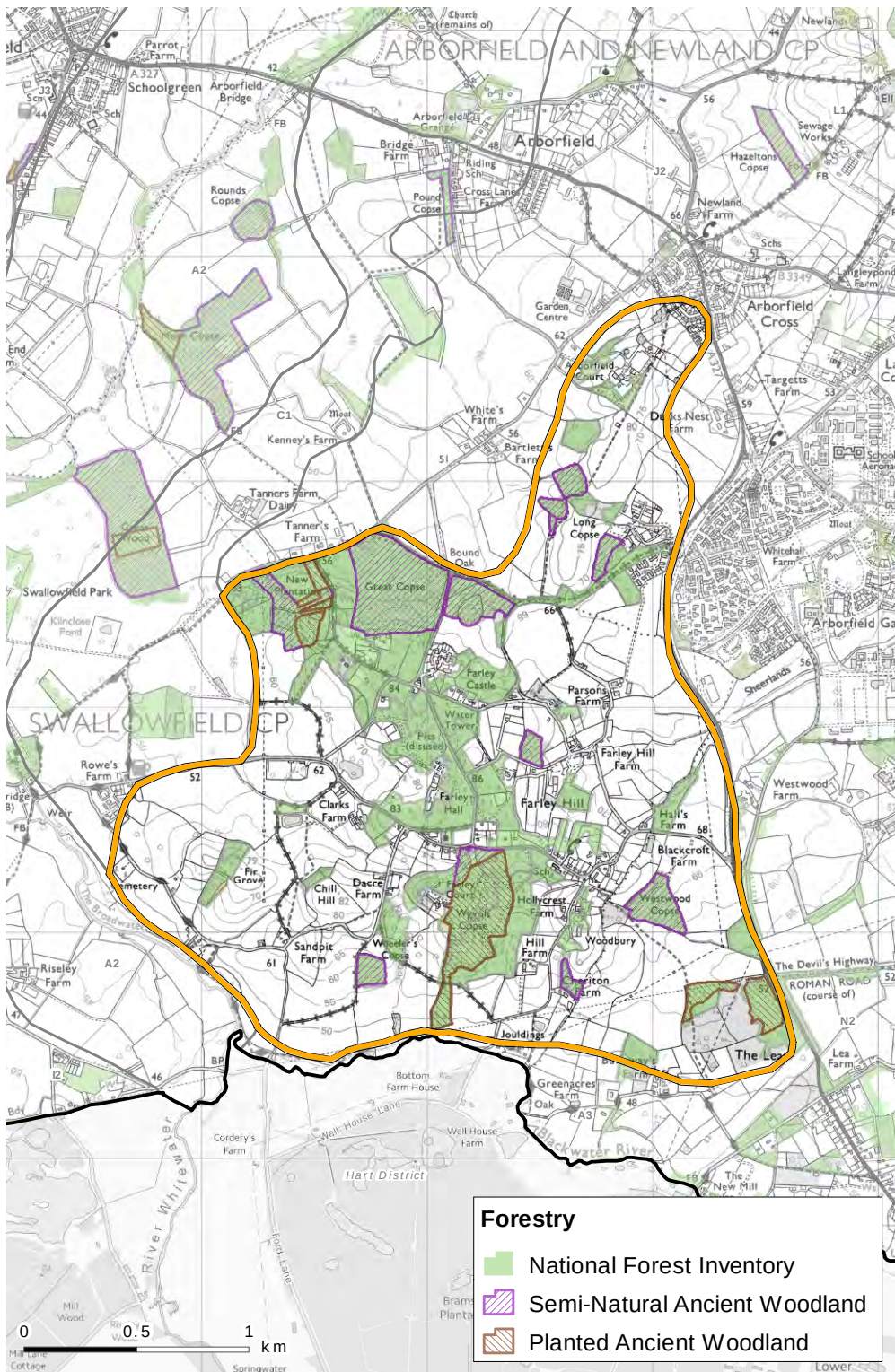
- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape, including BAP priority habitats and ancient woodlands, designated as LWS. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to provide screening of roads and development. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Conserve the rural qualities of the farmed 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.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and control of associated built development.
- Conserve and protect the intricate landscape pattern of woodland and mixed pasture and arable fields, and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
- Conserve and protect the parkland landscapes, and plan for the next generation of parkland trees, including BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland.
- Conserve, enhance and manage heathland habitats, particularly from changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. An appropriate heathland management

regime is critical.

- Conserve the individual identity of the hamlets, farmsteads and manors through control of new development. In particular avoid the spread of development from Arborfield into the area.
- Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape but balance this with continued conservation of valuable semi-natural habitats. Consider zoning of activities to ensure ecologically valuable or more sensitive elevated landscapes are protected from damaging activities and ensure appropriate management of informal recreation, particularly in relation to the Rights of Way network and connections to new residential areas.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the rural winding lanes with their unimproved road side verges. Resist unsympathetic highway improvements or widening that would threaten their rural character, particularly in the most rural areas.
- Integrate the new urban edge of the development at Arborfield through planting of woodland and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate new roads, particularly in relation to the Arborfield Cross Relief Road and its connection via Eversley Road.
- 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. Take particular care to minimise the visual impact of commercial farm enterprises. Restrict unsympathetic boundary changes around existing properties.
- Conserve distinctive wooded character of undeveloped skylines. Consider the impact of any development on skylines, particularly vertical elements which would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas, and the Loddon and Blackwater valleys. Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive skylines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements, which have the potential to be highly visible in this elevated landscape.
- Protect the framed views across the river valleys
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and intimate character of the landscape, including the experience of dark skies through the control of development.







**A7. EXTRACT FROM WOKINGHAM VALUED LANDSCAPES
ASSESSMENT (2024)**

Farley Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

Farley Hill Valued Landscape Narrative

Farley Court was about 1820 the residence of Charles Dickinson, whose wife was a friend of Miss Mitford, and whose daughter was the late Mrs. Elliot, author of Old Court Life in France and other works; it was lately the seat of Mrs. Brooks. Of the scattered smaller houses at Farley Hill some are half-timbered and thatched and others of brick.

A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3.
Published by Victoria County History, London, 1923.

Introduction

The Farley Hill Valued Landscape is a landscape of wooded hills, recreation and agriculture; with a number of notable large houses, an abundance of timber-framed and brick-built cottages and farmhouses, all linked by a network of rural lanes. The prominent geology is the Bagshot Formation of sand and sedimentary bedrock formed between 56 and 47.8 million years ago during the Palaeogene. The valued landscape occupies the slopes and high wooded ground of the L2 'Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' Landscape Character Area (LCA), centred on the Registered Park and Garden and Grade II listed building at Farley Hall. Small areas of the valued landscape fall within the C1 'Arborfield River Terrace' LCA to the west and the J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA to the north and north-east.

The valued landscape is an irregular trapezium with the long side forming the eastern boundary. The north-west boundary runs down Swallowfield Road from Arborfield Cross, incorporating the Chamberlains Farm Area of Special Character, later it borders the River Loddon Valued Landscape at Swallowfield Park. To the south-west and south it shares a boundary with the River Blackwater Valued Landscape, running along Nutbean Lane and south down Ford Lane to the 'Devil's Highway' Roman Road. The southern boundary of the valued landscape then runs roughly east until it meets the Eversley Road/Reading Road (A327). The eastern boundary runs broadly north along the gently meandering Eversley Road/Reading Road (A327), a recognised green route. This boundary deviates east to include ancient woodland, other green infrastructure assets as well as a group of listed buildings around Westwood Farmhouse. The valued landscape boundary rejoins the Eversley Road/Reading Road around Chaucer Grove and runs up to Arborfield Cross where the edge of the settlement marks the northern point of the valued landscape.

The valued landscape is a strongly rural landscape with a heightened sense of tranquillity. It is an intimate landscape of small hills and fields, woodlands, ponds, winding and sometimes steep rural lanes, and historic vernacular architecture. The valued landscape rises above the valleys to a height of 80m AOD at Farley Hill itself, and there are long views across the landscape, especially to Reading which lies to the northwest. The scenery and the landscape's proximity to the River Loddon and River Thames corridors help make this a valuable landscape for recreation; including activities such as rambling, shooting and riding being popular pursuits.

