

Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment

Land east of Lodge Road, Hurst

On behalf of Mactaggart and Mickel Strategic Land (Mac Mic)

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Contents.

Document Management.....	i
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Site Location and Description.....	7
3. Description Of Proposals.....	9
4. Effect On Landscape Elements.....	12
5. Effects On Landscape Character.....	15
6. Effects On Visual Amenity.....	24
7. Planning Policy.....	33
8. Summary and Conclusions.....	39

Figures.

- FIGURE 1: SITE LOCATION PLAN
- FIGURE 2: ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNATIONS PLAN
- FIGURE 3: TOPOGRAPHY PLAN
- FIGURE 4: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PLAN
- FIGURE 5: VIEWPOINT LOCATION PLAN
- FIGURE 6: ANNOTATED PHOTOVIEWS (NOS. 1-11)

Appendices.

- APPENDIX 1: PARAMETERS PLAN
- APPENDIX 2: DETAILED METHODOLOGY
- APPENDIX 3: ILLUSTRATIVE LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN
- APPENDIX 4: VISUALISATIONS

1. Introduction.

- 1.1. Pegasus Group have been commissioned by Mactaggart and Mickel Strategic Land (Mac Mic) Limited to prepare a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in support of an outline planning application on a 10.68ha site at Land East of Lodge Road, Hurst shown on **Figure 1: Site Location Plan**, for the construction of up to 99 dwellings (the proposed development). (see **Appendix 1: Parameters Plan**).
- 1.2. An initial desk-top study was carried out to review a range of published information relating to the site and its context, landscape designations, published landscape character assessments and the accompanying guidance. A site visit was carried out in May 2024 to review the findings of the desktop study and to determine the extent of the visual influence of the site.
- 1.3. The main objectives of the LVIA are:
 - To describe the landscape character of the site and its surroundings, evaluate its sensitivity to change and, taking into account the magnitude of change, assess the effect that the proposal would have on the landscape character.
 - To identify potential visual receptors (i.e. people who would be able to see the development), evaluate their sensitivity to change and, taking into account the magnitude of change, assess the effect that the proposal would have on visual amenity. A residential visual amenity study is excluded from this LVIA, noting that appropriate privacy distances between existing properties and new built development would be maintained.
 - To identify landscape elements associated with the site, evaluate their sensitivity to change and, taking into account the magnitude of change, assess the effect the proposals would have on landscape elements.
- 1.4. As illustrated on the **Environmental Designations Plan (Figure 2)** the site lies outside of any statutory or local/non-statutory landscape designations.
- 1.5. This LVIA should be read in conjunction with the supporting Planning Statement and Design and Access Statement (DAS). The **Illustrative Landscape Masterplan** is included at **Appendix 3**.

Assessment Approach and Methodology.

- 1.6. This LVIA assesses the operational stage of the proposed development only, as the construction stage is short and temporary in duration. The effects are therefore assessed at Year 1, immediately post-completion, and at Year 15 to consider the proposed mitigation and enhancement measures.
- 1.7. A preliminary 2km radius search area was initially identified to review the baseline condition and planning policies that may be relevant to the proposed development. The detailed assessment has encompassed a refined study area that is restricted to the immediate vicinity of the site, due to the highly enclosed nature of the site, resulting from adjacent built form and/or mature tree belts.
- 1.8. The LVIA has been undertaken with regard to the following best practice:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd edition) (hereafter referred to as GLVIA3) – Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013);
- GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13, 2/13, 1/14, and 2/14 – Landscape Institute (2013 and 2014);
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment – Natural England (2014);
- An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management – Natural England (2019);
- Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19 – Landscape Institute (2019); and
- Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations, Technical Guidance Note 02/21 – Landscape Institute (2021).

1.9. The detailed methodology for this LVIA is provided at **Appendix 2**.

1.10. The GLVIA3 states in 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

1.11. GLVIA3 also states in paragraph 1.17 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.”²

1.12. GLVIA3 also recognises in paragraph 2.23 that:

“...professional judgement is a very important part of LVIA. While there is some scope for quantitative measurement of some relatively objective matters much of the assessment must rely on qualitative judgements”³

Limitations to the Assessment

1.13. In undertaking the landscape and visual assessment in relation to the proposed development, there are limitations and constraints affecting the outputs from this work. These include:

- The baseline assessment has been based on information readily available at the time of undertaking the assessment.
- Every effort has been made to ensure that the photographs and their locations represent a variety of receptors and views from a range of distances and directions.

¹ Paragraph 1.1, Page 4, GLVIA3rd Edition

² Paragraph 1.17, Page 9, GLVIA, 3rd Edition

³ Paragraph 2.23, Page 21, GLVIA, 3rd Edition

- Due to the timing of instruction it was not possible to obtain winter views (illustrating deciduous trees devoid of leaf cover), however, the assessment assumes winter conditions, unless otherwise stated and has been informed by review of winter photography included in the LVIA prepared for a previous larger housing application on the site;
- Due to the timing of instruction and the limited potential for views of the proposed development on the site due to the flat topography and surrounding enclosure by built development and trees, publicly accessible viewpoint locations were selected based on professional judgement and were not formally consulted upon with the Local Planning Authority;
- No computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) was produced as professional judgement determined that due to the flat topography and surrounding enclosure by built development and trees, publicly accessible viewpoint locations would be limited to locations close or directly adjacent to the site boundary;
- The assessed development is based on the **Parameters Plan** as shown at **Appendix 1** and is assessed on the assumption that the proposals are delivered in line with this plan.
- The assessed development at year 1 and year 15 is assessed on the assumption that the proposals are delivered in line with this Parameters Plan including estimated conservative growth of existing and proposed planting.

1.14. The focus of this report is on the landscape and visual effects arising from the proposals; however, whilst effects on cultural heritage and ecology are beyond the scope of this LVIA, heritage assets and nature conservation designations in the search area are shown on **Environmental Designations Plan** at **Figure 2** as they have the potential to inform considerations of landscape value.

Nature of Effect

1.15. The degree of landscape or visual effect is identified by means of a descriptive scale as per the GLVIA 3rd Edition guidance. However, it is also necessary to consider the nature of the landscape and visual effects. GLVIA 3 assists on this point noting paragraph 5.37 concerning landscape effects which states that:

“One of the more challenging issues is deciding whether the landscape effects should be categorised as positive or negative. It is also possible for effects to be neutral in their consequences for the landscape. An informed professional judgement should be made about this, and the criteria used in reaching the judgement should be clearly stated. They might include, but should not be restricted to:

- ***The degree to which the proposal fits with existing character.***
- ***The contribution to the landscape that the development may make its own right, usually by virtue of good design, even if it is in contrast to existing character.***
- ***The importance of perceptions of landscape is emphasised by the European Landscape Convention, and others may of course hold different opinions on whether the effects are positive or negative, but this is not a reason to avoid making this judgement, which will ultimately be weighed against the opinions of others in the decision making process.”***



- 1.16. A precautionary approach is applied to this LVIA that assumes all landscape and visual effects are considered to be negative or adverse unless otherwise stated.

2. Site Location and Description.

- 2.1. Hurst is a small village within the Borough of Wokingham in Berkshire, situated approximately 1km east of the settlement edge of Reading. The market town of Wokingham is approximately 2.5km to the south, and Twyford is approximately 1.5km to the north. Whistley Green is a small village to the north of the site, which historically developed along the A321 Broadwater Lane and coalesces with Hurst following the post-war construction of dwellings along Tape Lane.
- 2.2. The site is located at the northwestern edge of the village and comprises a single field bounded by hedgerows and trees, currently used for the grazing of horses, ponies and donkey's. The site is bordered by existing residential development to varying degrees. The eastern site boundary is flanked by Tape Lane, with residential properties typically fronting on to the road facing the site. Residential properties along Martineau Lane and Nursery Close back on to the site's southern boundary, with Tape Lane Allotments and rear gardens of dwellings adjacent to the site's southeastern boundary. To the north there are several small to medium sized fields and paddocks used for equestrian grazing with outbuildings and an outdoor riding menage, which separate the site from existing residential properties at the southern edge of Whistley Green. Lodge Road to the west, would accommodate the main vehicular access connection to the site and the road corridor is flanked by mature hedgerows and belts of trees. Additional enclosure to the site from Lodge Road is provided by mature trees within the curtilage of Poole House, located between Lodge Road and the site.
- 2.3. The site itself is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape protection designations and no other environmental designations are present, as illustrated in **Figure 2: Environmental Designations Plan**, however many of the trees within the site are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). There are no Listed Buildings or structures on, or immediately adjoining the site, however there are a number of Grade II listed buildings along Broadwater Lane to the north, the closest of which includes Elder Cottage and Parkers Cottage approximately 75m and 90m to the northeast respectively. Hurst Conservation Area contains several Grade II listed buildings, along with the Grade I listed Church of St Nicholas off Church Hill approximately 540m to the south of the site. Due to the intervening built form associated with the southern part of the village and mature trees within fields and along intervening roads, there is no intervisibility of the site with the Hurst Conservation Area.
- 2.4. There are a range of community facilities within Hurst including St Nicholas Primary School, a post office, convenience store, bakery, village hall, allotment gardens and local pubs in proximity to the site. There are several recreational facilities including a cricket club and a bowling club, along with football pitches and a play area at Hurst Recreational Ground to the northeast of the Site. There is a small play area off Martineau Lane, south of the Hurst Allotments. There are further community facilities and a railway station at Twyford, approximately 2km to the north of the site. Hurst village benefits from multiple public transport options with bus stops along Broadwater Lane, Sawpit Road and School Road within walking distance of the site, providing access to Wokingham, Twyford, Reading and Charvil.
- 2.5. Existing tree and hedgerow vegetation associated with the site includes hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees, dominated by oak, that follow the northern and western boundary of the site. A preliminary Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) has been carried out by Tyler Grange in June 2024 which accompanies the application. The AIA recorded a mixture of low, moderate and high value Arboricultural features, including six veteran trees and several trees covered by Tree Preservation Order (TPOs).
- 2.6. In terms of pedestrian access, the site is in private ownership with no public access permitted, and no Public Rights of Way within or immediately adjacent to the site. The Loddon Long Distance Path passes broadly north to south close to the western edge of

Lodge Road. The roads directly adjacent to the site typically don't have paved footways along the routes. Tape Lane to the east is a narrow, single-track lane with no pavements for the majority of the route where it lies adjacent to the site.

