

LAND AT STANBURY HOUSE, SPENCERS WOOD

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

for
Cooper Estates Strategic Land Limited.

March 2025

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I INTRODUCTION

I.1 REASON FOR ASSESSMENT

- I.1.1 This document addresses the likely Landscape and Visual effects of a proposed housing development for up to 63 new homes on land to the west of Stanbury House in Spencer’s Wood, Berkshire. It has been undertaken for Cooper Estates Strategic Land Limited (CESL) and forms part of the documentation associated with an Outline Planning Application with all matters reserved for future detailed consideration other than access to the Site, and has been prepared by Indigo Landscape Architects Ltd.
- I.1.2 It is important to note, however, that following a previous application and series of appeals the land immediately to the east of the Site (fronting onto the Basingstoke Road) gained permission for the development of up to 57 new homes and has now been built out;¹ and that a full Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has previously been produced for this development which has been subjected to rigorous scrutiny under the appeal process.
- I.1.3 The adjacent 57 Unit development therefore forms the baseline for this assessment.
- I.1.4 It is also important to note that permission also exists for an area Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) on the land to the west of the Site which has also now been built out.²

I.2 AIM

- I.2.1 The purpose of this assessment is to outline the aims and methods of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA); to detail the process of assessment according to accepted guidance in the field; and to apply this approach to the proposals on the Application Site.
- I.2.2 The assessment itself has the following objectives:
- i. To identify the existing significant landscape features and the landscape quality both of the Application Site and the surrounding Study Area.
 - ii. To assess the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposals taking account of any mitigation proposed.
- I.2.3 The approach to the assessment has therefore involved:
- i. Recording and analysis of the key components of the landscape which contribute to overall landscape character, and of the visual baseline associated with the Site and surrounding area through desk-based study and field appraisal;
 - ii. An evaluation of the sensitivity of the existing landscape, and of visual receptors likely to be affected by the proposed development;
 - iii. Appreciation of the nature, form, scale and materials associated with the development, including mitigation measures proposed; and,
 - iv. An assessment of the magnitude of effect and its potential for significance as a result of the implementation of the proposed development.

¹ Appeal ref APP/X0360/W/15/3097721 dated 20th June 2016 and redetermination decision dated 18th September 2018.

² Extant SANG reference 192884.

I.3 BASIS OF ASSESSMENT

- I.3.1 This planning application is not the subject of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- I.3.2 It is instead, an Outline Application for a proposed residential development where overall effects are likely to be restricted to a limited area of the surrounding landscape. The report therefore recognizes the need for proportionality,³ and this has guided the scope of the Appraisal.
- I.3.3 It is also essential to understand that the assessments made are based purely on the information contained within the parameters outlined in the description of development (Section 5), as these will be the only fixed elements of this Outline Planning Application. Taking this approach provides an assessment of the essential basis of the scheme, rather than details which may or may not be built in the future, and means the assessment remains relevant at a future point as long as these parameters are adhered to. It also means that the worst-case scenario has been assessed (for example heights of buildings assume the worst case (two storey throughout the development) whereas at the detailed planning stage some buildings may be reduced in height to 1.5 storey with dormer windows to provide architectural and visual interest within the scheme).
- I.3.1 It is also important to understand that both the Landscape and Visual assessments undertaken have been prepared using a methodology which (partly as a consequence of the limited parameters provided) deliberately avoids forming a significant opinion on the merits of the architecture proposed. The assessment methodology is designed to make the assessment process as objective as possible. The impacts of built form (size, shape, materials etc.) are considered, but a judgement of design quality does not form part of this assessment.
- I.3.2 It is also essential to understand that in landscape character terms, the consideration of effects does not focus on the Site alone. Instead it focuses on the effects of the proposed development on the character of the landscape surrounding the Site. Whilst the Site itself forms part of the baseline and the effects on the Site form part of the consideration of effects, the question that is asked is not simply “would the landscape character of the Site itself change as a result of the proposals”, but “would the character of the landscape resource as a whole change as a result of the proposals and do the changes affect the integrity of the wider setting or are they largely in keeping with the existing landscape despite the changes that occur”.
- I.3.3 Finally, it is important to bear in mind that some landscape and visual effects are an almost inevitable consequence of development. It is up to the decision makers (in this case Wokingham District Council’s Planning Department) to consider any adverse effects identified in the context of beneficial effects that may also exist in other areas (such as the provision of much needed housing) and to strike a balance in making a decision on the application.

³ GLVIA 3 - Paragraphs 3.16 and 6.2.

2 SCOPE

2.1 GUIDANCE AND TERMINOLOGY

- 2.1.1 The methodology, guidelines and terminology used in the preparation of this Appraisal have been developed from the following:
- i. ‘Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition’ (GLVIA3) published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and which came into force on the 17th April 2013;
 - ii. The Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note LITGN-2024-01 (published in August 2024) which provides a compilation of clarifications on GLVIA3;
 - iii. ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’, Natural England, 2014; and
 - iv. ‘The Setting of Heritage Assets’, Historic England, 2017.
- 2.1.2 Consideration has also been given to Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21, ‘Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations’.
- 2.1.3 All photographs have been taken and presented in accordance with the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 06/19 “Visual Representation of Development Proposals”.
- 2.1.4 The generic title of the process followed is Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. The term ‘impact’ in this context is often seen as interchangeable with the term ‘effect’ and there may be circumstances in which the terms ‘impact and effect’ are interchangeable, however, GLVIA3 defines impact as ‘the action being taken’, and effect as ‘the change resulting from that action’ and these definitions have been followed throughout this assessment. Put simply, ‘impacts’ have an ‘effect’.
- 2.1.5 For the avoidance of doubt:
- ‘Km’ means kilometre/s; ‘m’ means metre/s.
 - All distances are approximate.
 - All references to points of the compass are generalised and are used for descriptive purposes only.
 - ‘Site’ refers to the Application Site within the boundary shown on the Indicative Masterplan drawing (number 1070-MP-01), a copy of which is contained within Appendix 7 to this document.