Attributes of the valued landscape:

Landscape quality (condition) – The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2004) categorises this area as the L2 ‘Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’ LCA and confirms that it is of overall high quality. Discussing the condition of the landscape it states:

‘The landscape has such a strong character that despite its moderate condition it is overall perceived to have a high quality.’¹

And:

‘The moderate condition relates to the considerable opportunities for minor but significant changes to bring the landscape closer to its optimum condition, with the condition of the remnant parkland, suburbanising trends, presence of incongruous features and replacement of overgrown hedgerows with fences all of particular concern.’²

The landscape quality of the C1 ‘Arborfield River Terrace’ LCA is described by the LCA (2004) as:

‘...a landscape of moderate quality ...which generally lack[s] a strong sense of place. The components are in a moderate-poor condition.’³

However, the LCA (2004) continues:

‘The components of the highest quality are the physical landscape, particularly the terrace landform and the tranquil rural environment.’⁴

The landscape quality of the J2 ‘Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay’ LCA is described in the LCA (2004) as moderate, but where:

‘...elements in the landscape, such as the pattern of small nucleated settlements and natural tributary streams create localised areas in good condition.’⁵

Scenic Quality - The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019) summarises the scenic quality of the landscape and identifies valuable landscape attributes that relate to the scenic quality of the valued landscape, including:

- Distinctive hilly landform and wooded skyline visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape

¹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.48, page 285

² Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.48, page 285

³ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 7.21, page 136

⁴ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 7.21, page 136

⁵ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 14.43, page 318

- Variety and complexity of mixed broadleaved woodland, some of which is ancient in origin, with high biodiversity value reflected in BAP priority habitats and Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designations
- Intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland provides scenic quality and visual diversity
- Recreational value of the network of the tree-lined and enclosed byways and footpaths allowing access and enjoyment of the countryside in close proximity to urban areas
- Rural pattern of farms and hamlets, which are well integrated into the wooded landscape and display a strong vernacular of timber-framed farmhouses and cottages, with polychromatic Reading brick, clay-tiled or thatched roofs
- Sunken winding rural lanes and tracks with mature hedgerows are visually appealing and add rural character to the landscape
- Historic parkland landscape associated with the Farley Hill estate, designated as a Registered Park and Garden, provides a cultural record of the past and layers of history within the landscape
- Contrast between the enclosure created by the woods and framed views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys; and
- Areas with a strong sense of seclusion and rural tranquillity, with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement.⁶

Within the 'Key Characteristics' section for the L2 'Farley Hill Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills' LCA, the LCA (2019) highlights the following relating to scenic quality and expands upon them in the main text:

- Small undulating hills rising to 80m AOD at Farley Hill. The islands of higher land express the underlying geology, of London Clay overlain by Bagshot Formation sands and Sixth River Terrace deposits, which produce poorer soils making it unsuitable for agriculture. The lower clay slopes support mixed agriculture.
- Small ponds and open water bodies, possibly from former gravel or clay pits are scattered throughout the area, including Farley Hill West pond, a proposed LWS.
- Extensive woodland network of mixed, coniferous and deciduous woodland and copses, including areas of BAP priority habitat and ancient woodland, many of which are designated as LWS. Farley Hill Woods also contains small areas of remnant heathland habitat.
- Intricate small-scale landscape with small sinuous pastures enclosed by the woodland, and arable fields on lower slopes bounded by thick, overgrown hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Early enclosure field systems cover an extensive area.
- Marginal land uses including pony paddocks with associated stables bound by post and rail fencing and semi-industrial uses of farmland which influence the rural character.
- Some large agricultural buildings which are highly visible within the small-scale landscape.
- Historic parkland associated with Farley Hall (Grade I listed). The parkland was laid out in early-mid 18th century, with possible contribution from Charles Bridgeman, and is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden.

⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

- Rural settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads, the hamlet at Farley Hill and 18th and 19th century country houses with a strong vernacular of brick, timber-framing, thatch and clay tile. A new estate development on the former Poperinghe Barracks disturbs this pattern.
- Network of footpaths and bridleways and quiet rural lanes and tracks, some sunken, which wind through the woodlands, bordered by bulky hedgerows and often without kerbs or intrusive signage.
- Views to the river valleys of the Blackwater, Broadwater and Loddon, with this area forming a wooded backdrop to views from the surrounding landscape.
- Secluded, remote character of the landscape enclosed within woodland, with an experience of dark skies.⁷

Rarity – Assessing rarity of landscape types and individual features is not simple. However, a number of sources can assist, including the LCA (2004) an archived document. Many of the features and components of the landscape are considered of at least regional importance by the LCA (2004) which states:

‘Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills (L2) is considered to be a landscape of overall moderate sensitivity as a result of the largely regional scale of importance of individual components and their low or moderate recreatability value.’⁸

But the LCA (2004) goes further, it provides an indication of rarity in its’ assessment of sensitivity where it addressed the re-creatability of landscape elements. It continues:

‘However, within this context there are elements of high sensitivity, in particular the woodland which includes significant areas classified as being of ancient origin and sensitive on account of their ecological value’.⁹

The NPPF is clear that ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees are ‘irreplaceable habitats’ and even notable trees and oak standards would take hundreds of years to replace. Even secondary woodland can be of national significance and rarity particularly as ‘lowland mixed deciduous woodland’ is recognised as a habitat of principal importance under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Coniferous plantations, whilst of more limited general importance in terms of the wildlife habitat they offer, still provide a relatively high value amenity landscape for informal recreation, they are relatively rare in the lowlands of the UK and are therefore of at least local significance.

From the perspective of wildlife conservation, the valued landscape encompasses a number of Local Wildlife Sites. Local Wildlife Sites occupy only 5% of the land area of England and so they are nationally rare. Of course, woodland Local Wildlife Sites, such as those found in this valued landscape, are a subset of the whole and are therefore even rarer.

⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 294

⁸ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.50, page 386

⁹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.50, page 386

Perceptual aspects such as dark skies and tranquillity are addressed later in this chapter. Discussing perceptual aspects, the LCA (2004) states:

‘Other sensitive attributes are the important perceptual characteristics, the role of this area in relation to the setting of the Blackwater and Loddon valleys, historic parkland and small-scale character – including the close knit settlement and historic land use pattern, vernacular built character and presence of quiet winding rural lanes and steep sunken tracks.’¹⁰

As with other forms of pollution, light and noise pollution are largely a function of population levels. The more inhabitants in a landscape, the greater the levels of light, noise, domestic waste, sewage and other forms of pollution are generated. The valued landscape is relatively sparsely populated and sits on the southern edge of the borough towards the western boundary of the South-East region - a greatly polluted and highly populated region.

The ‘England’s Light Pollution and Dark Skies’ map published by CPRE shows this valued landscape sitting on the very edge of a swathe of the worst light pollution in the country, centred on central London and stretching from Southend in the east, to Reading in the west and from Stevenage in the north to Crawley in the south.

CPRE’s tranquillity mapping closely reflects this distribution with the least tranquil areas closely matching those areas with the most light pollution. This valued landscape is one of the areas of locally very rare tranquillity and an even better example of locally very rare dark skies.

Whilst mitigation is always possible, the sheer weight of population in the region makes any reversal of current levels of light or noise pollution practically irreversible. Dark skies and tranquillity are regionally rare in the South-East.

The geology forms a more accentuated and distinctive hilly landscape than it does in other areas of the borough. It is the same geology found in the south-eastern corner of the Alexander Pope Valued Landscape and across the Barkham and Bearwood and Riseley Woods Valued Landscapes. The geology consists of the Bagshot Formation of sand and sedimentary bedrock overlaid on London Clay. Time and erosion have crafted these uncommon, hilly landscapes that exist as outliers around the periphery of the Bagshot Formation which stretches from near Farley Hill in the west to Esher in the east and from Aldershot in the south to Wokingham in the north. These pockets of discrete hilly landscapes surrounding the main formation are of at least regional importance and are impossible to re-create.