- 2.7. The site and the adjoining settlement of Hurst are located upon a relatively low-lying landscape set beyond the floodplain of the River Loddon to the west. (**Figure 3: Topography Plan**). The site is located on land at approximately 38m AOD, with the landform rising very slightly to the east towards Hurst, where beyond the site boundary, it reaches approximately 42m AOD. The highest point of the village is associated with the conservation area at Church Hill, at around 46m AOD. The landform rises further to the southeast at Binfield, at just over 80m AOD.

3. Description Of Proposals.

3.1. The Parameters Plan is contained at **Appendix 1** that includes the landscape proposals assessed, and an Illustrative Landscape Masterplan is included as **Appendix 3** that illustrates how the Parameters Plan could be delivered. At a macro level, the proposed green infrastructure would ensure that the proposed development is accessible, to ensure that it would be an attractive place to live, manage surface water attenuation in a sustainable way and facilitate improved opportunities for local wildlife. The key new landscape features could include:

- A central area of public open space (the 'Common'), that could include a species-rich meadow grassland,
- A new community orchard to the northwestern edge of the site near the access on to Lodge Road that would typically include fruiting trees of local provenance, set within a wildflower meadow,
- New individual and groups of native tree planting to areas of open space and enhanced planting to the site boundary to reinforce existing hedgerows including infilling hedgerow gaps and hedgerow tree planting, and
- Sustainable urban drainage systems to manage surface water runoff that is likely to include ponds and swales enriched with appropriate native wetland planting,

3.1. In addition to the Green Infrastructure elements, the following indicative proposals could be integrated within the public open space on the site:

- Pedestrian and cycle routes to provide connections through the site between Lodge Road to the west and Tape Lane to the northeastern and southeastern corners of the site,
- Circular footpath routes around the perimeter of the site and through the central common, connecting the new residential parcels,
- A naturalistic equipped play space (Local Landscaped Area for Play) within the central open space, well connected with pedestrian and cycle routes,
- An extension to Tape Lane Allotments to the southeastern edge of the site, providing new residents with opportunities to grow food,

3.2. The proposed development could deliver a cohesive and high-quality green infrastructure network that would:

- Sustainably manage surface water runoff improving resilience to climate change, while enhancing visual amenity and creating additional opportunities for biodiversity,
- Encourage and promote healthy and active lifestyles through the provision of high-quality, safe, and accessible open spaces for informal recreation and play for all ages and abilities, and opportunities to grow food and create connections with the community,
- Enhance pedestrian and cycle route connectivity to promote and facilitate sustainable travel movements,
- Respect local landscape character to enhance visual amenity and promote a sense of place, and

- Create new opportunities for biodiversity through the integration and establishment of a variety of new habitats providing foraging, nesting and shelter to a range of species.

3.3. The green infrastructure could deliver a broad range of benefits considered enhancement, which could include:

- Protecting and enhancing landscape character and biodiversity by implementing in-keeping landscape improvements and appropriate management practices to deliver biodiversity gain and overall enhancement to the landscape resource of the site,
- Improving physical and mental health and social well-being by creating good quality green spaces and opportunities for relaxation and health, physical activity as well as providing the overall built infrastructure necessary to ensure people can run, walk, cycle and play,
- Investment in the green infrastructure network which could provide multi-functional open spaces and parks for the benefit of local people, wildlife, and the environment,
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation through increased tree cover for natural air-cooling and CO₂ absorption and sustainable surface water management features,
- Improving the quality of place by using the natural environment to create high-quality living and recreational environments for people to live,
- Creating an attractive setting to new and existing residential areas,
- Sustaining economic growth and investment through high-quality environments of comparative location advantages to attract and retain business locally.

3.4. The iterative design of the scheme has been landscape-led and considered the opportunities to deliver strategic tree and woodland planting that would minimise the visibility of the built elements of the scheme from the adjacent settlement and wider countryside. The indicative design could deliver the following:

- Existing hedgerows and trees to be retained where possible and enhanced with appropriate native infill planting as necessary, reflecting native species existing within the site and filtering views towards new built form,
- Proposed new development to be offset from the site boundary, creating green corridors for meadow grassland and tree planting to soften views of new built form from the immediate context,
- Existing boundary vegetation to be supplemented with new hedgerow and tree planting including:
 - Native reinforcement hedgerow planting along the eastern boundary adjacent to Tape Lane and also adjacent to the eastern edge of the proposed development. New tree planting adjacent to the proposed development parcels aids in filtering views of the proposed dwellings in views from the existing settlement edge to the east. The planting of new hedgerows adjacent to the road reflects the character of existing views and intermittent tree planting retains a sense of openness allowing for views across the proposed central area of open space,
 - Replacement hedgerow planting where removals are required to facilitate construction of the new vehicular site access off Lodge Road to the west. New native scrub planting and the proposed community orchard behind the

replacement hedge would heavily filter views towards the new residential units within the site and would reinforce the existing wooded character and sense of enclosure when travelling along Lodge Road.

- New native infill shrub and tree planting to the southern boundary and adjacent to the extended Tape Lane Allotments would soften views towards the site from the south including Martineau Road, adjacent open space on higher ground and the existing allotments, and
- New native infill shrub and tree planting to the northern boundary would extend the existing boundary vegetation and reflect the character of the existing views towards the site beyond the adjacent paddocks to the north and restrict the extent of any more distant private views towards the development from dwellings on the edge of Whistley Green.
- Groups and belts of new tree planting along the edges of the central Common could connect with and visually extend the existing belts of trees within the site and along the boundary, to help define the areas of public open space and partially restrict views of the nearby new housing, and
- New vehicular access road and internal streets could be tree-lined, with larger stature, extra heavy standard trees where appropriate, breaking up the new built form and helping to integrate the new development into the already established settlement edge context.

4. Effect On Landscape Elements

- 4.1. The following section assesses the effects upon the landscape elements that currently characterise the site. It considers the introduction of the new landscape elements as indicated on the Parameters Plan, with any indicative measures clearly identified.

Land Cover

- 4.2. The site is currently private farmland and comprises grassland used primarily for the grazing of horses, ponies and donkeys. The land cover is typical of the locality, where several small paddocks and horsiculture related infrastructure are located to the north of the site and more widely at the settlement edge. The existing susceptibility and value of the land cover is considered to be **medium**, which results in a **medium** sensitivity.
- 4.3. Approximately 38% of the site area would change from grassland to residential development that includes private gardens, roads, pavements and driveways. Approximately 62% of the site would be dedicated to public open space and green infrastructure elements including attenuation ponds.
- 4.4. The illustrative landscape proposals contained at **Appendix 3** indicate how the parameters plan could be realised. The central area of public open space would likely comprise a species rich wildflower meadow grassland with perimeter native tree and hedgerow planting. New SUDs features could be supplemented with native wetland planting. Pedestrian access routes crossing through the open space would provide access to a naturalistic play space, and circular footpath routes through corridors of open space around the perimeter of the site. The benefits of tree and hedgerow planting as structural planting elements are discussed separately below to avoid double counting.
- 4.5. While the proposed public open space would provide benefits to biodiversity, visual and recreational amenity, the proposed new built form would inevitably have an adverse effect upon baseline land cover as a whole. The magnitude of change from the proposed development is assessed as **medium**, which when combined with the **medium** sensitivity, results in a **moderate adverse** effect upon the land cover of the site.

Topography

- 4.6. The landform of the site itself is relatively uniform, with an approximate 2m topographical variation across the site, ranging between 37m–39m AOD. The lowest point of the site is to the western edge where it meets Lodge Road, at approximately 37m AOD. The landform rises gently to the east to 38m AOD near the centre of the site, rising further to reach approximately 39m AOD near the northern and southern site boundary. The susceptibility of the topography to the type of development proposed is medium, which when combined with a medium value, would result in an overall medium sensitivity.
- 4.7. It is assumed that the overall gradients across the site would remain as existing, with only minor changes to the landform proposed. This would likely include localised excavations to facilitate construction of the SUDs basins, the road network, paths, parking and driveways, and with the digging of the new building foundations.
- 4.8. Once the construction of the proposed development is completed, the overall pattern of topography of the site would be maintained with landform largely retained at existing levels within the areas of public open space. The magnitude of change to the overall ground profile of the site would be **low**. With a **medium** sensitivity and a **low** magnitude of change, the overall effect upon topography would be **minor adverse**.