2.2 IDENTIFICATION OF THE PRELIMINARY STUDY AREA

- 2.2.1 The preliminary study area for this assessment was centred on the Site and included all areas within a 5km radius where the Proposed Development could potentially have an effect on landscape / townscape character and visual amenity, taking into account topography and significant areas of built form and vegetation.

2.3 SITE SURVEY WORK

- 2.3.1 The identification of the preliminary study area was followed up with detailed field survey work which was most recently undertaken on the 19th and 27th of February 2025 (refer to photographs in Appendix 6). Weather conditions were dry with clear visibility.⁴

- 2.3.2 Representative photographs were taken at viewpoints chosen to demonstrate the visibility of the Site in the surrounding landscape. Where many similar viewpoints were available, photographs were taken at the location where the Site is most visible.
- 2.3.3 Photographs were taken with a Nikon D3500 or D3400 digital SLR camera with a fixed 35mm focal length lens and presented using a 1.5x multiplication factor to give the equivalent of 52.5mm. They are intended to be viewed digitally and replicate a normal eye level view at 1.6 metres above ground level.⁵
- 2.3.4 The fieldwork undertaken has enabled the estimated Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) to be established (refer to Section 4.3); and this in turn has guided the detailed Study Area for the landscape baseline study.

2.4 SCOPE OF THE APPRAISAL

- 2.4.1 No scoping exercise has been undertaken with the Council. Instead the scope of this assessment has been based on the scope of works undertaken for the assessment undertaken between August 2013 and September 2014. It therefore takes account of comments made by the Council at that time (and raised at the subsequent appeal), and includes night-time assessments; construction period assessments, assessment of visual effects on receptors in private properties, and the need to consider viewpoints around Grazeley and Poundgreen.⁶

⁴ Indigo have worked on this site and the adjacent 57 unit site for approximately 10 years and this has included numerous site visits in both summer and winter to undertake fieldwork over this period. The most recent fieldwork was undertaken in February 2025 to check on any changes to the Site and surrounding area, and to update viewpoint photographs.

⁵ Note: Refer to Appendix 11 for technical details.

⁶ The consideration of cumulative effects in conjunction with the South of M4 SDL is now included within the main assessment (rather than within a separate section in this Appraisal) as the majority of the SDL has now been built and it therefore forms part of the baseline.

3 **METHODOLOGY, ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF ASSESSMENT**

3.1 **PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT**

3.1.1 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is a process where the features and qualities of the Application Site and surrounding landscape / townscape are examined, the Proposed Development is set out, and assessments are undertaken through a process that considers sensitivity of each “receptor” and the magnitude of change to determine the level (sometimes referred to as significance) of effect.

Sensitivity x magnitude = level of effect

3.1.2 Landscape / townscape assessment is distinctly separate from the process of visual assessment:

- **Landscape / townscape** effects are concerned with changes to the physical landscape, including the effects these changes have on its character as a whole and on the individual elements contributing to this character. “Receptors” can therefore include physical influences (for example vegetation or water bodies); influences of human activity (for example land use or the character of buildings / built form); or aesthetic and perceptual factors (for example tranquillity or wildness); all of which contribute to overall landscape character.
- **Visual effects** are the effects on “receptors” of changes (resulting from development) in the character of available views. In this case the “receptors” are people experiencing the view such as users of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) or occupants of residential properties.

3.1.3 Detailed methodologies for each are contained within Appendix 1 (Visual) and Appendix 2 (Landscape), and the results of the assessments are presented within Appendices 4 and 5 respectively.

3.2 **ASSUMPTIONS MADE**

3.2.1 In undertaking both the landscape and visual assessments, certain assumptions are made regarding the development. In this case these have included building heights, finished floor levels, construction phase assumptions, and plant growth rates.

3.2.2 In the case of building heights, it has been assumed that two storey buildings measure approximately 5.65m from ground level to eaves, and 8m to the ridge, and garages are single storey, measuring up to 4.5m in height.

3.2.3 In the case of building finished floor levels; these have been assumed to be 150mm above the existing ground levels in the location that each building is found on the survey.

3.2.4 In terms of construction it has been assumed that a tower crane would not be necessary and there would be no night time working (between approximately 6pm and 8am). Effects of lighting during the construction phase would therefore be limited to a few hours at either end of the day in winter.

3.2.5 With respect to plant growth rates, it has been assumed that plant growth and maintenance heights would be as follows:⁷

- Native hedge planting within the adjacent SANG land and along parts of the western, and northern boundaries would be:
 - 0.8 to 1.0m tall in year 1, planted in 3 staggered rows as transplants at 6 per linear metre.
 - Well established as a fairly solid hedge in year 7 – maintained at 2m height unless detailed otherwise.
 - Fully established as a solid hedge in year 15 – heights as above.