Relying heavily on the geology for fine views across the River Loddon, the designed landscape at Farley Hall, where the parkland was laid out in early-mid 18th century, is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden. This is of national significance and rarity.

The cultural heritage would be impossible to re-create. The Registered Park and Garden at Farley Hall and the Hall itself are of national significance and rarity, as are all the other listed buildings in

¹⁰ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.50, page 386

the valued landscape. The Buildings of Traditional Local Character (also referred to as locally listed or non-designated heritage asset) are of at least borough and to an extent county significance and rarity.

The one Archaeological Site in the valued landscape is of likely county-wide significance.

There are two Areas of Special Character (ASC) (locally listed Conservation Areas). ASCs occupy only 0.9 percent of the land area of the borough. They should therefore be considered very rare in the borough and probably of county-wide importance.

The intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland is considered to be of borough-wide importance and would be impossible to re-create.

Similarly, the rural pattern of farms and hamlets, well integrated into the wooded landscape, would be impossible to re-create as would the hedgerow lined, sunken and winding rural lanes and tracks. These features of the landscape would be impossible to re-create, are rare on a county-wide scale and are considered of at least borough-wide significance.

Another feature of this valued landscape is the Farley Hall Estate. It is recognised that sporting estates can have negative implications for landscape, for example on ecology. However, there are undeniable opportunities that this estate provides for recreational in the landscape. On the other hand, the estate depends mostly on the landscape and indeed the valued landscape, carefully conserved through the local planning process, as one of the unique selling points of the sporting experiences offered. The landscape provides the setting for sport. Sporting estates are not impossible to re-create but it would be a very complex task to do it on this scale and to this standard.

The infrastructure for informal recreation, the footpaths and byways of the valued landscape form a relatively dense network that would be difficult to re-create. The network has enhanced significance because of the quality of the landscape and the topography. It is of borough-wide significance.

Representativeness – ‘Rarity’ is discussed in the previous section. However, opposite to rarity is representativeness. The characteristics and features which make a landscape rare are also those that make it distinctive and therefore representative of its type. Notwithstanding the many special attributes that make this part of the countryside a valued landscape, the Farley Hill Valued Landscape is representative of the narrow band of broken and eroded landscapes that surround the upper levels of the Bagshot beds.

The geology underlying the landform itself is relatively rare, and therefore the Farley Hill Valued Landscape and the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape are the two best examples in the borough. In these valued landscapes the erosion of the upper strata has created steep isolated hills with aesthetically pleasing long views of the valleys of the rivers that made them. There are other examples of this landform in the borough; at Wokingham and Riseley. The landscape at Wokingham is almost entirely covered by urban development, whilst at Riseley, it still retains many features that make it a valued landscape, despite being bisected by the A33 road. This eroded geology is relatively

rare in the UK, being confined to an area, on the edge of the formation which is broadly elliptical with its long axis running from Farley Hill in the west to Esher in the east and its short axis from Aldershot in the south to Wokingham in the north. This landscape is far less built up than areas of similar geology and landform on the eastern or Surrey side of the main Bagshot formation. The lack of urban development in this valued landscape accentuates its importance and rarity.

Other 'representative' features, for example the vernacular architecture and the land-use fall out of the geology and steep topography.

Conservation Interests – In terms of wildlife and biodiversity, the Farley Hill Valued Landscape provides a mix of locally important wildlife habitats. Local Wildlife Sites within the Valued Landscape include: Claypits Copse; Cuckoo Pen; Farley Hill Woods, Great Copse and New Plantation; Long Copse (South) and Robin Hood Copse; Spring Copse and Long Copse (North); Westwood Copse; Wheeler's Copse and Featherstone Copse; Wyvol's Copse. These largely cover areas of ancient woodland with plantation present on some Ancient Woodland sites and some linking lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

Habitats of principal importance within the valued landscape include lowland mixed deciduous woodland and Wood Pasture and Parkland, with some small areas of traditional orchard.

There are a number of clay and gravel workings some of which have formed ponds. Due to its very high toad (Bufo bufo) population, Farley Hill West Pond is identified as a proposed Local Wildlife Site (LWS).

Cultural heritage - is represented by a dense collection of listed buildings of various kinds. Of the eighteen in the valued landscape, the Grade I listed building at Farley Hall is the most important, the most imposing and also sits centrally and at the highest point of the valued landscape with views across the valley of the River Loddon. The Grade II* listed buildings at Hall's Farm Kennels and Bartlett's Farmhouse are next in terms of quality. There are several different types of Grade II listed buildings including country houses (Arborfield Court and Farleyhill Court), former farmhouses (Farley Hill Farmhouse, Duck's Nest Farmhouse, Nutbean Farmhouse), former rural workers cottages (Vine Cottage, Drumhead Cottage), the Grade II listed stables north of Farley Hall and a Grade II listed cattle shelter adjacent to Old Parson's Cottage. The only listed public house in the valued landscape is the George and Dragon which currently provides added recreational and health benefits by encouraging organised walking routes for its customers. The route even takes in a walk down the riverbank in the adjacent River Blackwater Valued Landscape. In addition, there are four Buildings of Traditional Local Character, a form of local listing. They are Oak Cottage, Parsons Farm, Woodcot and Yew Tree Cottage.

The only Registered Park and Garden is the Grade II listed garden forming the setting to Farley Hall and its stable block. There is one archaeological site (No.104) that sits within the park and garden. There is a further archaeological site (No. 79) within the valued landscape and, of course, the historic route of the 'Devil's Highway', the Roman Road, and archaeological site 47 form its' southern boundary.

The valued landscape is relatively rich in Areas of Special Character: Farley Hill and Farley Hill Farm ASCs.

In addition, the LCA (2004) describes the heritage of early enclosure field boundaries. It states:

*'The piecemeal clearance of woodland to form cultivable land by assarting, and later by agreement, can be seen in the pattern of small irregular fields intermixed with woodland around Farley Hill, where the woodland remains a dominant feature. This early enclosure landscape covers an extensive area, once contiguous with adjacent lands around the Loddon (A2 and C1) and Spencers Wood (J3). A considerable amount of this early field system remains well preserved.'*¹¹

Recreational opportunities within the valued landscape include a relatively dense network of footpaths: ARBO 17, 18, FINCH 1, SWAL 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 24. Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) include: SWAL 8, 28, 29, 30 32 and 33, 34 ARBO 15 and 17. Greenway routes J and F which run along ARBO 15; and also route K, which runs from Arborfield Cross in a south-west direction along Swallowfield Lane for a few hundred metres to Greensward lane where it turns north-west and exits the valued landscape. The Farley Hall Estate offers excellent facilities for riding and shooting, with their value enhanced by the excellence of this landscape.

The L2 'Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' LCA is described as a landscape in fairly dry and formal prose, nonetheless paints an attractive view of the landscape. The LCA (2019) states:

*'An intricate network of winding rural roads and lanes, bridleways and footpaths links the farms and hamlets, and are used for recreation. The lanes are highly rural in character, a small proportion are sunken, bordered by bulky hedgerows and by woodland. They are without kerbs, sometimes with rough grassed triangular islands at junctions and with little intrusive signage'.*¹²

The L2 LCA identifies the recreational value of the landscape as a Valuable Landscape Attribute:

*'Recreational value of the network of the tree-lined and enclosed byways and footpaths allowing access and enjoyment of the countryside in close proximity to urban areas.'*¹³

The C1 'Arborfield River Terrace' LCA lies in the western part of the valued landscape, the Landscape Character Assessment (2019) identifies the following Valuable Landscape Attribute:

*'Valued area for recreation with a network of bridleways and public footpaths which allow enjoyment of the landscape.'*¹⁴

¹¹ Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2004), paragraph 16.38, page 381

¹² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para L2.11, page 296

¹³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

¹⁴ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 100

The J2 LCA lies in the northern and north-eastern part of the valued landscape. The description of the LCA states:

‘There is a regular network of roads throughout the area which tend to have a rural character with ditches, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, although increased traffic is having a negative impact. Rural tracks, bridleways and, less frequently, footpaths give access for recreational use....’¹⁵

The J2 LCA describes the ‘Recreational value of the network of rights of way between settlements’, as a valuable landscape attribute.¹⁶

Perceptual Aspects – are also addressed in the LCA (2019). The L2 ‘Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills’ LCA is described for its perceptual aspects in paragraphs L2.12 and L2.13. Addressing landscape views in the first paragraph mentioned it states:

‘The woods form a wooded horizon, framing views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys and strengthening the wooded character of the borough. The enclosure given by the woods on the hills themselves adds drama to the open views out across the valleys.’¹⁷

The second paragraph, (L2.13), addressing tranquillity, dark skies and rural ambience states:

‘There is a quiet and rural ambience, and although the landscape is accessible, it still feels secluded and tranquil, with dark skies.’¹⁸

The LCA identifies three valuable landscape attributes that reflect these earlier paragraphs on perceptual aspects:

Distinctive hilly landform and wooded skyline visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape.