Tree and Hedgerows

- 4.9. The Arboricultural Survey (Jan 2024) was carried out by Tyler Grange Group Ltd as part of a Preliminary Arboricultural Impact Assessment and the report sets out the location and condition of trees and hedgerows within and adjoining the site.
- 4.10. The survey identified 62 individual trees (six of which are veteran trees), 17 tree groups, 5 hedgerows, and one woodland. Grading can be summarised as.
 - Category A – ‘High’ value: 22 individual trees, one tree group and the woodland adjoining but located outside the site,
 - Category B – ‘Medium’ value: 23 individual trees and 10 tree groups,
 - Category C ‘Low’ value: 13 individual trees, 4 tree groups and all 5 hedgerows,
 - Category U – ‘unsuitable for retention’: 4 individual trees and 2 tree groups.
- 4.11. Tree Preservation Orders apply to most mature trees within and immediately adjacent to the site boundary. These trees are predominantly mature English Oaks, that have a large stature and contribute to the character of the area. Overall, the trees within the site are assessed as having a high value.
- 4.12. The susceptibility to changes arising from the development proposed would be **high**, reflecting the time this landscape element takes to mature. With a high value and high susceptibility, the overall sensitivity of the tree resource is **high**.
- 4.13. Existing hedgerows are native and typically include a modest range of species including Hawthorn, Crack Willow, Ash and English Elm. There are gaps in places, most notably along the northern boundary and localised parts of the hedgerow network have become overgrown with bramble scrub. Overall hedgerows are of **medium** value. Hedgerows are assessed to be of **medium** susceptibility due to their form being relatively overgrown, which is in-keeping with existing field boundaries in the locality and is indicative of a lower level of management over several years. Combining value and susceptibility, hedgerows are considered to have an overall **medium** sensitivity.
- 4.14. The proposed development is anticipated to result in the retention of all the existing tree cover across the site including trees within hedgerows, protected during the construction phase with measures to comply with BS: 5837 (see Preliminary Tree Retention and Removal Plan). Some localised sections of a category C hedgerow would be removed to accommodate the new vehicular access from Lodge Road, and an area of a category C tree group would require removal off Tape Lane to facilitate construction of the emergency access, as shown on the Parameters Plan (**Appendix 1**). Other access points would utilise existing field gates and gaps in the hedgerow where possible, minimising hedgerow loss. The localised hedgerow losses would represent a **negligible** magnitude of change and a **negligible** adverse effect.
- 4.15. Overall, the proposed development could bring about a notable increase in the quantity of trees within the site. The key areas of new planting, as illustrated on the Indicative Landscape Masterplan (**Appendix 3**) are likely to comprise:
 - Native woodland planting throughout the open space alongside the new development parcels, creating green infrastructure connections with existing mature woodland and trees,
 - A community orchard within the western area of open space adjacent to Lodge Road,

- Enhancement of existing site boundary trees through additional native tree planting,
- Avenue trees along the proposed main vehicular access road, tree lined streets and street trees within open space along the perimeter blocks.

- 4.16. It is assessed that the magnitude of change upon the tree resource would be **low**. This would translate to **moderate beneficial** effects on the tree resource within the site, with the potential realised as the trees mature further integrating the proposals into the surrounding landscape context.
- 4.17. Similarly, in addition to infilling gaps in existing hedgerows new hedgerows could be planted across the site to increase the diversity of the hedgerow resource whilst also defining the curtilages of properties. New hedgerows would help deliver local green networks that benefit amenity and biodiversity. On balance, given the outline stage and lack of detail on how planting may be delivered within the development plots, it is likely that the magnitude of change would be **low**, and this would translate to **minor beneficial** effects upon the hedgerow resource within the site.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW).

- 4.18. There is no existing PRoW within the site, and the full extent of the site is not accessible to the public. There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the immediate context of the site, however the Loddon Long Distance Path / Greenway Route passes the site to the west of Lodge Road.
- 4.19. The proposed network of pedestrian and cycle routes would have the potential to permeate through both the development parcels and areas of public open space to create an increase in recreational opportunities and links to established walking routes within the existing settlement. Circular footpath routes around the site perimeter could offer opportunities for informal recreation and connections to a play area and community orchard. The development could also deliver improvements or additions to existing footways along the roads adjacent to the site including to the B3030 Lodge Road and Tape Lane towards local convenience stores. Increasing access to public open space would also provide potential benefits for the wider community.
- 4.20. Effects upon the visual amenity of people using the existing PRoW in the wider landscape are assessed in Section 6 of this report.

5. Effects On Landscape Character.

- 5.1. This section seeks to establish how the proposals would have a bearing on landscape character locally. The effects on landscape character consider how the introduction of new landscape elements may physically alter the landform, landcover, landscape pattern, and perceptual attributes of the site, and/or how the visibility of the proposals could change the way in which landscape character is perceived. Landscape character is defined in GLVIA3 as the:

“Distinct and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.”

- 5.2. The landscape around the site has been subject to several separate landscape character assessments, undertaken at a range of different scales, these are:

- National Character Area (NCA): 115 Thames Valley’, and
- Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (2019)

National Character Area.

- 5.3. At the national level, England is divided into 159 National Character Areas (NCAs) defined by combinations of landscape character, biodiversity, and geology. The site is located to the western edge of NCA 115: ‘Thames Valley’, which extends across an extensive area from Reading in the west, to the western edge of London in the east and to Rickmansworth in the north.

- 5.4. Key characteristics of the NCA, relevant to the site and study area include:

- ***“Flat and low-lying land, rising to low, river-terraced hills, ...***
- ***The numerous hydrological features provide unity to an area which otherwise lacks homogeneity; these features include the River Thames and its tributaries, streams, lakes, canals and open waterbodies (the result of restored gravel workings)***
- ***Farming is limited. Where it survives, grazed pasture is the major land use within a generally open, flat and featureless landscape. The field pattern is medium-scale and irregular, with smaller fields to the west. Localised areas of species-rich hay meadows provide a splash of colour in summer.***
- ***Although densely populated and developed, pockets of woodland, open grassland, parkland, wetlands and intimate meadows provide escape and tranquillity, and include a variety of habitats supporting important populations of many species, ...***
- ***The area has an urban character, and there are very few villages of more traditional character...***
- ***The area is important for recreation, both for residents and visitors. Historic parkland and commons provide access to green space, the Thames Path National Trail runs the length of the NCA, and a variety of activities are enjoyed on the river and other waterbodies.”***

- 5.5. Landscape opportunities listed for the NCA which are considered relevant to the proposals include:

“...SEO 3: Maintain existing greenspace and plan for the creation of green infrastructure associated with the significant projected growth of urban areas, to reduce the impact of development, to help reduce flooding issues, and to strengthen access and recreation opportunities. Seek links from urban areas to wider recreation assets such as the Thames Path National Trail, National Cycle Routes, and the river and canal network, and promote the incorporation of best practice environmental measures into any new development.

SEO 4: ... restore and increase woodland for carbon sequestration, noise and pollution reduction, woodfuel and protection from soil erosion, while also enhancing biodiversity, sense of place and history...”.

- 5.6. The overall key characteristics and description of the NCA reveal a heavily urbanised, low-lying landscape reflective of the river Thames floodplain, interspersed with sites of importance for conservation and dissected by major transport links. This document is inevitably a high-level character assessment, which provides a useful overview by which to understand the character of the local and wider landscape and its surroundings.

Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (2019).

- 5.7. The Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (WLCA) forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Update, providing an objective description of the landscape to aid in decision-making and future landscape management strategies. The WLCA subdivides the Wokingham landscape into 14 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) which share broadly similar patterns of geology, topography, vegetation, and human influences. Each LCT is divided into more geographically specific Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) with shared generic characteristics but with its own identity. There are 28 separate LCAs identified within the borough.

- 5.8. As illustrated on **Figure 4**, the site is located within the ‘River Terrace’ LCT, and more specifically, within LCA C2: ‘Hurst River Terrace’. The ‘River Terrace’ LCT spreads vertically through the centre of the borough across two areas. It is described as:

“The LCT is distinguished by a flat landform of younger river terraces, close to the modern rivers. A semi-enclosed landscape of large-scale agricultural fields, divided by post and wire fencing or hedgerows, with settlement connections to the adjacent river.”

- 5.9. LCA C2: ‘Hurst River Terrace’ is summarised as:

“A relatively flat lowland agricultural landscape lying to the east of the floodplain of the River Loddon. Arable fields tend to be large, with areas of horse and pony grazing. The area has a strong connection to the river valley, with water-filled ditches and ponds throughout. A network of rural roads connects farms and the small settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst.

The Hurst River Terrace is defined to the west by the boundary with B1: Loddon River Valley with Open Water...”