- Scrub planting within the adjacent SANG land would be:
 - 0.5 to 0.8m tall in year 1 (as existing).
 - Well established as fairly solid areas of scrub in year 7 – between 1.5m and 2.5m in height.
 - Fully established as solid areas of scrub in year 15 – between 2m and 3m in height.
- Native woodland mix planting within the adjacent SANG land would be:
 - 0.5 to 0.8m tall in year 1 with occasional standard trees up to about 3m in height (as existing).
 - Well established as woodland in year 7, forming a solid visual barrier at ground level in summer and good filtering to full screening of views in winter (depending on the depth of planting) – heights likely to vary between 3.5 and 5m. Plants to be allowed to grow to natural shape.
 - Fully established as woodland in year 15, forming a solid visual barrier at ground level in summer and good filtering to full screening of views in winter (depending on the depth of planting) – heights likely to vary between 6.5 and 9m. Plants to be allowed to grow to natural shape.
- Tree planting in gardens and within the public areas (Extra Heavy Standard, Advanced Nursery Stock and Semi-Mature specimens) would be:
 - 4.5 – 6m tall in year 1.
 - 6 – 8 m tall in year 7.
 - 7 – 10m tall in year 15.

3.2.6 It should be noted, however, that tree heights would vary with species and are made on the assumption that planting and maintenance (watering etc) is to a high specification and that shocks to plant physiology (drought etc) are avoided. For example, in these conditions a semi-mature oak tree planted at 5m in height is likely to reach over 6m by year 7, and around 7.5m by year 15, whilst the equivalent aged sweet chestnut planted at 6.5m in height may reach 8m by year 7 and 10m by year 15.

3.2.7 Finally, it should also be noted that with the exception of the recent planting undertaken on the adjacent SANG land (see above), for the assessments made in years 7 and 15 it has been assumed that there will be no significant change (growth or loss) in offsite / foreground vegetation.

3.3 **LIMITATIONS OF ASSESSMENT**

3.3.1 The assessment undertaken is based on certain assumptions and therefore has certain limitations. Whilst the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) calls for assessments to be appropriate and proportionate to the nature of the development proposed these limitations should be recorded. For this study these have been identified as follows:

- The assessment only assesses effects on visual receptors on publicly accessible land and from private residences (estimated) – Whilst this is entirely normal it should be noted that visual effects from locations on surrounding fields are not covered.
- No photomontages or other forms of visualisation have been used in the assessments undertaken.
- Demolition phase assessments and decommissioning phase assessments have not been undertaken.

⁷ For further details of planting refer to Section 5 below.

- iv. This is an Outline Application. The proposals for the development therefore show the intention regarding the design of the Site, including landscape, however, proposals are not absolute and will be subject to further detailed design. For example, although generic materials are given in Section 5 below, exact details of the proposed materials / colours were not known at the time of undertaking the assessments and no detailed planting proposals were included within the information on which this assessment is based. Assessments have therefore been based on the information available (as set out in Section 5 of this document).
- v. No visual survey work was undertaken from the Basingstoke to Reading railway line which runs through the lower lying land to the west of the A33: and no survey work has been undertaken at night. Night time assessments are based on professional judgement using knowledge gained from day-time site survey work.
- vi. As set out in Appendix I, the visibility of the Site from private viewpoints has been estimated both by looking towards the Site from public areas, and by standing on Site and looking outwards. No attempt has been made to access private property for more detailed assessment.
- vii. Similarly, for the purposes of the visual assessment “Construction” includes the period when any construction is visible in the view. It assumes that from a viewpoint construction plant, scaffolding and part completed buildings would be fully visible in the area of Site closest / most obvious to the viewpoint and takes no account of the fact that the impact of these elements would vary during the construction period.
- viii. As set out above, with the exception of the newly planted SANG, for the visual assessments made in the medium to longer term (years 7 and 15) it has been assumed that there would be no significant change (growth or loss) in offsite / foreground vegetation.
- ix. Finally, whilst the estimated Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) is mapped to a good degree of accuracy and takes into consideration the screening effects of topography, built form and significant areas of vegetation as noted from site work, it should be understood that there will still be locations within the mapped ZVI where the complexity of landscape (such as intervening vegetation / buildings) or lack of public access makes it impossible reasonably to determine the exact visibility of the Proposed Development. In reality there will be some areas within the mapped ZVI where the proposed development will not be visible, and there may also be some un-mapped areas where glimpses of the development would exist.

4 **BASELINE STUDY**

4.1 **INTRODUCTION**

- 4.1.1 This section brings together the various elements that together make up the baseline study associated with the development.
- 4.1.2 It includes the site location (including a brief description of the Site); the Zone of Visual Influence (which in turn broadly determines the detailed Study Area for the landscape baseline); the environmental baseline (contained within Appendix 5) which covers physical influences, influences of human activity and aesthetic and perceptual factors associated with the landscape; designations and Planning policies relevant to the Study Area; a review of existing Landscape Character Assessments; and a review of other relevant documents.

4.2 **SITE LOCATION** (refer to the Indicative Masterplan in Appendix 7)

- 4.2.1 The Application Site covers an area of approximately 3 hectares located near the central part Spencers Wood on the west side of Basingstoke Road. It includes part of two fields located to the west of the Approved 57 unit development (which is now largely built).
- 4.2.2 The Site is reasonably well screened by mature vegetation around its northern and southern boundaries;⁸ and is well screened by the newly constructed housing along its eastern boundary.
- 4.2.3 Access to the Site is exclusively from the Basingstoke Road through the Approved 57 Unit development.
- 4.2.4 An area of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) is located to the west and north of the Site and will provide the necessary measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects of this (and other) development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (as required by Policy CP8 of the Core Strategy (see paragraph 4.5.43 below)). Whilst the SANG is directly associated with this development, as set out above it is the subject of a separate planning approval and its effects are not, therefore, considered within this assessment.