Contrast between the enclosure created by the woods and framed views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys.¹⁹

And:

Areas with a strong sense of seclusion and rural tranquillity, with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement.²⁰

¹⁵ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para J2.12, page 240

¹⁶ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

¹⁷ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), paragraph L2.12

¹⁸ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), paragraph L2.13

¹⁹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

²⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 296

The C1 'Arborfield River Terrace' LCA (forming a small part of the western valued landscape), describes perceptual aspects. It states:

*'A tranquil rural environment, with a network of lanes and tracks connecting dispersed farmsteads with fields emphasising the rural character of the landscape...'*²¹

The C1 LCA identifies 'A tranquil area with a sense of remoteness, removed from roads and visual intrusion of settlement' as a Valuable Landscape Attribute.

The J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay' LCA lies in the northern and north-eastern part of the valued landscape. The description of the LCA identifies (at paragraph J2.14) 'a wooded context from hedgerow trees and wooded horizons states...'. The LCA description identifies the following Valuable Landscape Attributes:

*Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provides a rural character...*²²

And:

*Views across the landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south...*²³

Associations – This compact but rich landscape has a shorter discrete history being intimately associated with Swallowfield and the families that owned land in the vicinity. Farley Hall was built for Charles Lannoy in the 1720s and the English landscape gardener, Charles Bridgeman (1690–1738) a pioneer of the naturalistic landscape style, possibly designed part of the historic garden there. Farley Hall is now the seat of the Viscounts Bearstead. Marcus Samuel, the first Viscount Bearstead, was the joint-founder of the Shell Transport and Trading Company in 1897 that, following merger with the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company, became one of the world's largest oil companies. During the First World War, the First Viscount Bearstead was active in providing oil and especially a petroleum distillate, which formed the basis of the high explosive TNT (trinitrotoluene).

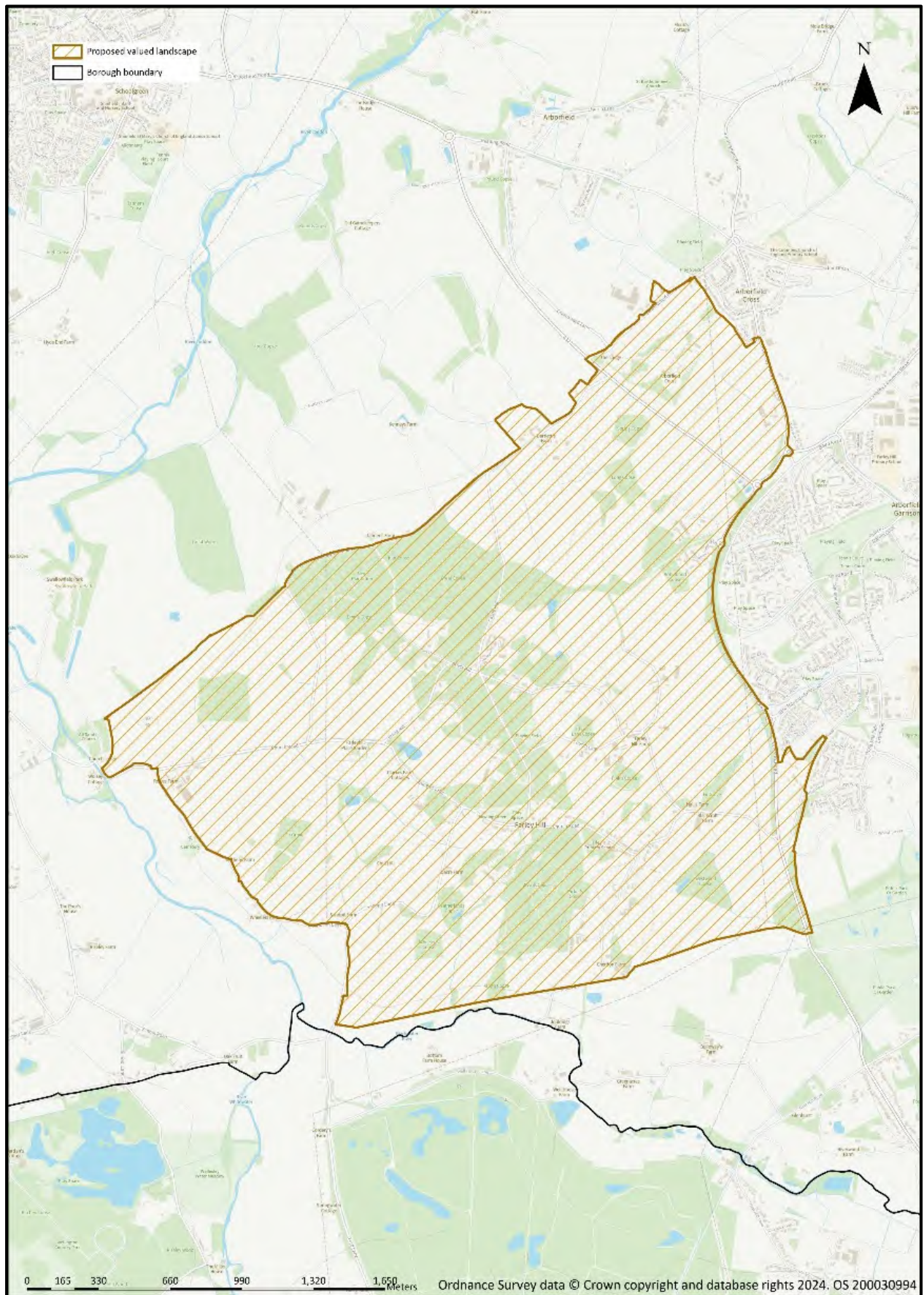
Around 1820, Farley Court was the residence of Charles Dickinson, a descendent of the famous Captain Francis Dickinson (1632-1704). Capt. Francis - born in Appleton, Berkshire (now Oxfordshire) - was granted 6000 acres in Jamaica by Charles II as a reward for capturing Jamaica from Spain in 1655. Like many families the Dickinsons were slave owners compensated for their losses after the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Charles Dickinson's wife was a friend of the celebrated author Mary Russell Mitford (1787 – 1855) – Author of *Our Village* and resident of Three Mile Cross and later Swallowfield to the north of the valued landscape. Mary Russell Mitford, who must surely have visited her friend at Farley Hill and the surrounding landscape, was herself a friend of Jane Austen (1775 – 1817). Charles Dickinson's daughter was Mrs. Elliot, author of *Old Court Life in France* and other works.

²¹ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), para C1.13, page 100

²² Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

²³ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), page 240

Farley Hill Valued Landscape Map



A8. METHODOLOGY AND SUMMARY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been undertaken with reference to best practice, as outlined in the following published guidance:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd Edition, 2013) - Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment;
- Assessing landscape value outside national designations (2021) – Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21;
- Visual representation of development proposals (2019) - Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19;
- Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) - Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage; and
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (2014) - Natural England.

1.2 GLVIA3 states within paragraph 1.1 that *'Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity.'*

1.3 It also states that when identifying landscape and visual effects there is a *'need for an approach that is in proportion to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of the likely effects. Judgement needs to be exercised at all stages in terms of the scale of investigation that is appropriate and proportional.'*

1.4 GLVIA3 recognises within paragraph 2.23 that professional judgement is at the core of LVIA, and that while some change can be quantified (for example the number of trees which may be lost), *'much of the assessment must rely on qualitative judgements'*. The Landscape Institute's Technical Committee has advised that the 2013 revision of the GLVIA *'places greater emphasis on professional judgement and less emphasis on a formulaic approach'*.

2. LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE EFFECTS

- 2.1 Landscape/townscape effects are assessed by considering a combination of the landscape's sensitivity, and the magnitude of change it will experience.

Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity

- 2.2 Sensitivity is determined by a combination of the value that is attached to a landscape element, and the susceptibility of the landscape element to changes that would arise as a result of the proposals. The determination of sensitivity takes into account the below elements:

Landscape/Townscape Quality

- 2.2.1 A combination of desk study and field work has been undertaken to identify and record the character of the landscape, as well as its condition. The landscape character and quality of the area was established through consideration of the landscape elements, features, and aesthetic and perceptual factors. This subjective judgement is often informed by national or local designations made upon the landscape in respect of its quality, e.g. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Landscape quality is judged with reference to Table L1. Quality feeds into the assessment of Value, as below.

Landscape/Townscape Value

- 2.2.2 Landscape value is also considered in order to avoid consideration only of how scenically attractive an area may be, and thus to avoid undervaluing areas of strong character but little scenic beauty. It is defined in the glossary of the GLVIA as: *'The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons.'*
- 2.2.3 Paragraph 180 of the current NPPF outlines that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes *'...in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan'*. Valued landscapes therefore usually include nationally designated landscapes, such as National Parks or National Landscapes. Locally or regionally designated landscapes, as well as areas where documentary evidence, and/or site observation (in accordance with Box 5.1 of GLVIA3 and LI TGN 02/21) indicates as being more valued than the surrounding area, can often also be considered to be valued landscapes.
- 2.2.4 Landscape value is judged on site by an experienced assessor, with reference to Table L2.

Susceptibility

- 2.2.5 Susceptibility indicates the ability of a landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the proposed development 'without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies.' (GLVIA3, para. 5.40).
- 2.2.6 Susceptibility is judged in accordance with the criteria set out in Table L3.
- 2.3 The judgement as to sensitivity combines judgements on susceptibility and value. A landscape of high sensitivity will tend be one with a low ability to accommodate change and a high value, and vice versa. Landscape sensitivity was judged according to the criteria set out in Table L4.

Magnitude of Change

- 2.4 The magnitude of change is the scale, extent and duration of change to a landscape arising from the proposed development, and was assessed using the criteria in Table L5.

Landscape/Townscape Effects

- 2.5 The landscape effect is judged by combines judgements on sensitivity and magnitude of change.
- 2.6 The landscape effects can be either beneficial, adverse or neutral. Landscape effects can be direct (i.e. impact on physical features, e.g. landform, vegetation, watercourses etc.), or indirect (i.e. impact on landscape character as a result of the introduction of new elements within the landscape).
- 2.7 Landscapes of higher sensitivity, when subjected to a higher magnitude of change, are likely to experience high landscape effects, which can be either beneficial or adverse. Similarly, landscapes of low sensitivity, when subject to a low magnitude of change, are likely to experience lower landscape effects.
- 2.8 It is also important to consider the area over which the effects may be felt, and to note that effects will generally tend to decline with distance from the development in question (as the magnitude of change is likely to reduce).
- 2.9 Changes can also be beneficial, including through the creation of new landscape features, introduction of beneficial management practices, or improving public or recreational access. Therefore, landscape effects have been considered at completion (Year 0), as well as at Year 15, as landscape effects can reduce as new planting or mitigation becomes established and effective.
- 2.10 Table L6 sets out a general description/examples of the levels of landscape effects.

3. VISUAL EFFECTS

- 3.1 Visual effects are concerned with people's views of the landscape and the change that will occur.
- 3.2 A site visit has been undertaken to ascertain and record the baseline visual condition of the site and surroundings, noting the receptors (i.e. the people who experience the view and where they area/what they are doing), and the nature of the existing views. Factors taken into consideration in considering the baseline include the activity people undertake when experiencing the view (e.g. walking in the countryside, working in the office); the nature, composition and character of the views; elements which may interrupt or otherwise influence the views; and the extent and proportion of the view.
- 3.3 GLVIA3 recognises that is not always possible to view the site during both the winter and summer months. Visibility is likely to be greatest during the winter months when vegetation is out of leaf. However, even if the site is only visited during the summer months, the assessment of visual effects is undertaken by a professional, who is experienced in considering what the visual effect will be when the intervening vegetation is out of leaf. As such, the assessment of visual effects takes into consideration both summer and winter views, and assesses the worst case scenario.
- 3.4 The following terms are often used to describe the extent, content, duration, or character of the view:
- No view – the site or development are not visible from the receptor.
 - Glimpsed view – a limited view of the site or development, or a small part of it, or a transient view when moving.
 - Partial – only a part of the site or development is clearly visible.
 - Filtered – views are partially screened by intervening vegetation, the extent of which may change with the seasons.
 - Screened – a view hidden by intervening vegetation, topography, built form or similar.
 - Open – a clear view.

Visual Sensitivity

- 3.5 The sensitivity of the visual receptor is affected by several factors, including its susceptibility to change, and the value of the view. The susceptibility to change of a visual receptor often relates to the activity they are undertaking and/or the duration of their view. Views of higher value would include those from recognised beauty spots or viewpoints, while views of lower value may include those along a main road within a town.

- 3.6 The sensitivity of the receptor is assessed with reference to Table V1.

Magnitude of Visual Change

- 3.7 A professional judgement is made to determine the magnitude of change on visual receptors, with reference to Table V2. It takes into consideration factors such as the extent of the change (in terms of character and geography), the scale of the proposal, the duration of the change, the reversibility, and the proportion of the change. The magnitude of change will generally decrease with distance from its source, until a point is reached where there is no discernible change.

Visual Effects

- 3.8 The Visual Effect is judged based on a combination of the sensitivity of the receptor, and the magnitude of change, and is judged with reference to Table V3. As with Landscape Effects, the Visual Effects are considered at completion of the project (Year 0), as well as at Year 15, acknowledging that mitigation measures such as new landscaping, may reduce visual effects over time.
- 3.9 Visual effects can either be beneficial, adverse, or neutral. Visual effect are usually expected to be higher when there is a higher magnitude of change experienced by a higher sensitivity receptor, and vice-versa.

4. VISUALISATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

- 4.1 The photographs and visualisations within this report have been prepared in general conformance with the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 06/19. The 'types', as set out within the Guidance, comprise the following:
- Type 1 - annotated viewpoint photographs;
 - Type 2 - 3D wireline/model;
 - Type 3 - photomontage/photowire;
 - Type 4 - photomontage/photowire (survey/scale verifiable).
- 4.2 The baseline photographs within this report include a combination of context photographs (showing the character of the site and surroundings), as well as Type 1 photographs (which are displayed at a recognised scale and angle of view, as per the guidelines).
- 4.3 Photographs were taken with a digital camera with a lens that approximates to 50mm, to give a similar depth of view to the human eye. In some cases images have been joined together to form a panorama. The prevailing weather, and any effects on visibility are noted. Images are displayed at

the most appropriate size, taking into account the published guidance, legibility at A3 paper size, and context (which is often shown for illustrative purposes only), and allows for enlarged scale printing if required.

- 4.4 The Guidance Note advocates a proportionate and reasonable approach, which includes professional judgement, in order to aid informed decision making. While effort is made to include Type 2 or 3 visualisations, this is not always possible due to project constraints.

TABLE L1 - LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE QUALITY	
	Typical criteria
Very High	Nationally designated landscapes, such as National Landscapes, National Parks or World Heritage Sites. Generally landscapes in very good condition, with intact and distinctive features. It may be that within nationally designated areas, some parts may be of lower quality due to detractors.
High	Often locally designated landscapes, such as Special Landscape Areas or Conservation Areas. Attractive with a strong sense of character, place, and distinction. Will generally be in a good condition, with intact and distinctive features.
Medium	Pleasant, ordinary landscapes with some detractors, and with no particular distinctive qualities. Will generally be in a medium condition, with some intact features.
Low	Degraded or unattractive landscape, affected by many detractors. Will generally be in poor condition, with few intact elements.