- 5.10. ‘Relevant key characteristics for the Hurst River Terrace LCA include:

- ***“Flat lowland landscape with gently shelving slopes down to the Loddon River valley...”***
- ***Network of water features from minor drainage channels radiating into the Loddon Valley; deep drainage ditches around the fields; and scattered farm ponds.***

- *Simple agricultural landscape of mainly arable farmland, with pasture enclosed in relatively large straight-sided fields, including smaller areas of horse and pony paddocks.*
- *Open character with relatively few boundaries marked by vegetation. Hedgerow or roadside trees are relatively scarce and scattered.*
- *Villages located around historic cores including Whistley Green and Hurst, which has a Conservation Area. Newer linear development within these settlements is aligned along the network of roads and rural lanes. There is no strong local vernacular, although there are fine early buildings and building character is unified by the presence of red brick.*
- *Regular pattern of river terrace farmsteads along the rural lanes, some of which are listed. Many have large-scale modern agricultural buildings which are prominent in the landscape.*
- *A rural and tranquil area, with only southern edge affected by movement and noise of the M4 and its junction with the A329 (M) and crossed by pylons.*
- *Wooded horizons created by the wooded character of the adjoining Loddon valley..."*

5.11. Regarding 'Natural Landscape' the description includes:

"... a relatively flat lowland landscape above the Loddon Floodplain lying almost entirely at 40m AOD with gentle shelving slopes falling to the river valley below..."

... a network of formal ditches (that often follow the roads) designed to drain water into the Loddon river valley below ...

This area lacks woodland, but its verdant and open character is enhanced by the dark wooded horizons created by the adjacent LCAs. The openness is emphasised by the fragmented character of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

... predominantly agricultural and residential. The farmland is mixed, although arable dominates. The pastures support horses, sheep and cattle...

... large geometric fields of variable shape. These fields are mostly divided by post and wire fences with occasional stretches of metal estate rail and gates defining the edges of the pony paddocks. There are few boundaries marked by vegetation, although the infrequent lengths of hedgerow that have survived tend to be intact and comprise mechanically managed low flailed hawthorn monoculture hedge. Remnant hedgerow or roadside trees are sometimes present. Some property boundaries contain coniferous shelterbelt hedgerow plantations and there is often vegetation in gardens, which help to break up the landscape. However, generally the landscape appears to lack vegetation structure and is reliant upon hedgerows, trees, and woodland in the adjacent landscape types for definition..."

5.12. 'Valuable Landscape Attributes' include:

- *"Peaceful and open character of the undeveloped arable and pastoral landscape when removed from the intrusion of major roads to the south, which provides an escape in close proximity to the urban population.*

- *Rural settlement pattern of small villages with historic cores and farmsteads unified by the cohesive use of redbrick which provides a cultural record of the past and adds local distinctiveness.*
- *A network of narrow rural lanes with characteristic roadside ditches which contribute to scenic quality.*
- *Small wetland habitats, including drainage channels and numerous farm ponds which are valued for flora and fauna.*
- *Gently undulating terrace landform provides open and clear views to the wooded backdrop of the adjacent Loddon Valley."*

5.13. 'Landscape Condition' is described as:

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

5.14. 'Key Issues' relevant to the site and context include:

- *"...Hedgerow loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture...*
- *...Despite the presence of pasture there are no areas of species-rich grassland in this area due to increasingly intensive grassland management and conversion to arable land or pony grazing.*
- *Increasing pressure for horse/pony paddocks and grazing, particularly at settlement edges, leading to a decrease in rural intactness and affecting landscape condition.*
- *Drainage operations associated with development and agriculture affecting small wetland habitats.*
- *Demand for residential development increasing linear development along rural lanes and continuing to push towards the amalgamation of close settlements Whistley Green and Hurst impacting rural character. Incremental suburbanisation of buildings.*
- *Increasing traffic on rural lanes has led to creation of informal passing places and consequent demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes..."*

5.15. The following 'Landscape Strategy' is outlined for the LCA:

"... conserve and enhance the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape with its scattered rural farmsteads and small red brick villages connected by narrow rural lanes.

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

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

5.16. 'Landscape Guidelines' relevant to the site and proposed development include:

- *"Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to create a more wooded character and provide screening of the M4. Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.*
- *Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape. Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.*
- *Conserve and manage hedgerows and hedgerow trees as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstate or repair hedgerows and hedgerow trees with native species where there are opportunities to do so.*
- *Manage the integration of equine activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and hedgerow trees and control of associated built development.*
- *Conserve, enhance and manage wetland and resist infilling of ponds and drainage ditches due to development or changes in land use.*
- *Reinstate lost grassland habitats on pastoral land.*
- *Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of villages and dispersed farms through control of new development, avoiding further linear spread of development.*
- *Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.*
- *Conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the open landscape between adjacent village centres, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining between Hurst and Whistley Green.*
- *Conserve the scenic value and rural character of the villages and the listed and historic buildings throughout the area, including within Hurst Conservation Area.*
- *Avoid detracting tall or large structures as well as high plantings of coniferous hedges, which would be very prominent in this open area.*
- *Resist proposals that introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.*
- *Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways modifications, road widening, passing bays, infrastructure and signage.*

- *... Resist proposals that would impact on the intactness or integrity of the landscape or habitats.*
- *Maintain views to the wooded backdrop of the Loddon valley. Consider the impact of any development on the views to the wooded horizon. Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts, other vertical elements, and very large agricultural or domestic buildings which have the potential to be highly visible...*
- *Protect the strong perceptions of tranquility in the landscape, ensuring development and associated infrastructure does not spread onto the river terrace."*

Assessment of the Landscape Character of the site.

- 5.17. The site lies on the eastern edge of the village of Hurst and has no public access. The landcover comprises pastoral farmland currently grazed by horses, ponies and donkey's. The site is bordered by residential development to the east along Tape Lane and to the south along Martineau Lane. Immediately north of the site there are smaller agricultural fields including a private stable block and riding menage. The built-up edge of Whistley Green is set beyond the smaller agricultural fields, including recent residential development on Nursery Gardens. To the southwest of the site there are several dwellings on the Nursery Close cul-de-sac with larger detached properties accessed off the B3030 Lodge Road. The site is similar in character to other field parcels to the north, east and south of the village, which also include horse grazing and mature trees along field boundaries. To the west of the village beyond Lodge Road, the field parcels include a restored landfill site and are typically larger in scale with less tree cover.
- 5.18. The character of the site and local countryside is not of such value that it has warranted a statutory or non-statutory landscape designation, and the landscape has no features that would indicate a 'valued' landscape in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Paragraph 180(a)⁴. For these reasons, the site falls at the lower spectrum of the landscape value continuum, representing an area of pleasant, but unremarkable settlement edge landscape.
- 5.19. Paragraph 180 notes that the planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by **"...(a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes..."** in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the Development Plan with 180 b) stating: **"recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services (...) and of trees and woodland..."**. This is further clarified in Paragraph 181 of the NPPF, which states: **"Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites..."** therefore, clearly establishing the principle of hierarchy between designated and non-designated countryside. This is further reinforced by the Planning

⁴ In relation to the decision **APP/X0360/W/22/330920** that dismissed the appeal against a refusal for a larger quantum of housing on the Site, the Inspector agreed the site was not a valued landscape and stated at paragraph 49 that:

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

Practice Guidance (its section 'Natural Environment') which puts more emphasis on protected landscapes such as National Parks and National Landscapes (previously AONBs). The site clearly falls at the lower end of the spectrum, with the local landscape not being designated and not identified in the Local Plan as a non-statutory landscape designation. There are no development plan policies that would indicate the site has a special character, or value, in landscape character terms. It therefore transpires that the site should be considered against Paragraph 180 b) alone.