4.3 **THE VISUAL BASELINE** (refer to drawings 1070-A-07 and 1070-A-08 in Appendix 3)

- 4.3.1 The visual baseline sets out all areas of the surrounding countryside from where development of the nature described in Section 5 of this document (2 storey housing) may be seen, and establishes the type of receptors found in each location.
- 4.3.2 As set out in the methodology detailed in Appendix 1 it is established through desk top study and extensive fieldwork and determines the estimated⁹ Zone of Visual Influence presented on drawings 1070-A-07 and 1070-A-08 in Appendix 3. Within the area identified it is estimated that views of the Proposed Development may be possible from ground level or within buildings. Outside this line it is not believed that there would be any views of the Proposed Development.¹⁰

The estimated Zone of Visual Influence:

- 4.3.3 In the case of this development, due largely to the nature of surrounding vegetation and built form, the Zone of Visual Influence of the Development Proposals is contained within a very small area of the surrounding countryside / townscape (and one in which public access is extremely limited) within approximately 580m of the centre of the Site:
- To the east of the Site there would be views from properties within the recently constructed 57 unit scheme, however further views from this direction would be prevented by the houses themselves, and by the existing properties along Basingstoke Road (see Viewpoints 10 and 11).
 - From the northeast views are prevented by vegetation along the western side of Basingstoke Road and the double Redwood and Oak avenue along the private road leading to 'Wellington Court' (see Viewpoints 8 and 9).
 - From the north there is no public access near the Site; and views are screened by the double Redwood and Oak avenue and by further trees and woodland in the area known as Stanbury Park. The Zone of Visual Influence extends through the woodland located immediately to the north of the Site, and ends just to the north of the double avenue. Views from this direction are limited to those seen through the trees from a short stretch of the private drive leading to 'Wellington Court'. The closest properties within Wellington Court are located some 110m from the northern boundary of the Site, and the depth of intervening woodland would prevent all but an occasional glimpse of the proposals, even in winter (refer to aerial photograph on drawing 1070-A-01, Appendix 3).
 - Views from the northwest extend into the adjacent SANG but are screened by the vegetation along the northern boundary of the SANG in combination with the falling topography (see Viewpoint 6).
 - From the west the Zone of Visual Influence stops at Woodcock Lane (Shinfield Byway 25), where vegetation to the east side of the Byway prevents all but the occasional glimpse of the fields beyond in winter (see Viewpoint 7); and in any event the topography of the hill would prevent views of all but the roofs of houses along the western boundary of the Site (Viewpoint 19). From the A33 views are truncated by the extensive vegetation along either side of Woodcock Lane (Viewpoint 3).
 - From the southwest the Zone of Visual Influence theoretically extends to the landscape around 'Highlands', however, there is no public access in this location and the ZVI has therefore been based on topography alone. In reality it is extremely unlikely that there would be views from 'Highlands' due to significant intervening vegetation. From further southwest views are truncated by the landform in the area and by intervening hedgerows; hedgerow trees; and woodlands along field boundaries (see Viewpoints 4 and 5).
 - From the south the edge of the Zone of Visual Influence is created by the housing along Clements Close, buildings within the Wellington Industrial Estate, the vegetation along Kiln Lane (Shinfield Bridleway 24), and the woodland to the north of the Lane (a Local Wildlife Site). Views are available from the fields on the 'Highlands' estate immediately south of the Site, however, these are filtered by the significant trees along the southern Site boundary (see Viewpoints 13 and 14).

⁸ Of particular note is the double avenue of Redwood and Oak trees located just north of the northern boundary (along the private drive leading to 'Wellington Court').

⁹ The Zone of Visual Influence is estimated (as access to private land is not possible), so in drawing the Zone of Visual Influence the worst case position has been taken. Furthermore, as set out in the methodology, it should be recognized

that there will always be areas within the ZVI shown on the drawings where the complexity of Landscape / Townscape makes it impossible reasonably to delineate the exact visibility of the Proposed Development; and others where localised intervening vegetation or buildings screen the Site from view.

¹⁰ Although occasional glimpses may exist. E.g. see Viewpoints 1, 2, 15 and 16.

- From the southeast views are truncated by the vegetation along the western side of Basingstoke Road, and other intervening vegetation within the fields and along the Site boundary (see Viewpoint 12).

4.3.4 More distant views (beyond 1km) are prevented by a combination of topography and vegetation. There are no distant views from the north, south or east and from further west (beyond the A33) the flat landscape combined with high lane-side hedgerows; tree-lined lanes; the raised railway line; trees along the course of the Foudry Brook; and trees along intervening field boundaries prevent almost all views of the area around the Application Site. Even where the foreground is more open and the area around the Site is visible (marked visually by the Redwood avenue along the drive to ‘Wellington Court’), the Site appears distant and foreground vegetation prevents views of all but the tops of the avenue trees. Only very occasional glimpsed views towards the Site are available from this landscape (see Viewpoints 1, 2, 15 and 16).

Visual receptors:

- 4.3.5 Bearing in mind the limited extent of the Zone of Visual Influence, potential visual receptors are limited to four groups found in the following locations:
- People passing through the area on transport routes:
 - Users of Basingstoke Road.
 - People using facilities / undertaking activities specifically associated with the experience and enjoyment of the landscape:
 - Users of Woodcock Lane (Shinfield Byway 25), Kiln Lane (Shinfield Bridleway 24), and the footpath crossing the field to the south of the Site (Shinfield Footpath 23).
 - People living in the area:
 - People using Basingstoke Road; Copenhagen Rise (within the recently constructed 57 unit development), Woodcock Lane (Shinfield Byway 25), Kiln Lane (Shinfield Bridleway 24); and the footpath crossing the field to the south (Shinfield Footpath 23); for local access.
 - Receptors on private property:
 - People working in commercial premises along Basingstoke Road, in ‘Highlands’ and within the ‘Wellington Industrial Estate’.
 - People living in / accessing properties in Wellington Court.
 - People living in / accessing properties on the ‘Highlands’ estate.
 - People living in properties along Clements Close to the south of the Highlands Estate.
 - People living in / accessing properties along Copenhagen Rise (within the recently constructed 57 unit development).