TABLE L2 - LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE VALUE	
	Typical criteria
Very High	Nationally designated landscapes, such as National Landscapes, National Parks or World Heritage Sites. Generally landscapes in very good condition, with intact and distinctive features. May have elevated levels of tranquillity, or appear wild. May contain very rare features, and may be of particular historic or ecological interest and value. May have substantial recreational value.
High	Often locally designated landscapes, and usually with high landscape quality and in a good condition. May have higher than average recreational value, or ecological or historical interest. May be considered particularly scenic, or allow for particularly scenic public views from within the landscape. May have well-known cultural associations. May be identified as a particularly good example of a characteristic landscape, or contain particularly good examples of characteristic landscape elements.
Medium	Pleasant, ordinary landscapes. May have localised scenic qualities, with limited recreational value. May have undesignated heritage or ecological value at a local level.
Low	Degraded landscape. May have limited public accessibility or views. May have many features which detract from the scenic quality or tranquillity. May have little ecological or cultural interest.

TABLE L3 - LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE SUSCEPTIBILITY	
	Typical criteria
High	Landscapes with a poor capacity to accommodate change, owing to the interaction of the proposed development with the topography, vegetation cover, built form, etc. Landscapes with little or no ability to absorb change, as change would conflict or be out of context with the character of the surroundings. Landscapes where there is little or no screening possible, and where development would be readily visible, and out of character.
Medium	Landscapes with a good capacity to accommodate change. The change would be reflective of the scale and character of parts of the surrounding landscape. Some landscape elements may be lost due to development, but this could be mitigated.
Low	A landscape with a very good capacity to accommodate change, with proposed development comprising a small part of the wider landscape, or being in-keeping with the overarching character of the surroundings. Development may be very well screened, or may complement or enhance the local character.

TABLE L4 - LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE SENSITIVITY	
	Typical criteria
Very High	A landscape that is typically of higher value, and with a high susceptibility to change. May include nationally designated landscapes, or landscapes of very high quality or value.
High	A landscape with a limited ability to accommodate change, of higher to medium landscape value. Often landscapes of higher quality, and may be locally designated.
Medium	Landscapes with a good capacity to accommodate change, where change would not lead to major loss or damage to landscape elements or character. Often landscapes of medium value and quality.
Low	A landscape with a very good ability to accommodate change, where change would not lead to major loss of key or important elements. Often lower value or quality landscapes.

TABLE L5 - LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE	
	Typical criteria
High	Total loss or major alteration to key receptors, characteristics or features of the baseline.
Medium	Partial loss or damage to key receptors, characteristics or features, or partial improvement, restoration or addition to these features.
Low	Minor loss or alteration, or minor improvement to key receptors, characteristics or features.
Negligible	Very limited loss or alteration, or limited improvement to key receptors, characteristics or features.
Neutral	No identifiable change.

TABLE L6 - LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE EFFECT	
	Typical criteria
Major	Effects are in complete variance to the baseline landscape. Proposals may have a substantial detrimental or beneficial effect on the landscape resource or character.
Moderate	Effects result in fundamental alterations to the landscape resource or character, which may not be fully mitigated. Effects may result in clearly identifiable benefits.
Minor	Effects result in slight alterations to the landscape resource or character, with mitigation being effective. There may be some beneficial effects.
Negligible	Effects would barely perceptible on the landscape resource or character, either beneficial or adverse.
Neutral	No identifiable effect.

Note: Effects may be judged to be either adverse or beneficial.

TABLE V1 - SENSITIVITY OF VISUAL RECEPTOR	
	Typical criteria
High	Users of Public Rights of Way with generally open or unspoilt views. Users of outdoor recreational facilities where the purpose of the recreation is the enjoyment of the countryside, and with open views, such as visitors to National Landscapes, National Parks, Country Parks, Heritage assets (such as National Trust properties, Conservation Areas) etc. Non-motorised users of unclassified or minor roads where there are unspoilt views/lack of intrusive features. Residential properties with predominantly open views from ground and first floor windows, or gardens.
Medium	Views with moderate scenic value within undesignated landscapes. Users of Public Rights of Way with restricted views in less sensitive areas, or where there are intrusive features. Users of outdoor recreational facilities where views are not key to the purpose of the recreation, e.g. sports pitches, golf courses. Motorised users of unclassified or minor roads, or non-motorised users where there are some intrusive features. Residential properties with partial views from windows or gardens, or oblique views, or where views are partially obstructed. Users of institutional buildings and their grounds, such as schools.
Low	Views with many detracting features. Users of outdoor recreational facilities where the view is restricted or incidental to the activity. Users of main transport routes, including roads and rail (motorised or not). People at their place of work.

TABLE V2 - MAGNITUDE OF VISUAL CHANGE	
	Typical criteria
High	A dominant change in view which would be obviously discordant and out of context. Changes would occupy the majority of the view.
Medium	An obvious visual change which may be discordant, or not discordant but clearly visible over a large proportion of the view.
Low	Small changes to views that would be noticeable. Changes may be discordant over a small proportion of the view, or not discordant over a larger proportion of the view.
Negligible	The change will be discernible, but the character of the view will not materially change, or the change may not be discordant.
Neutral	No identifiable change.

TABLE V3 - VISUAL EFFECT	
	Typical criteria
Major	The proposals would be clearly visible and dominant, and would cause a substantial deterioration or improvement to a view from a more sensitive receptor.
Moderate	The proposal would be readily identifiable/visible, and would cause some deterioration or improvement to a view from a more sensitive receptor, or a greater deterioration or improvement to a view from a less sensitive receptor.
Minor	The proposal would be noticeable, and would cause limited deterioration or improvement to a view from a more sensitive receptor, or some deterioration or improvement from a less sensitive receptor.
Negligible	The proposal would not substantially change the view, but would be discernible.
Neutral	No change in view.

Note: Effects may be judged to be either adverse or beneficial.

DIRECT EFFECTS ON LANDSCAPE FEATURES		
Vegetation		
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
High to Medium	The structural vegetation on Site is of medium to high quality with the majority of tree species and hedgerows classed within the 'B – Moderate' category. There is one veteran tree in the northern corner of the Site and two TPOs in the south, one an individual tree and the other a group of trees.	
	Impact and Mitigation	
	Most of the existing structural vegetation on Site is due to be retained. New hedgerows, tree belts and individual trees within the landscape are also proposed, adding to the tree stock currently on Site. A localised section of existing vegetation is proposed to be removed to accommodate the new Site access off the Eversley Road / Langley Common Road / Baird Road roundabout. It is noted that this vegetation forms part of the Eversley Road Green Route Enhancement Area. Removal of this vegetation would weaken the function of the Green Route locally, however, would have a negligible effect on the function of the route as a whole. Furthermore, the Proposed Development offers the opportunity for additional enhancements to more fragmented sections of the GI corridor along the south-eastern boundary of the Site. A mixture of species-rich grassland and wildflower grassland will improve on the habitat value of the existing modified grassland on Site. Overall, while some existing vegetation will be removed, there will be a net increase in tree and vegetation cover on the Site, as well as an increased diversity of habitats, resulting in a beneficial change once vegetation has established.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Low		Minor Beneficial
		As the proposed vegetation matures
Public Rights of Way and Access		
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
Low	PRoW ARBO17 runs along the northern boundary of the Site and currently affords long-distance views south, across Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Green. The footpath runs in an east-west direction, linking the wider landscape with the western edge of Arborfield Cross.	
	Impact and Mitigation	
	PRoW ARBO17 is located within the proposed SANG and therefore is unlikely to be directly impacted by the Proposed Development. Additional recreational paths will connect to it, increasing recreational use of the Site.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Low		Neutral
		Neutral