- 5.20. The following paragraphs analyse the site's landscape character, based on the field appraisal by Pegasus. The following section identifies the landscape value and landscape susceptibility of the site to residential development of the type proposed with reference to Box 5.1 of the GLVIA3, and Technical Guidance Note O2/21 prepared by the Landscape Institute.
- 5.21. The GLVIA3 clearly identifies a hierarchy of valued landscapes when discussing the level of importance which they signify. It clearly states that the value decreases from internationally valued landscapes such as World Heritage Sites to nationally valued landscapes such as National Parks and National Landscapes (AONBs), to locally valued landscapes: ***"...locally valued landscapes, for example, local authority landscape designations or, where these do not exist, landscapes assessed as being of equivalent value using clearly stated and recognised criteria..."*** The site and the surrounding landscape do not fall under any of the above categories.
- 5.22. There is no PRoW within the site, and beyond the site there is a low density of PRoW (see **Figure 2**). In terms of its recreational value, the site is privately owned and not accessible to the public. The topographical profile of the site and surrounding landscape combined with hedgerows and tree cover restricts opportunities to experience views towards the site. Views across the wider landscape towards the site are largely obscured due to the surrounding settlement edge, the mature trees along the site and surrounding field parcel boundaries and belts of mature trees along and adjacent to the route of Lodge Road.
- 5.23. Generally, the site does not contain many landscape features that would be considered rare or unique, however there are several large-stature, mature Oak trees (Grade A) predominantly located around the site boundary and many classed as 'High' Arboricultural value, and / or as veteran trees and protected by Tree Preservation Orders. Mature Oak trees are relatively common features in the local landscape, found along adjacent field boundaries and road network. All mature Oaks and veteran trees within the site would be retained, and development offset to avoid the root protection areas of the trees.
- 5.24. The site does not contain or adjoin any designated heritage or nature conservation assets, however the boundary of an 'Area of Special Character' (ASC) is located approximately 50m to the northeast of the site, broadly covering the built form associated with the central part of Whistley Green, along the A321 Broadwater Lane and the eastern edge of Hurst village. The ASC relates to Policy TB26 within the Wokingham MDD Local Plan (**see section 7**) and is broadly similar in nature to a Conservation Area as it forms an area or contains a group of buildings with a *'consistent period or character reflecting the areas past but where a Conservation Area designation may not be justified'* (Wokingham MDD 2014, para 3.126). The site is approximately 50m from the boundary of the ASC, and mature trees along the intervening field boundaries adjacent to the site, along the rear gardens of properties along Broadwater Lane and along the site's norther boundary, prevents any views of the site from the ASC. The site is not covered by any landscape conservation designations that would relate to ecology or biodiversity and any localised value restricted to its peripheral and internal field boundary vegetation. There are also no know cultural associations with the site or its immediate context that have been recorded in notable works of literature or art.
- 5.25. The levels of tranquillity and the perceptual aspects associated with the site are influenced by its well-enclosed nature associated with the mature trees along the boundary, and the

associated land use for grazing horses, providing a modest scenic value from the very localised publicly accessible locations close to the site boundary where parts of the Site are visible. The established residential development to the immediate east and south of the site, and the movement of vehicles along the B3030 Lodge Road and Tape Lane also influences the degree of tranquillity perceived across the site. The site and the immediate landscape context are relatively tranquil, as is typical of undeveloped land adjacent to a suburban settlement, however due the lack of public access to the site and limited public views this relative tranquillity has modest value. In addition, the site is connected on all sides to varying extents by residential curtilage and the local road network, and therefore could not be described as remote.

- 5.26. Based on the above analysis the value of the site is assessed as medium and the susceptibility of the site to the type of development proposed is assessed as medium, resulting in a **medium** overall sensitivity.

Effect on the Landscape Character of the Site and immediate context.

- 5.27. The immediate landscape context is influenced by the settlement edge character of Hurst and Whistley Green. The site itself forms an open area of land used for the grazing of horses, ponies and donkey's and contains some commonplace but valuable landscape features including high quality, large stature Oak trees with some veteran specimens. The enclosed nature of the site limits the extent from where the proposed development could influence the surrounding landscape context.
- 5.28. As part of the development proposals, the existing landscape features of value within the site would largely be retained, with no trees requiring removal and only small sections of low-value category C hedgerows to be removed to facilitate access. As part of the proposals, the retained vegetation and proposed trees, hedgerows and ornamental planting would be actively managed to create a pleasant and welcoming environment for the existing and proposed community. The new green infrastructure is likely to include a community orchard, native tree planting within the areas of public open space, and street tree planting. The proposed planting would over time aid in integrating the new built development into the receiving landscape, as well as further restricting visibility of new buildings from the limited and localised views available from the immediate settlement edge context.
- 5.29. The illustrative landscape strategy includes native tree planting, a community orchard, and extension to Tape Lane Allotments to enhance biodiversity and provide healthy food and recreational opportunities for the community. Reinforcing the site boundary vegetation with native infill hedgerow and tree planting, along with planting new hedgerows would respect and enhance the character of existing features of value within the site, helping to integrate the development into the landscape and existing settlement. The introduction of new wetland habitats with planting associated with the drainage swales and basins and areas of managed wildflower grassland would introduce new opportunities for biodiversity.
- 5.30. A large area (62%) of the site would be dedicated to public open space including green infrastructure elements. The remaining 38% of the site would cover new dwellings including private gardens, and the access road. The principal central area of open space (the 'Common') would retain a sense of openness across the site, reflective of the current site. The proposed public open space, including community orchard connected by new footpath routes, and reinforced perimeter hedgerows would enhance the structural vegetation whilst retaining the open character of the majority of the site.
- 5.31. The magnitude of change within the site, changing from open fields to housing, albeit within a well-considered Parameters Plan that would allow notable green infrastructure

enhancement, results in an overall **medium** magnitude of change and a **moderate** adverse effect upon baseline landscape character. It is also relevant to consider the effects of the proposed development upon the wider landscape character beyond the Site and the immediate context.

Effect on the Landscape Character of the wider countryside.

- 5.32. The Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (2019) identifies the site as lying within the “Hurst River Terrace” Landscape Character Area. The landscape is summarised as being in a ‘moderate condition’ with a ‘suburban character’. Key issues relevant to the site include the lack of species rich grassland and the use of land for pony grazing. The increase in linear development along rural lanes and the push towards the amalgamation of close settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst is cited.
- 5.33. The proposed development would comprise two distinct clusters of residential development at the northern and southern ends of the Site, with the central area remaining undeveloped. The new central ‘Common’ could comprise a species rich meadow, representing an enhanced landscape that could be appreciated and accessed by both new and existing residents. The majority of the site area would become publicly accessible open space and allotments. In addition to notable improvements to public access and recreation, there would also be appropriate enhancements to the key landscape character elements of the site including improvements to the structure of existing hedgerows.
- 5.34. Relevant published guidelines include reinstating grassland habitats on pastoral land, avoiding linear spread of development, conserving settlement identity including the sense of physical and visual separation, and maintaining and enhancing the character of rural lanes. Beyond the site, there would be no change to any of the listed key characteristics of the LCA, and opportunity to perceive indirect perceptual effects upon landscape character from lighting or increased traffic movements would be negligible. The effects upon visual amenity and longer-range views are set out in the following section 6 of the LVIA below.

6. Effects On Visual Amenity

Visual Envelope

- 6.1. The combination of flat landform, surrounding built development and mature vegetation create a visually contained site where there are limited opportunities for publicly accessible views. There are occasional partial views of the site through infrequent gaps in the hedgerow along Tape Lane to the east. There are also partially restricted views of the site from private properties, particularly the upper floors of dwellings facing on to Tape Lane, recognising that it is an established planning principle that there is no private right to a view. The proposed access location onto Lodge Road is enclosed by a mature hedgerow that follows the highway verge.

Baseline Visual Context

- 6.2. A selection of representative public viewpoints from all directions and distances from the site have been reviewed, with an emphasis on high sensitivity receptors including settlement edges and public rights of way (see **Figure 5: Viewpoint Location Plan**). A series of annotated photoviews from Viewpoints 1-11 are included at **Figure 6**.
- 6.3. Residential views have been assessed as part of the settlement edge where public access is available, however an individual assessment of the impact upon the views of all individual scattered dwellings with potential views of the proposed development does not form part of the scope of this assessment. It should be noted that it is an established planning principle that there is 'no private right to a view', and consequently if suitable privacy distances between existing properties and proposed development are maintained, any private views of new built development should not be a valid consideration in the determination of the planning application.

Distribution of available views

- 6.4. Publicly accessible views have been assessed as part of the settlement edge, however an individual assessment of the impact upon the private views of individual dwellings does not form part of the scope of this assessment. It should be noted that it is an established planning principle that there is no 'private right to a view', and consequently if suitable privacy distances between existing properties and proposed development are maintained, the impact upon any private views of new built development should not be a valid consideration in the determination of the planning application.
- 6.5. The site has a limited visual envelope due to surrounding built development to the immediate south and east along the settlement edge of Hurst, and from residential development within Whistley Green to the north. Mature hedgerow and tree cover also surrounds the site boundary and belts of mature trees along adjacent roads, further obscuring views into the site. Consequently there are a limited number of publicly accessible locations where views of the site are available. The proposed residential development up to two storeys high would have a localised visual envelope, with new built development typically being visible in the context of the existing village.
- 6.6. There are some very limited locations along the roads immediately adjacent to the site boundary, from where fleeting views of the site are possible, with the ground level of the site typically restricted by hedgerow planting. From various points along Tape Lane to the immediate east (**Viewpoints 1-5 & 7**) glimpses of the site ground level are confined to field access points and occasional gaps. To the immediate west, the B3030 Lodge Road (**Viewpoints 9 & 10**) tree and hedgerow planting along the curtilage of existing properties

and the mature hedgerow along Lodge Road, typically restricts oblique views in the direction of the site. A circa 100m length of the northwestern site boundary abuts Lodge Road, where a mature hedgerow restricts view into the site apart from a field access.