4.4 THE ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE

Introduction

4.4.1 The environmental baseline is a record of the state of key constituent elements of the landscape within the Study Area. It is contained within Appendix 5 to this document and records the existing landscape condition on Site and within the Study Area under the following headings:

Physical influences

- Geology / geomorphology
- Soils / pedology
- Vegetation
- Landform / topography
- Drainage / water bodies

Influences of human activity

- Heritage assets
- Land use / management
- Pattern / character of settlement
- Character of buildings and built form
- Dark skies
- Recreational access / movement
- Landscape pattern
- Cultural associations

Aesthetic and perceptual factors

- Landscape scale
- Complexity
- Degree of enclosure / openness
- Tranquillity
- Wildness
- Remoteness
- Sense of place

4.4.2 As set out in the detailed landscape methodology (Appendix 2) for each key constituent element a description is given (including location and geographic extent); an assessment is made of the condition / intactness of that element in the Study Area; and a value is attributed.

4.4.3 A preliminary assessment is then made as to whether there is the potential for ‘significant’ effects to occur as a result of the nature of the development proposed. Only those elements with the potential for ‘significant’ effects are carried forward to more detailed assessment.

4.5 LANDSCAPE AND TOWNSCAPE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

4.5.1 A detailed analysis of the planning policy background and a detailed planning history of the Site is set out by Phillips Planning Services in the Planning Statement associated with this application. A full analysis of relevant planning policies and documents is not repeated here, but a summary of policies which relate specifically to Landscape / Townscape elements, character and visual impact of the Site is covered within this section.

National Statutory Context – the National Planning Policy Framework

4.5.2 National planning policy contains guidance on planning and related issues on a national basis. From the 12th December 2024 this has primarily been set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), superseding the previous versions of this document. Other national planning policy that remains current is identified in the introduction to the NPPF (associated with nationally significant infrastructure projects / traveller sites and waste policies); however, these have no relevance to these proposals.

4.5.3 The NPPF is a wide ranging document comprising of 17 chapters which sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

4.5.4 It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced; it must be taken into account in preparing the development plan; and is a material consideration in planning decisions.

4.5.5 The NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development in Chapter 2, gives guidance on ‘Plan-making’ and ‘Decision-making’ in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively, and then details in Chapters 5 to 17 policies covering all aspects of development from ‘delivering a sufficient supply of homes’ to ‘facilitating the sustainable use of minerals’. These, taken as a whole, constitute the Government’s view of what sustainable development in England means in practice for the planning system.

4.5.6 There is no direct reference in the NPPF to Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments, although their need is an intrinsic requirement of assessing the effects of development on the surrounding landscape; and ‘cumulative landscape and visual impacts’ are mentioned in paragraph 165a under planning for climate change.

4.5.7 Of particular relevance to the nature of development proposed on the Application Site are policies in the following sections of the document:

NPPF Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development

4.5.8 This section sets out three overarching objectives that should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in the Framework; considering economic, social and environmental objectives.

4.5.9 Specifically, paragraph 8c, the “environmental objective” reads:

“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.”

4.5.10 Paragraph 9 goes on to say that “these objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this Framework” and that “they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area”.

4.5.11 It then sets out in paragraph 10 that “so that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development**”; and paragraph 11 outlines what this means in terms of plan-making and decision-taking. For decision-taking this means “approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date¹¹, granting permission unless:

- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance¹² provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.”¹³

4.5.12 Paragraph 12 states that “the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed”.

NPPF Section 5 - Delivering a sufficient supply of homes

4.5.13 This section of the NPPF sets out the requirement for local planning authorities to support the Government’s objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, and provides guidance on how to achieve this.

4.5.14 It covers the importance of ensuring that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed,¹⁴ and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay; and it sets out methods for identifying land for homes, for determining the number of houses needed, and for maintaining supply and delivery.

¹¹ NPPF footnote 8 of the NPPF clarifies that “This includes, for applications involving the provision of housing, situations where: the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites (with the appropriate buffer as set out in paragraph 78); or where the Housing Delivery Test indicates that the delivery of housing was substantially below (less than 75% of) the housing requirement over the previous three years. See also paragraph 227”.

¹² NPPF footnote 7 clarifies that “The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 189) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, 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 75); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.”

¹³ NPPF footnote 9 clarifies that “The policies referred to are those in paragraphs 66 and 84 of chapter 5; 91 of chapter 7; 110 and 115 of chapter 9; 129 of chapter 11; and 135 and 139 of chapter 12.”

¹⁴ Including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing (including Social Rent); families with children; looked after children; older people (including those who require retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes); students; people with disabilities; service families; travellers; people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes.