INDIRECT EFFECTS ON LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER			
Landscape/Townscape Character of Site			
Landscape/Townscape Quality	Landscape/Townscape Value	Landscape/Townscape Susceptibility	Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity
Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Existing Condition			
The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape or heritage quality or value. The Site is composed of four pastoral fields and one fallow field associated with Ducks Nest Farm. The fields are largely geometric in shape but varied in scale. Their boundaries are generally made up of mature hedgerows interspersed with hedgerow trees. A semi-open boundary exists along Observer Way where existing vegetation is establishing. The trees on the Site are of moderate condition with many categorised as class B. Additionally, there are two TPOs on Site and one veteran tree in the northern corner. The small sheds associated with Ducks Nest Farm are industrial in appearance and not in keeping with the semi-rural qualities exhibited by the farmyard and buildings (including one listed building) at the farmhouse. The roads either side of the Site detract slightly from its semi-rural character, with traffic noise from vehicles accelerating and decelerating at roundabouts reducing the tranquillity somewhat. Pylons and overhead wires that pass through the centre of the Site also act as detractors. The topography of the Site is varied with a flatter profile in the south and a rising topography in the north. The northern portion of the Site exhibits a more open character than that of the south, with the rising landform leading to a wooded ridgeline around Arborfield Court. From across the Site, there are views of the suburban edge of Arborfield Green / Arborfield Garrison, contributing towards a suburban fringe character. As the landform begins to fall towards the north-east, views of the suburban edge of Arborfield Cross also come available.			
Impact and Mitigation			
The character of the Site will change from that of pastoral fields to a new SANG in the northern three fields, and residential development with associated infrastructure within the southern two fields. Although representing a material change in the southern part of the Site, the new residential development would be reflective of the surrounding settlement character of Arborfield Green and Arborfield Garrison to the immediate south. Proposed gapping up of existing hedgerows and new tree belts will strengthen habitat corridors across the Site, whilst integrating the built development and associated infrastructure into the landscape. The proposed SANG will maintain open views south and also provide added benefits for biodiversity and recreation. The character of this part of the Site will remain largely unchanged due to the perception of existing development at Arborfield Green and Arborfield Garrison. Added connectivity through the Site will allow better use of the area and will provide valuable community resource.			
Magnitude of Change	Effect Year 1		Effect Year 15
Medium	Moderate Adverse		Minor Adverse
			As the proposed vegetation and SANG matures
Landscape/Townscape Character of Immediate Surroundings			
Landscape/Townscape Quality	Landscape/Townscape Value	Landscape/Townscape Susceptibility	Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity
Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Existing Condition			
The adjacent landscape to the north of the Site is varied with the small village of Arborfield Cross and its associated Conservation Area to the north-east, and the arable and pastoral fields and woodland situated around the Grade II Listed Arborfield Court. These represent higher value landscape features. To the east, the landscape is ordinary and in agricultural use with pockets of woodland and mature hedgerows lining geometric fields. To the south and south-east, the landscape is characterised by ongoing development at Arborfield Garrison and the existing settlement of Arborfield Green which provide a suburban character to the south of the Site. This continues to the south-west, where further residential development meets Eversley Road. West of the development, the landscape is more attractive and features areas of ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Sites. Among these are the industrial park and traveller site which detract slightly from the otherwise rural and wooded character of the landscape.			
Impact and Mitigation			
The residential area of the Proposed Development would be related to the northern edge of Arborfield Green and Arborfield Garrison located to the south-east of the Site, both visually and in terms of settlement character. As the vegetation along the southern boundary of the Site establishes, alongside some existing young planting within the buffer between Eversley Road and Baird Road, this perceived connection would be reduced. However, this interrelation would be retained at the Site's access point off the roundabout between Eversley Road / Langley Common Road / Baird Road.			
Upgrades to the Eversley Road / Langley Common Road / Baird Road roundabout would introduce some additional urbanising influences along the northern edge of Arborfield Garrison, including a new access road, signage and pedestrian crossings. However, this would be experienced at a junction which already exhibits a suburban fringe character with signage, streetlights and engineered junctions (see photographs for 3a and 3b). During our site visit in December 2023, new trees had been planted as part of the Eversley Road Green Route Enhancement Area at the junction between the Site and Rickman Close. Proposed pedestrian crossings as part of the Proposed Development could result in the need for the removal of one or more of these trees. The need for this would be determined through future detailed design work. Overall, the upgrades to Eversley Road would not represent a material change in the existing character of Eversley Road.			

The perceived arrival into Arborfield Garrison would occur further north along Observer Way due to the presence of residential development within the south of the Site. However, the proposed tree and scrub belt along the south-western edge of the Site would increasingly soften and screen views of built form on the approach to Arborfield Garrison as it matures, alongside the existing establishing hedgerow in this location. Once established, this would contribute towards a more enclosed and wooded approach to Arborfield Garrison which is characteristic of other approaches to the settlement.

The residential component of the Proposed Development would be largely imperceptible from Arborfield Cross located to the north of the Site. Parts of the SANG would be perceptible from the southern edge of the village, however this would create no material change in the landscape setting to the village.

Magnitude of Change	Effect Year 1	Effect Year 15
Medium	Moderate Adverse	Minor Adverse As the proposed vegetation and SANG matures

Landscape/Townscape Character of Wider Surroundings

Landscape/Townscape Quality	Landscape/Townscape Value	Landscape/Townscape Susceptibility	Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity
Medium	High to Medium	Medium	High to Medium

Existing Condition

As set out within the published Landscape Character Assessment, the wider landscape exhibits a densely settled character with the development around Arborfield Garrison providing a strong suburban influence on the wider landscape. Areas of woodland, mature hedgerows and in-field trees are characteristic of the wider landscape both to the east and west of the Site. The landscape character to the north of the Site is somewhat higher in value, with a rural settlement pattern and dwellings that display a strong vernacular, as evidenced by the Conservation Area in Arborfield Cross. Within the wider landscape there are areas of higher value, illustrated through the designations of the Blackwaters, Farley Hill and Bearwood Areas of Special Landscape Importance within the Wokingham Borough Council Value Landscape Assessment (September 2024).

Impact and Mitigation

Due to the nature of the topography, vegetation cover and built form surrounding the Site, the Proposed Development would not be perceptible past its immediate surroundings, including from the Blackwaters, Farley Hill and Bearwood Areas of Special Landscape Importance.

Magnitude of Change	Effect Year 1	Effect Year 15
Negligible to None	Negligible Adverse to None	Negligible Adverse to None

Heritage Assets

Landscape/Townscape Quality	Landscape/Townscape Value	Landscape/Townscape Susceptibility	Landscape/Townscape Sensitivity
High	High	High	High

Existing Condition

The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for heritage. Ducks Nest Farm, a Grade II Listed 18th Century farmhouse is located approximately 60m north-east of the Site boundary. Approximately 200m north of the Site's northern boundary is the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area which contains a number of Grade II listed buildings, including Magnolia Cottage, Birch House, The Swan Public House, the Arborfield, Newland and Barkham War Memorial, and The Bull Inn.

Impact and Mitigation

Although the Conservation Area and assortment of listed buildings within Arborfield Cross lie within close proximity to the Site, the intervening landform, buildings and vegetation means the proposed development would not affect the character of the landscape near these heritage assets. The northern most portion of the Site is proposed to be developed as a SANG and therefore will create no material change to its existing character, albeit with improved ecological and recreation value. On the eastern boundary of the Site, the listed building at Ducks Nest Farm will experience a marginal change to the character around it due to filtered views of the proposed development through existing mature vegetation from first floor windows. These views will become increasingly screened over time as intervening vegetation establishes and matures. A separate Heritage Assessment considers this in full detail.

Magnitude of Change	Effect Year 1	Effect Year 15
Low to Negligible	Minor Adverse	Negligible Adverse As proposed vegetation matures

OTHER EFFECTS

Cumulative impacts

We are not aware of any permitted or allocated development within the vicinity of the Site which would affect this assessment.

Lighting

The Site is currently unlit; however, streetlights along the southern boundary and at the two roundabouts along Eversley Road cast some light spill onto the southern portion of the Site. Some light spill is also present from Ducks Nest Farm. The additional light from the southern portion of the development will be seen against the context of the existing streetlights and built development within Arborfield Green. No lighting is proposed within the north of the Site. No significant lighting effects are expected.