- 6.7. To the south of the site, there are a small number of locations where glimpsed and partial views of the site are possible, through gaps in the intervening properties along Martineau Lane. Partial views are possible from gaps in the trees along the southern edge of the site from Tape Lane Allotments (**Viewpoint 6**). Partial views between gaps in built form and through / above intervening vegetation are possible from the northernmost part of the public open space at Martineau Green (**Viewpoint 8**).
- 6.8. Apart from the immediate vicinity of the site there would be very limited opportunities for views of the proposed development from the surrounding landscape. To the north, views towards the site from the A321 Broadwater Lane are typically obscured due to the presence of built development on the southwestern side of the road, which combines with the screening afforded by the mature trees within gardens (**Viewpoint 11**). From other residential streets, existing built form along the southern settlement edge of Whistley Green prevents publicly accessible views of the site.
- 6.9. There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the immediate context of the site, however Loddon Long Distance Path passes the vicinity of the site, to the west of Lodge Road. There are no views currently possible from the route, due to the mature belts of woodland adjacent to the route through which the route passes. PRoW Footpath ref 'STNH30' traverses the low-lying landscape along the eastern edge of the river Loddon, however there are no views possible from the route due to the belts of mature trees adjacent to Lodge Road obscuring views of the site.

Visual Receptor Assessment

- 6.10. Based on the field assessment and the representative viewpoints shown on **Figure 5**, the following receptors have been identified where public views of the proposed development would be available, illustrated in the **Annotated Photoviews Nos. 1–11 (Figure 6)**.
- 6.11. **Table 2** below sets out the assessment of receptor sensitivity in accordance with the **Detailed Methodology** at **Appendix 2**.

Table 2: Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Receptor	Viewpoints	Value	Susceptibility to change	Sensitivity
Settlements & Places of Interest				
Hurst	1a,1b,2,3a,3b,4,5,6,7,8,9 & 10	Medium	Medium	Medium
Whistley Green	11	Medium	Medium	Medium
Public rights of way / Long-Distance Footpaths & Public Open Space				

Receptor	Viewpoints	Value	Susceptibility to change	Sensitivity
Users of Loddon Long Distance Path	–	Medium	High	High
Users of Tape Lane Allotments	6	Medium	Medium	Medium
Users of Martineau Green public open space	8	Medium	Medium	Medium
Highways				
Users of the B3030 Lodge Road	9 & 10	Medium	Medium	Medium
Users of Tape Lane	1a,1b,2,3a,3b,4,5 & 7	Medium	Medium	Medium
Users of the A321 Broadwater Lane	11	Medium	Medium	Medium

- 6.12. Based on the Detailed Methodology at **Appendix 2** and with reference to the annotated photoviews (**Figure 6**) Visualisations (**Appendix 4**) and field survey, **Table 3** below, sets out the assessment of the visual effects at Year 1 and Year 15 following construction. The assessment is based on the Parameters Plan at **Appendix 1**.

Table 3: Operational Effects on Views from Visual Receptor Groups

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Overall Effect
Settlement & Places of Interest			
Hurst (Viewpoints 1a, 1b, 2, 3a, 3b, 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8)	Medium	Year 1: From much of the village, views towards the site are restricted by the built form immediately adjacent to the site, and mature hedgerows along the site boundary. There would be occasional partially restricted views of new residential development most frequently from Tape Lane. Other views through gaps in built	Year 1: Moderate adverse

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Overall Effect
		form and/or partially restricted by planting include views to the south from Martineau Road, Martineau Green and Tape Lane Allotments. Whilst new built form would be experienced, open views across the central area of open space of the site would be retained from much of Tape Lane experienced in the context of housing on the edge of the village. The overall magnitude of change would be medium .	
		Year 15: Proposed reinforcement of existing perimeter vegetation and the likely inclusion of new tree planting adjacent to the new built development would reduce the visibility of new built development over time. The overall magnitude of change would be low .	Year 15: Minor adverse
Whistley Green (Viewpoint 11)	Medium	Year 1: There are very few publicly accessible parts of Whistley Green from where the proposed development would be visible. Fleeting glimpses of new built form may be possible through gaps in established housing along Broadwater Lane and Nursery Gardens. Views would be largely screened by the mature trees along the site boundary, and along the intervening field boundaries. Overall, the magnitude of change would be low .	Year 1: Minor adverse
		Year 15: The proposed native tree planting to the northern boundary will have established, to further obscure views of new built form from publicly accessible points within the settlement. The overall magnitude of change would be negligible .	Year 15: Negligible adverse
Public rights of way & Long-Distance Footpaths			
Users of Loddon Long Distance Path	High	Year 1: For most of the route, users experience no views towards the site due to the woodland and hedgerows adjacent to Lodge Road. For a short section of the route, it may be possible for glimpsed views of the new vehicular access point off Lodge Road through gaps in the intervening trees. The proposed new dwellings are to be set back from Lodge Road and due to intervening layers of existing vegetation are unlikely to be	Year 1: Negligible adverse

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Overall Effect
		perceptible, even in winter. The overall magnitude of change would be negligible .	
		Year 15: The establishment of the proposed new community orchard trees adjacent to Lodge Road, replacement hedgerow planting adjacent to the access point and avenue trees along the vehicular access and throughout the development would further obscure potential views of new built form. The overall magnitude of change would remain negligible .	Year 15: Negligible adverse
Users of Tape Lane Allotments (Viewpoints 6 & 7)	Medium	Year 1: Users of the allotments currently experience some open views across the site, through gaps in the trees along the site's southern boundary. Partial views of new built form would likely be possible from within the allotments, enclosing the view from some points. New built form would be offset from the boundary with the area of open space allocated to the extension of the allotments, and by the new tree planting between the allotments and proposed development edge. New built form would be seen within the context of existing properties visible from along Tape Lane, Martineau Lane and distant views of Whistley Green. The overall magnitude of change would be medium	Year 1: Moderate adverse
		Year 15: Tree planting between the extended allotment area and the new development edge would have established to soften and obscure views of new built form. The overall magnitude of change would be low .	Year 15: Minor adverse
Users of Public Open Space off Martineau Lane (Viewpoint 8)	Medium	Year 1: Existing built form along Martineau Road and mature trees within the open space and along the southern boundary of the Site, would obscure views of new built development from most locations across the area of open space. Glimpsed views of the southern edge of the new housing behind the allotment extension would be very localised and the overall magnitude of change would be low.	Year 1: Minor adverse

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Overall Effect
		Year 15: New tree and hedgerow planting along the new development edge would have established to soften and largely obscure views of new built form although the outline of new housing would be clear in winter. Localised glimpses of new development would be perceived in the context of existing housing adjacent to the open space. The magnitude of change would be negligible .	Year 15: Negligible adverse
Highways			
Users of the B3030 Lodge Road (Viewpoints 9 & 10)	Medium	Year 1: Mature hedgerows and trees alongside the road and within the curtilage of properties along the road, enclose the view towards the proposed development from much of the route with heavily filtered views likely in winter. Views of the new vehicular access off Lodge Road would be available for a localised section of the route (Viewpoint 9), immediately adjacent to the site and very fleeting oblique views of new housing across a field boundary gate, set behind existing planting (Viewpoint 10) The proposed new buildings would be barely perceptible from the route, even in winter, noting they would be set back within the site and typically, screened by multiple layers of existing trees within and adjacent to the site. Overall, the magnitude of change would be low .	Year 1: Minor adverse
		Year 15: Trees within the proposed new community orchard and new hedgerow and scrub planting adjacent to the road would have established, to screen views into the site (Viewpoint 9) and infill gaps in the existing hedgerow along the site boundary (Viewpoint 10). These measures would reinforce the rural character of the route and the new dwellings are unlikely to be perceptible to road users, even in winter. An overall negligible magnitude of change is predicted.	Year 15: Negligible adverse
Users of Tape Lane	Medium	Year 1: Users of Tape Lane currently experience very limited views into the site, restricted to locations where there are small gaps in the roadside hedgerow	Year 1: Moderate adverse

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Overall Effect
(Viewpoints 1a, 1b, 2, 3a, 3b, 4, 5 & 7)		including field access points. From the section of Tape Lane immediately adjacent to the site, views of new two-storey residential development would be perceptible set above the retained perimeter hedgerow, however this visibility, even in winter, would be limited by the set back of the development into the site and would be typically restricted to the upper floors and/or roofscape of the new housing. A sense of openness from the central section of Tape Lane would be retained where the route passes the central area of open space within the site. Overall, there would be a medium magnitude of change.	
		Year 15: Proposed planting including the reinforcement of roadside hedgerow planting, and new hedgerow and tree planting along the development edge would have established and would soften any localised views of new built form. The overall magnitude of change is anticipated to be low .	Year 15: Minor adverse
Users of the A321 Broadwater Lane (Viewpoint 11)	Medium	Year 1: Existing properties along the southwestern side of the road would obscure the view towards the site from the majority of the road. A single gap at a field access point offers a partially obscured view of the site (Viewpoint 11), however views of new built form would be largely obscured by mature trees in the gardens of properties along Broadwater Lane at this location, particularly when the trees are in leaf. The magnitude of change would be low .	Year 1: Minor adverse
		Year 15: New tree planting along the boundary of the proposed development would have established, further restricting the very fleeting views of new built form, even in winter. The magnitude of change would reduce to a negligible level.	Year 1: Negligible adverse

Summary of Visual Effects

- 6.13. Based on the Detailed Methodology at **Appendix 2** and with reference to the annotated photoviews (**Figure 6**) and field survey, **Table 4** below, sets out the assessment of the visual effects at Year 1 and Year 15 following construction. The assessment is based on the Illustrative Masterplan at **Appendix 1**, with the Year 15 assessment factoring in the growth of mitigation planting as illustrated on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan in **Appendix 3**.