- 4.5.15 It also sets out the requirement to take into account any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas and it sets out policies specifically applicable to housing in rural areas.
- NPPF Section 8 - Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 4.5.16 This section of the NPPF sets out the requirement for planning policies and decisions to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction, are safe and accessible, and which enable and support healthy lifestyles.
- 4.5.17 Amongst numerous other aims this section sets out the requirement to plan positively for the provision / use of shared spaces, community facilities and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments (paragraph 98a); and it sets out the importance that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities (paragraph 100).
- 4.5.18 It also stresses that planning policies should protect and enhance Public Rights of Way and access including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks (paragraph 105).
- NPPF Section 11 – making effective use of land
- 4.5.19 This section of the NPPF sets out the requirement for planning policies and decisions to promote the effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions.
- 4.5.20 Amongst other criteria it encourages multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside (paragraph 125a).
- NPPF Section 12 - Achieving well-designed places
- 4.5.21 This section of the NPPF focuses on the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places. Amongst other criteria it sets out the expectations of development plans and policies, discusses the use of design guides and codes, and outlines the importance of trees.
- 4.5.22 In particular, paragraph 139 states that ‘Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design¹⁵, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes’ and that ‘significant weight should be given to a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.’
- 4.5.23 Also key, paragraph 135 states the following:
‘Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:
a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) 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);
d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience’.
- 4.5.24 Paragraph 136 calls for all new streets to 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’. It advises the need to ‘ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places’.
- NPPF Section 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- 4.5.25 This section of the NPPF sets out the requirement that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (amongst other criteria) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes¹⁶ and that in preparing development plans the aim should be to minimise pollution and other adverse effects on the local and natural environment.
- 4.5.26 It sets out that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by ‘recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland’; and by ‘minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs’ (paragraph 187 b and d); and it sets out that plans ‘should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries’ (paragraph 188).
- 4.5.27 It specifically requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes (formerly AONB), and states that the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads, and it also provides guidance for development in these areas (paragraph 189); and it also provides guidance for planning policies and decisions in areas defined as Heritage Coast (paragraph 191) although none of these are relevant to the Application Site.
- 4.5.28 Under a sub-heading of ‘habitats and biodiversity’ development plans are required to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity including the requirement to ‘identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity’ (paragraph 192b), and a series of principles are listed

¹⁵ A footnote here refers to the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.

¹⁶ The term Valued Landscapes does not necessarily mean that they are designated. Paragraph 187 states that ‘Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

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

- which local planning authorities should apply when determining planning applications (paragraphs 193 to 195).
- 4.5.29 Under a second sub-heading of ‘Ground conditions and pollution’, ground conditions (referring to land stability and contamination) and the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment are also considered. In doing so paragraph 198a) refers to noise pollution, and paragraph 199 refers to air quality management (both outside the remit of this assessment), however paragraph 198b refers to the need for planning policies and decisions to ‘*identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason*’, and 198c refers to the need to ‘*limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation*’.
- NPPF Section 16 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
- 4.5.30 This section of the NPPF sets out the planning requirements to consider all heritage assets from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites.
- 4.5.31 It sets out how development plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, provides guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas, and requires local planning authorities to maintain (or have access to) a historic environment record; and then provides guidance to local planning authorities in determining planning applications.
- 4.5.32 In particular (in relation to this assessment), paragraph 207 requires an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected (including any contribution made by their setting)¹⁷ at a level of detail sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance, and paragraph 216 clarifies that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should also be taken into account.
- 4.5.33 Under the heading ‘Considering potential impacts’, paragraphs 212 to 215 provide guidance on dealing with proposed developments that effect designated heritage assets, with paragraph 212 setting out the overarching requirement that ‘*When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation¹⁸ irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance*’; whilst paragraph 216 clarifies that ‘*In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.*’ [emphasis added].
- 4.5.34 Paragraph 214 deals with circumstances where a development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of designated heritage assets, whilst paragraph 215 deals with circumstances where a development will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset.
- National Planning Practice Guidance
- 4.5.35 The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) is a web-based resource, provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which brings together planning guidance on various topics into one place. It adds further context to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and it is intended that the two documents should be read together.
- 4.5.36 The NPPG replaces over 7,000 pages of planning guidance that was previously published in separate documents. It is now available entirely in one place, online and not in hard copy.

¹⁷ Setting of a heritage asset is defined in the NPPF Glossary (Annex 2) as: ‘*The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.*’

¹⁸ And ‘*the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be*’.

- 4.5.37 Plan makers (mainly Local Authorities who are responsible for a Local Plan but also community groups who may be working on a Neighbourhood Plan) must have regard to national policies and advice contained in the guidance when developing their plans. The guidance is also a ‘material consideration’ when taking decisions on planning applications. This means that if a local policy is deemed out of date, local authorities may be directed by the National Planning Practice Guidance’s requirements.
- 4.5.38 The Planning Practice Guidance helpfully includes landscapes, environmental gain, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their settings in the ‘Natural Environment’ section (most recently updated on the 19th February 2025). Under a sub-heading of ‘Landscape’, paragraph 036 requires “*the cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully*” and paragraph 037 states that “*to demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on the landscape, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment can be used*”.

Local Planning Context: The Local Plan

- 4.5.39 Within Wokingham the Local Development Framework (now called the ‘Local Plan’) contains a number of documents outlining spatial development options, including the Core Strategy;¹⁹ the Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan;²⁰ the Joint Minerals and Waste Plan;²¹ and several Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) including the Borough Design Guide²² (which includes a series of Village Design Statements).
- 4.5.40 The Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan was “made” in January 2017, and also forms part of the Council’s Development Plan.
- 4.5.41 Work is also underway on an updated Local Plan (the ‘Local Plan Update’) which will shape the future of Wokingham Borough and will guide where and how growth will take place in the Borough in the years up to 2040. The Plan is currently under Examination, with adoption anticipated in May 2026. In the interim the extant plans continue to form the Local Plan for the Borough.

Wokingham Borough Council planning policies relevant to Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 4.5.42 A full summary of the relevant policies from Wokingham Borough Council are contained within the planning statement prepared by Phillips Planning Services. The following policies from the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy relate to the Study Area and are specifically relevant to the Landscape and Visual Appraisal and development of the Application Site.