Construction Phase

There will be temporary effects on the landscape character of the Site and its surroundings during the construction of the proposed development, including earthworks, heavy vehicle movements, temporary fencing, storage of materials and taller plant and scaffolding associated with the build out phase. It is anticipated that the extent of effects will be controlled through a Construction Environment Management Plan, and that there will be no specific landscape/visual effects above those usually associated with construction of this nature.

VISUAL EFFECTS ON USERS OF ROADS AND PROWS		
Users of Observer Way		Photograph 5
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
Low	For users travelling south along Observer Way, the Site does not come into view until south of the footbridge. The first view of the Site is of the field within the south-west corner, and due to the lack of existing mature vegetation, there are open views across the rest of the southern portion of the Site. People travelling north have a more open view of the Site as they approach the footbridge, including views into the northern portion.	
	Impact and Mitigation Views of the proposed development will be possible from a short section of Observer Way. The proposed development includes new vegetation, alongside existing immature vegetation, along the Site's south-western boundary. This will soften, and eventually screen, views into the Site from Observer Way as it matures. As most users of Observer Way are travelling by vehicle, these views will be experienced at speed where the primary focus is on the road, rather than the surroundings. Over time, the character of Observer Way on the approach to Arborfield Garrison will become more enclosed and treed, reflecting the character of other roads on the approach to the settlement.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Medium		Negligible Adverse
Users of Eversley Road		Photographs 3 and 4
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
Low	Views into the Site are available from a short stretch of Eversley Road. Open views of the Site are possible from the roundabout with Observer Way due to existing immature vegetation. Views of the Site become increasingly screened between the junction with Observer Way and Arborfield Cross, due to intervening vegetation and farm buildings at Ducks Nest Farm.	
	Impact and Mitigation Transient views of the Proposed Development would be available from a short section of Eversley Road between the existing access to Ducks Nest Farm and the junction with Observer Way. Here, glimpsed and filtered views of the proposed residential development would be available through newly establishing vegetation. These views will become increasingly filtered and eventually screened as the vegetation matures. A brief glimpse into the Site would remain where the proposed access is located off the roundabout with Langley Common Road.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Medium		Negligible Adverse
Users of PRoW ARBO17		Photographs 1, 6, 7 and 8
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
High	PRoW ARBO17 runs along the northern boundary of the Site and affords long-distance views south, across Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Green. The footpath runs in an east west direction, linking the wider landscape to the west of Observer Way with Arborfield Cross in the east.	
	Impact and Mitigation The landform to the north of the Site rises towards a ridgeline which reaches its peak at Arborfield Court. This screens views of the Site from the wider landscape to the north. Views from the Grade II listed Arborfield Court are screened by intervening vegetation. PRoW ARBO17 follows the northern boundary of the Site along this ridge. From this footpath, there would be close views of the proposed SANG. The proposed residential development within the south of the Site would be visible in the middle ground. As proposed vegetation along the northern edge of the residential area establishes, views of built form would become increasingly softened and filtered. Eventually, only the rooftops of the Proposed Development would be seen extending above the treeline, helping to integrate the development into existing views of Arborfield Garrison (see photographs 6, 7 and 8). Due to the elevation of the footpath, distant views south, above the top of the Proposed Development, would be retained, creating no material change to the character of the existing longer distance views. As the land falls away from the ridgeline towards Arborfield Cross, views of SANG land within the north-east corner of the Site would be afforded above existing boundary vegetation for users of PRoW ARBO17 (see photograph 1). Due to the nature of the SANG proposals, the character of these views would not materially change.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Medium		Minor Adverse

VISUAL EFFECTS ON RESIDENTS		
Residents of Harts Close		Photograph 2
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
High to Medium	Close views into the north-eastern field of the Site are possible from some properties along the southern edge of Harts Close. Further north along Harts Close, views of the Site are largely truncated by intervening vegetation and built form.	
	Impact and Mitigation Close views of the SANG within the north-east corner of the Site would be possible from first floor, south-facing windows of some properties along the southern edge of Harts Close. These views would become increasingly filtered due to the gapping up of existing boundary hedgerows and the planting of new vegetation within the SANG. Views of the proposed residential development within the south of the Site would be heavily filtered by existing vegetation, eventually become screened.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Low		Negligible Adverse
Residents of Ducks Nest Farm		
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
High to Medium	Views of the Site from the property at Ducks Nest Farm are largely screened due to existing mature vegetation and a tall evergreen hedge along the curtilage of the property. Glimpses through this existing vegetation and above the hedge would be possible from first floor, south-facing windows.	
	Impact and Mitigation Filtered views of the proposed residential development within the south of the Site would be available through existing mature vegetation from south-facing first floor windows of the property at Ducks Nest Farm. These views would become increasingly screened as proposed vegetation along the Site's boundary establishes.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Medium to Low		Minor Adverse
Residents of Melrose Gardens		Photograph 1
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
High to Medium	Views towards the Site are available for properties along the south-western side of Melrose Gardens. These include open views into the north-eastern corner of the Site at an oblique angle from first floor windows. Views towards the southern portion of the Site are screened by intervening vegetation.	
	Impact and Mitigation Due to the orientation of the houses along Melrose Gardens, views of the Site will be limited to oblique views of the north-eastern corner, which includes part of the proposed SANG. Due to the nature of the SANG proposals, this would not materially change the character of the existing view. Views of the SANG would become increasingly screened due to maturing boundary vegetation enhancements. Views towards the proposed residential development would be screened by existing intervening vegetation.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Negligible		Neutral
Residents of Ducks Nest Cottages		
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
High to Medium	Views of the Site from Ducks Nest Cottages are screened to the south by intervening agricultural sheds and buildings at Ducks nest Farm, as well as existing vegetation. Views are more open to the north with gaps in hedgerows likely to offer clearer views of the northern portion of the development.	
	Impact and Mitigation The proposed residential development will be screened by existing buildings associated with Ducks Nest Farm as well as existing vegetation. Filtered views north towards the proposed SANG in the north-eastern corner of the Site would be available from rear elevations. However, the character of these views would not materially change due to the nature of the SANG proposals. Views of the SANG would become increasingly screened due to maturing boundary vegetation enhancements.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Neutral		Neutral

Residents of Rickman Close		Photograph 3
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
High to Medium	Views towards the Site are heavily filtered for most properties along Rickman Close due to existing mature vegetation between Eversley Road and Rickman Close. However, more open views are available from west-facing ground and first floor windows of properties along the northern end of Rickman Close. This is due to a lack of intervening vegetation between Eversley Road and Rickman Close, as well as sparser vegetation along the Site boundary adjacent to the entrance to Ducks Nest Farm.	
	Impact and Mitigation Views of the proposed residential development will be possible from west-facing windows of properties on the northern end of Rickman Close. These views will include residential properties and associated landscaping and SuDS within the east of the Site. These views will become increasingly filtered and eventually screened once proposed vegetation along the eastern boundary of the Site establishes and matures. Views of the proposed development from the remaining properties along Rickman Close will continue to be heavily filtered or screened due to existing and proposed vegetation.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Medium		Minor Adverse

Residents around Bairds Road		Photograph 4
Sensitivity	Existing Condition	
High to Medium	For properties along and adjoining Baird Road, views towards the Site are mostly screened during the summer months due to existing mature vegetation within the existing green buffer between Baird Road and Eversley Road. These become more filtered during the winter months when vegetation is not in leaf. A gap in this vegetation exists at the junction between Baird Road and Arbery Way where relatively new planting is still maturing. This permits some more open views towards the Site's south-western corner at an oblique angle from properties along Arbery Way.	
	Impact and Mitigation An existing newly planted hedgerow with hedgerow trees marks the southern and south-western boundary of the Site. Additional proposed vegetation along here would reinforce the structure and screening potential of this boundary and would reflect the existing tree belts along the Eversley Road Green Enhancement Route, once mature. At year 1, views of the proposed residential area within the south of the Site would be available from a handful of properties around the junction between Bairds Road and Arbery Way due to the immature intervening vegetation. However, the establishing vegetation would increasingly filter views from these properties.	
Magnitude of Change		Effect Year 15
Low		Negligible Adverse