Table 4: Summary of Effects upon Visual Receptor Groups

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Overall Effect
Settlement & Places of Interest			
Hurst (Viewpoints 1a, 1b, 2, 3a, 3b, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 &10)	Medium	Year 1: Medium	Year 1: Moderate adverse
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Minor adverse
Whistley Green (Viewpoint 11)	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor adverse
		Year 15: Negligible	Year 15: Negligible adverse
Public rights of way & Long-Distance Footpaths			
Users of proposed Loddon Long Distance Path	High	Year 1: Negligible	Year 1: Negligible adverse
		Year 15: Negligible	Year 15: Negligible adverse
Users of Tape Lane Allotments (Viewpoints 6 & 7)	Medium	Year 1: Medium	Year 1: Moderate adverse
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Minor adverse
Users of Public Open Space off Martineau Lane (Viewpoint 8)	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor adverse
		Year 15: Negligible	Year 15: Negligible adverse

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Overall Effect
Highways			
Users of the B3030 Lodge Road (Viewpoints 9 & 10)	Medium	Year 1: Medium	Year 1: Minor adverse
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Negligible adverse
Users of Tape Lane (Viewpoints 1a, 1b, 2, 3a, 3b, 4 & 5)	Medium	Year 1: Medium	Year 1: Moderate adverse
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Minor adverse
Users of the A321 Broadwater Lane (Viewpoint 11)	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 15: Minor adverse
		Year 15: Negligible	Year 15: Negligible adverse

7. Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

- 7.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a material consideration in planning decisions. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out at Paragraph 11. The NPPF sets out overarching objectives to achieve sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. For decision-taking, a development that accords with a current development plan should be approved without delay; and, where the development plan is absent, silent, or relevant policies are out of date, permission should be granted unless:

"i. The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. Any adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."

- 7.2. Footnote 7 outlines the protected areas or assets of particular importance to the NPPF policies (rather than those in development plans) which relate to:

- Habitat sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 187); and/or
- Designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- Land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast;
- Irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 72); and
- Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

- 7.3. The site and its immediate setting do not lie within any area designated for its landscape value. At Paragraph 8, criterion 'c' describes the 'environmental objective' to ***"protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy"***.

- 7.4. Paragraph 20 refers to strategic policies that should make sufficient provision for 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. Paragraph 135 relates to achieving well-designed places, criterion 'b' requires developments to be ***"visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping"***. Criterion 'c' also sets out to ensure that developments ***"are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)"***.

- 7.5. Para. 136 describes how trees make an ***"important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change."*** It states how ***"new streets [should be] tree-lined"***, and ***"that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards),"***

that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible". In relation to the proposed development whilst as an outline planning application, landscape matters are reserved, the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan indicates that tree-lined streets including along the main access road and internal main streets could be delivered.

- 7.6. Section 15: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment specifies how planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Paragraph 180a states that protection and enhancement of **"valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils"** should be **"in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan"**. It also notes that the **"intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services"** should be recognised. As set out in the baseline section of this report it is not considered that the site is located within a valued landscape.
- 7.7. Paragraph 181 makes it clear that there is a hierarchy to the importance and value attributed to landscapes, and that the development plan should identify the quality of particular landscapes that are not subject to statutory protection. Para. 182 describes how the **"scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas"**. The proposed development is not in a designated area.
- 7.8. Within Section 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, Paragraph 196 states how local authorities should take into account amongst other things, **"the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness"**. The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (**Appendix 3**) and Design and Access Statement that accompanies the application illustrate the potential for the proposed development to make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework

- 7.9. The main documents which form the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework include the Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document adopted on the 29th January 2010, and the Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan adopted on the 21st February 2014.

Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2010)

- 7.10. The Core Strategy policies which are of relevance to the proposed development, or to landscape and visual matters include:

CP1 – 'Sustainable development'

- 7.11. The policy includes:

"Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that:

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

The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (**Appendix 3**) and Design and Access Statement that accompanies the application illustrate the potential for the proposed development to maintain and enhance the high quality of the environment.

CP3 – 'General Principles for development'

7.12. The policy includes:

“Planning permission will be granted for proposals that:

a) Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life;...The Design and Access Statement illustrates how the proposed development parameters would be appropriate to the local area, including the maintenance of appropriate privacy distances to adjoining land users.

c) Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses. The Parameters Plan indicates the retention of important trees, the majority of which are covered by Tree Preservation Orders. The majority of the Site area would be retained as open space including an enhanced central ‘Common’ area with public access, noting the site is currently not accessible to the public.

d) Maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species...The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (Appendix 3) demonstrates that it is possible to deliver both biodiversity and amenity enhancements.

f) Contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping; The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (Appendix 3) and Design and Access Statement illustrate how the development would respect the surrounding character of both built form and open space, retaining a large central area of open space and enhancing it with public access and peripheral tree and shrub planting..

g) Provide for a framework of open space in secure community use achieving at least 4.65 ha/1,000 population provision together with recreational/sporting facilities in addition to private amenity space; The Design and Access Statement illustrates how an appropriate quantum of public open space and associated facilities including play areas are provided.

h) Contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities... The Design and Access Statement illustrates how new footpath linkages across the site and provision of a new footway along Lodge Road would assist in providing connections to existing community facilities and would also provide linkages to facilities on site including the community orchard, allotments and play area.

CP7 – ‘Biodiversity’

7.13. This policy relates to sites of importance for nature conservation, but is also relevant due to the presence of veteran trees within the site, The policy states:

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

Development:

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

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

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

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

or

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

The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (**Appendix 3**), Design and Access Statement and Ecology report that accompany the application demonstrate how the proposed development could comply with this policy.

CP11 – 'Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)'

7.14. The policy includes:

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

1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and

2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings..."

The proposed development is assessed to broadly comply with this policy as whilst housing is clearly not a 'rural enterprise', the site is currently not publicly accessible, and the majority of the Site is proposed as public open space (shown on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan as an open 'Common' landscape). Furthermore, the quantum of new development and it's peripheral location close to the existing settlement edge would not constitute excessive encroachment

Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014)

7.15. The following policies are of relevance to the site, the proposed development and landscape and visual matters:

Policy CC03- 'Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping'

7.16. The policy states:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Development proposals within the River Valley areas shall improve or contribute toward:

a) The establishment of a Loddon/ Blackwater riverside footpath and bridleway, as defined on the Policies Map, to accommodate dual use

b) The establishment of a riverside footpath and cycleway to accommodate dual use along the Emm Brook

c) Opportunities for improvements to green infrastructure to help minimise flood risk".

The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (**Appendix 3**) and Design and Access Statement demonstrate how the proposed development could comply with this policy.

Policy TB21 – 'Landscape Character'

7.17. The policy states:

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

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

The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (**Appendix 3**) and Design and Access Statement demonstrate how the proposed development could comply with this policy.

Policy TB23 – 'Biodiversity and Development'

7.18. The policy includes:

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

- a) Provide opportunities, including through design, layout and landscaping to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing***
- b) Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation***
- c) Ensure that all existing and new developments are ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network."***

The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (**Appendix 3**), Design and Access Statement and Ecology report that accompany the application demonstrate how the proposed development could comply with this policy.

Policy TB26 – 'Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character'

7.19. The policy states:

- "1. Areas of Special Character are shown on the Policies Map.***
- 2. Planning permission will only be granted for proposals to or affecting Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character where they demonstrate that they retain and enhance the traditional, historical, local and special character of the building or area and its setting.***
- 3. Proposals that involve the demolition of a Building of Traditional Local Character will require strong justification."***

The Proposed Development would have no impact on either Buildings of Traditional Local Character or Areas of Special Character.

7.20. Other more generic policies apply to most types of development and expand on principles set out in the Core Strategy, or broadly relate to residential development, including:

- Policy CC01 – 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development'
- Policy CC02 – 'Development Limits'
- Policy CC10 – 'Sustainable Drainage'
- Policy TB08 – 'Open Space, sport and recreational facilities standards for residential development'

Wokingham Borough Council Borough Design Guide SPD (2012)

7.21. The Wokingham Borough Council Borough Design Guide aims to enhance the quality of proposed new developments by setting out a series of design principles. These principles include areas such as, environmental sustainability, local settlement and countryside character, residential character and context, open space and landscape, design of streets and spaces and more.

'A Design for Hurst' Village Design Statement (2005)

7.22. This document aims to provide a context for new development in the parish, by identifying and analysing local character and outlining guidelines for the design of future development.