Core Strategy Policies

- 4.5.43 The Adopted Core Strategy is a policy document which determines the future development of the Borough until March 2026. This includes 21 policies and strategies to provide new housing, schools, roads, places to work and other services and sets out the criteria against which planning applications will be determined. Policies relevant to the Landscape and Visual aspects of these proposals include:
- I. Policy CPI - Sustainable development
- This is a policy designed to enhance the overall sustainability of the area through minimising impacts on the environment. It applies to the entire Borough and includes 12 wide ranging points including the statement that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that:
- “*Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment; Avoid areas of best and most versatile agricultural land;*” and ‘*provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes...*”.

¹⁹ Adopted on the 29th January 2010.

²⁰ Adopted on the 21st February 2014.

²¹ Adopted on the 19th January 2023.

²² Dated June 2012.

2. Policy CP3 - General Principles for development

This is a wide ranging policy designed to ensure development is of a high standard of design and can integrate with the character of the area; and is also important to achieving sustainable development in the Borough. It applies to the entire Borough and includes the statements that:

“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;
.....*
- c. Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses.*
- d. Maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species;
.....*
- 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;*
- 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;
.....”.*

3. Policy CP7 – Biodiversity

This is a policy designed to protect biodiversity. It applies to the entire Borough and states that:
“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”.**

4. Policy CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

This is a policy designed to protect the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. In this case the whole of Study Area falls within the “Thames Basin Heaths SPA 7km zone” and the “Thames

Basin Heaths SPA 5km zone” falls across the majority of the Application Site. The policy states that:

“Development which alone or in combination is likely to have a significant effect on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area will be required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects are delivered”.

5. Policy CP9 – Scale and location of development proposals

This is a policy designed to manage growth in the Borough. It deals with rural exception sites and details areas where development proposals will be acceptable within development limits (in addition to the Strategic Development Locations detailed in policies CP18-21) and includes Spencers Wood in the list of modest development locations.

6. Policy CP11 – Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)

This is a policy designed to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the rural environment. It includes the statements that:

“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;
.....”.*

Development Management Policies

4.5.44

The Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policies Document sets out the criteria against which planning applications will be determined. Policies relevant to the Landscape and Visual aspects of these proposals include:

1. Policy CC02 Development Limits

This is a Cross Cutting (generic) policy which sets the development limits for each of the Borough’s specified settlements as set out in Core Strategy Policy CP9. It refers to the “Policies Map” which defines the development limits for each settlement and states that:

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

The Development limit for Spencers Wood crosses the adjacent 57 unit site at the rear of Stanbury House (with proposals to extend the boundary to cover the 57 unit scheme within the Local Plan Update). None of the Application Site, therefore, lies within the “Development Limits”.

2. Policy CC03: Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping

This is a Cross Cutting (generic) policy which refers to “Green Routes” and “Green Route Enhancement Areas” (which are defined on the “Policies Map”); development proposals within river valleys; and development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of areas of green infrastructure. It also refers to development proposals more generally, stating that:

“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. Policy SAL05: Delivery of avoidance measures for Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

This is a policy which designates areas of land designed as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) in order to divert recreational pressure from the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). It allocates land in accordance with Policy CP8 of the Core Strategy and applies to the associated SANG land located immediately to the west of the Application Site²³. It states that:

“There is a presumption against the development of these sites for uses other than SANG unless the applicant can demonstrate that [there are] sufficient alternative avoidance measures for all relevant submitted and/or approved plans and projects within the Borough taking account of Natural England’s advice on SANGs”. [text added]

4. Policy TB21: Landscape Character

This is a policy which requires proposals to take account of the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment and to use the Landscape Character Assessment to identify important landscape features that should be protected or enhanced through development proposals. It states that:

- “ 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.”*

5. Policy TB23: Biodiversity and development

This is a policy which supports Core Strategy Policy CP7. It identifies Sites of national and international importance (on the Policies Map) and states that:

- “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.”*

6. Policy TB24: Designated Heritage Assets

This is a policy which seeks to conserve and enhance Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Areas and their settings. It identifies these assets on the Policies Map, provides support to proposals that conserve and where possible enhance the local character, setting, management and historic significance of designated heritage assets (with particular support for initiatives that would improve any assets that are recognised as being in poor condition or at risk); and requires:

“works to or affecting heritage assets or their setting to demonstrate that the proposals would at least conserve and, where possible enhance the important character and special architectural or historic interest of the building, Conservation Area, monument or park and garden including its setting and views.”

7. Policy TB26: Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character

This is a policy which designates areas of townscape as “Areas of Special Character” where there are areas or groups of buildings where there is a consistent period or character reflecting areas past but where a Conservation Area designation is not justified. It refers to the “Policies Map” for their location (one of which covers an area of Spencers Wood opposite the Site on the east side of Basingstoke Road); sets out that proposals that involve the demolition of a Building of Traditional Local Character will require strong justification; and it states that:

“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”.

The Borough Design Guide

4.5.45 The Borough Design Guide was published by Wokingham Borough Council in June 2012 and is an adopted Supplementary Planning Document to the Core Strategy. It covers the whole Borough and is designed to encourage developers to bring forward well designed developments which complement and build upon the character of the immediate area (around development sites); and to ensure their proposals are appropriate and protect nearby properties from the impact of development. It incorporates all the Village Design Statements in the Borough including that relevant to Spencers Wood (see below) and is an important material consideration in the determining of planning applications.