7.23. Design and development aspirations and guidance within the document which relate to the proposed development, and in particular those relating to implementing successful open space include:

- *“The open views and vistas need to be retained as far as possible.*
- *...protect and maintain the existing pattern of hedges and trees, ponds and streams in, around and between the agricultural fields...*
- *External lighting installations on private land and buildings need to be sensitive to the rural aspects of the parish and minimise levels of light pollution.*
- *Trees are a vital element to the character of Hurst; future developments need to consider whether adequate space has been allowed for the growth of trees to maturity...*
- *Consideration should be given to existing wildlife corridors, and where appropriate create new ones.*
- *Access to open spaces and views of and from them to be retained...*
- *Consider all opportunities to extend or add to existing public spaces.*
- *Enhance pedestrian access to Dinton Pastures and the River Loddon by the provision of new public footpaths linking them to the village and the rest of the network.*
- *Improved and new footpaths and bridleways in keeping with the rural nature of the Parish, in particular, extending the footpaths to enable safe pedestrian access between the village centre and the Church, and between Dinton Pastures and the River Loddon, are viewed as highly desirable subject for suitable funding...*
- *Where existing development is substantially along one side of the road only, new development on the opposite side needs to be assessed to ensure the essential character of the area is not adversely affected...*
- *Every encouragement should be given to the maintenance and replanting of existing and new hedgerows.*
- *It is desirable that native trees and hedges are planted in association with any new development to aid the constant renewal of the landscape...*
- *The rural nature of the Parish dictates that soft boundary treatment is usually the most desirable, particularly the area fronting a road.*
- *The character and housing density of the surrounding area is an important factor in considering the impact of new development on its surroundings...*
- *New buildings need to reflect the proportions of those nearby. The visual impact of new buildings is important. Careful consideration needs to be given to the suitability of location, density, setting, grouping, use, and the effect on the character of the area...”.*

The Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (**Appendix 3**) and Design and Access Statement that accompany the application demonstrate how the proposed development could comply with this policy.

8. Summary and Conclusions

- 8.1. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was prepared following best practice guidance, in support of an outline planning application for up to 99 residential units on a 10.68ha site at Land East of Lodge Road, Hurst. Whistley Green is a small village to the north of the site, which historically developed along the A321 Broadwater Lane and coalesces with Hurst following the post-war construction of dwellings along Tape Lane.
- 8.2. The site is located at the northwestern edge of the village and comprises a single field bounded by hedgerows and trees, currently used for the grazing of horses, ponies and donkey's.
- 8.3. The site is bordered by existing residential development to varying degrees. The eastern site boundary is flanked by Tape Lane, with residential properties typically fronting on to the road facing the site. Residential properties along Martineau Lane and Nursery Close back on to the site's southern boundary, with Tape Lane Allotments and rear gardens of dwellings adjacent to the site's southeastern boundary. To the north there are several small to medium sized fields and paddocks used for equestrian grazing with outbuildings and an outdoor riding menage, which separate the site from existing residential properties at the southern edge of Whistley Green. Lodge Road to the west, would accommodate the main vehicular access connection to the site and the road corridor is flanked by mature hedgerows and belts of trees. Additional enclosure to the site from Lodge Road is provided by mature trees within the curtilage of Poole House, located between Lodge Road and the site.
- 8.4. The site itself is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape protection designations and no other environmental designations are present, however many of the trees within the site are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). There are no Listed Buildings or structures on, or immediately adjoining the site, however there are several Grade II listed buildings along Broadwater Lane to the north. Hurst Conservation Area contains several Grade II listed buildings, along with the Grade I listed Church of St Nicholas off Church Hill approximately 540m to the south of the site. Due to the intervening built form associated with the southern part of the village and mature trees within fields and along intervening roads, there is no intervisibility of the site with the conservation area. There are no public rights of way within or immediately adjacent to the site, and there is no public access permitted within the site.
- 8.5. The site and the adjoining settlement of Hurst are located upon a relatively low-lying landscape set beyond the floodplain of the River Loddon to the west. (**Figure 3: Topography Plan**). The site is located on land at approximately 38m AOD, with the landform rising very slightly to the east towards Hurst, where beyond the site boundary, it reaches approximately 42m AOD. The highest point of the village is associated with the conservation area at Church Hill, at around 46m AOD. The iterative design of the scheme has been landscape-led and as such, the development proposals could include several new landscape features which are locally appropriate, such as hedgerow improvements, a wildflower meadow across a central 'Common', a community orchard, naturalistic play area and new public access across the site which together could provide increased opportunities for biodiversity, improved pedestrian permeability for both the new residents and wider existing community.
- 8.6. The assessment concludes that there would be a **moderate adverse** effect on landcover from the loss of pastoral farmland to new residential development and a **minor adverse** effect upon topography where the landform would be largely retained at existing levels. No existing trees would be lost, and localised sections of hedgerows would be removed to accommodate pedestrian and vehicular access. They would be a notable quantity of new tree planting comprising a community orchard, a belts of native tree planting, and tree lined streets with further tree planting along the perimeter of the site. There would be the potential

for **moderate beneficial** effects upon the tree resource within the site and the potential for **minor beneficial** effects upon hedgerows.

- 8.7. The proposed network of pedestrian and cycle routes would have the potential to permeate through both the development parcels and areas of public open space to create an increase in recreational opportunities and links to established walking routes within the existing settlement. Circular footpath routes around the site perimeter could offer opportunities for informal recreation and connections to a play area and community orchard. The development could also deliver improvements or additions to existing footways along the roads adjacent to the site including to the B3030 Lodge Road and Tape Lane towards local convenience stores. Increasing access to public open space would also provide potential benefits for the wider community.
- 8.8. The baseline landscape character has been considered with reference to National Character Area 61, and Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (2019) identifies the site as lying within the "Hurst River Terrace" Landscape Character Area. The landscape is summarised as being in a 'moderate condition' with a 'suburban character'. Key issues relevant to the site include the lack of species rich grassland and the use of land for pony grazing. The increase in linear development along rural lanes and the push towards the amalgamation of close settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst is cited.
- 8.9. Pegasus Group assessed the site against the published criteria and concluded that the landscape character of the site has a medium overall sensitivity to the type of development proposed. This conclusion was reached following reference to Box 5.1 of the GLVIA3, and Technical Guidance Note O2/21 prepared by the Landscape Institute.
- 8.10. Relevant published guidelines from the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (2019) applicable to the Site within the "Hurst River Terrace" Landscape Character Area, include reinstating grassland habitats on pastoral land, avoiding linear spread of development, conserving settlement identity including the sense of physical and visual separation, and maintaining and enhancing the character of rural lanes. Beyond the site, there would be no change to any of the listed key characteristics of the LCA, and opportunity to perceive indirect perceptual effects upon landscape character from lighting or increased traffic movements would be negligible.
- 8.11. The magnitude of change within the site, changing from open fields to a housing estate at the northern and southern ends of the site has been assessed in the context, of a Parameters Plan that would allow notable green infrastructure enhancement. It is assessed that there would be an overall medium magnitude of change and a moderate adverse effect upon baseline landscape character.
- 8.12. Beyond the site, there would be no change to any of the listed key characteristics of the "Hurst River Terrace" LCA, Beyond the immediate vicinity of the site, the opportunity to perceive indirect perceptual effects upon landscape character from lighting or increased traffic movements would be negligible.
- 8.13. It is an established planning principle that there is 'no private right to a view', and consequently if suitable privacy distances between existing properties and proposed development are maintained, any private views of new built development should not be a valid consideration in the determination of the planning application.
- 8.14. The site has a very limited visual envelope due to surrounding built form, mature hedgerow and tree cover with, a low-lying, flat landform resulting in a limited number of publicly accessible locations where views towards the site are available. The proposed residential development up to two storeys high would have a localised visual envelope, with new built development typically being visible in the context of the existing village.

- 8.15. The visual impact assessment concludes that initial changes to visual amenity would be moderate adverse from the western edge of the village of Hurst, reducing to a minor adverse effect at Year 15 following the growth of mitigation planting. A minor adverse effect is predicted from Whistley Green at Year 1, reducing to a negligible effect at Year 15. The effect upon views from Tape Lane Allotments would be Moderate adverse at year 1, and Minor adverse at year 15.
- 8.16. Users of the Public Open Space off Martineau Lane, would experience minor adverse effects at Year 1, reducing to a negligible effect by year 15 following the growth of the proposed tree and hedgerow planting along the southern edge of the new development. Users of the proposed Loddon Long Distance Path are predicted to experience negligible adverse effects due to mature intervening tree screening.
- 8.17. The visual impact upon road users close to the site, including localised sections of Tape Lane, as reported under the settlement edge of Hurst, would be Moderate adverse at Year 1, reducing to a minor adverse effect at Year 15 following the growth of perimeter hedgerow and tree planting. Fleeting views experienced by users of other road routes, including Lodge Road, would experience minor adverse effects initially, reducing to a negligible adverse effect upon the growth of mitigation planting.
- 8.18. A review of the NPPF and the Wokingham Borough Development Plan indicates that the proposed development has the potential to comply with the relevant landscape planning policies. This has been achieved by the adoption of a landscape led approach to the Parameters Plan that could be delivered as set out in the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan. The approach has minimised adverse effects upon visual amenity and existing landscape features, whilst providing landscape elements and features for the benefit of both the existing and proposed community that could include a community orchard, large wildflower meadow as part of the central common, naturalistic play space and an extension to the existing allotments. It is concluded that the proposals would respect the surrounding landscape context and relationship to the existing village edge of both Hurst and Whistley Green.
- 8.19. Overall it is considered that the receiving landscape has the capacity to accommodate the proposed development without causing unacceptable harm to the existing landscape and visual resource.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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