4.5.46 Within this design guide there are numerous ‘urban design principles’ relevant to any proposals in this location. These include issues discussed under Section 2 ‘General Principles’; Section 4 ‘Residential’; Section 5 ‘Streets and Spaces’; Section 6 ‘Parking’; and Section 8 ‘Rural and Settlement Edge’. Whilst many of these are of most relevance at a detailed design level, the principles referring to Settlement Edge under section 8 are of particular relevance at this stage. These include:

“General principles

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

²³ Although interestingly whilst this land is on the Council’s interactive Proposals Map it is not listed in the areas of land under this policy.

RD2: New development associated with existing villages or hamlets should retain, enhance and incorporate some of the existing features and characteristics of the settlement pattern, wherever possible.

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

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

Built form

RD5: New development in the rural area should respond to the typical forms of buildings in the village or locality.

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

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

Spaces and landscape

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

Specific guidance - Development on settlement edges

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

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

4.5.47 The supporting text to RD9 also states that:

“New development located on the edges of settlements or important green spaces must demonstrate how the interrelationship between open countryside and development form is respected.

This may be achieved by incorporating soft landscape into the proposals. The aim should be for the development to recede and soften in relation to adjoining open countryside. ‘Hard’ urban edges or taller, landmark buildings are unlikely to be appropriate in most situations.”

The Village Character Statement

4.5.48 The Village Character Statement relevant to Spencers Wood is titled “A Vision for Our Villages: Ryeish Green, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross Character Statement”. It is a short document published by Shinfield Parish Council in April 2008 (with a ‘Notification of Amendments’ section added in August 2009). As set out above it forms one of a series of documents adopted by the Council as part of the Borough Design Guide and is therefore a material consideration in determining planning applications.

4.5.49 The Village Character Statement describes the qualities valued by residents in Ryeish Green, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross at the time of publishing. It describes the local characteristics of the area and defines a series of aspirations and specific recommendations for the design of any future development under six main headings. Key issues of relevance within this document include the desire to:

Planning Context

- Retain the semi-rural character of the villages and the countryside in scale and design.

The Setting of Our Villages

- Maintain the separation between settlements.
- Maintain the characteristic open countryside, trees and copses beside the main roads.
- Screen new developments by shelter belts of trees and hedgerows and retain fields and copses between groups of buildings so that they contribute to the patchwork village character.

History and Development of the Present Community

- Maintain the separate identity of the settlements.
- New buildings should reflect local character and historic context.
- Recreation facilities should be improved in line with the growth of population.

Countryside

- Retain and enhance the characteristic countryside pattern of fields with wide hedgerows and belts of trees.
- Retain and protect significant trees in the landscape.
- Record, protect and enhance habitats and biodiversity.
- Maintain and improve access to the countryside.

The Built Environment

- Generally restrict new houses to two storey with pitched roofs and to ensure they reflect those nearby in terms of character and proportions / scale.
- Reflect historical context and local traditional materials; and specifically use red bricks (patterned where appropriate) for new buildings in the centre of Spencers Wood.
- Reflect the density of housing in the local area.
- Protect listed buildings and their settings.

Roads, the Street-Scene and Traffic.

- Protect and enhance grass verges along existing roads and use grass verges and footpaths in new developments where appropriate.
- Include facilities for off-street, or safe on-street parking.
- Ensure lighting is sympathetic to the semi-rural environment and minimise the impact of light pollution and telephone masts.
- Improve cycling facilities.

4.5.50 There are several references to Mary Russell Mitford in this document, and it is clear that whilst the “rural atmosphere is greatly appreciated by residents and the proximity of houses and the countryside is the reason most people choose to live here”,²⁴ the areas is seen as being “semi-rural”²⁵ in character; and

²⁴ Page 9.

²⁵ Pages 4, 17 and 19.

the “noise from the M4, A33 and connecting roads is an ever present disturbance to an otherwise quiet environment”.²⁶

Shinfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan

- 4.5.51
- The Shinfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan is a 31 page document prepared by the Parish Council between July 2012 and February 2017 when it was adopted (“made”) following an independent examination and referendum. It has been brought into legal force by Wokingham Borough Council and therefore forms part of the Council’s Development Plan.
- 4.5.52
- The Neighbourhood Plan is designed to strengthen local planning policies within the parish, with stated objectives as follows:

“To ensure the new developments enhance the character of existing settlements.”

“To develop a vibrant and prosperous neighbourhood by encouraging development that supports a good range of housing, schools, shops and services that meets the needs of local people and protects the quality of the local environment.”

“To provide new and diverse leisure and recreational activities in order to promote healthy and crime free lifestyles for everyone.”
- 4.5.53
- It sets out an introduction and background information on the location and population of the parish; what infrastructure and housing is to be delivered within the parish; and then sets out 12 policies ranging from the *Location of Development* (Policy 1) to *Broadband Provision* (Policy 12).
- 4.5.54
- Most relevant (in landscape design terms) to the proposals under consideration are the items listed under the following policies:

1. Policy 2: *General Design Principles* - This is a generic policy which encourages “variation within a scheme, as long as this respects local distinctiveness and creates safe and sustainable environments” and sets out that “this can be achieved through the use of locally distinctive materials, differing layouts and positioning of dwellings, and the retention of existing trees, and provision of new trees, within new gardens and in the public realm.”

2. Policy 5: *Parking* - This is a policy which sets out minimum garage dimensions and principles for parking within developments.

3. Policy 6: *Trees Hedgerows and Woodland* - This is a policy which supports new development where it provides buffer zones to certain hedgerows, Habitats of Principal Importance, Ancient Woodlands, Local Wildlife Sites, and ponds, if they are deemed to have significant ecological importance following ecological survey.

4. Policy 7: *Biodiversity* - This is a policy which supports new development which provides biodiversity enhancements.

5. Policy 8: *Flooding* - This is a policy which encourages new development to incorporate existing watercourses, ponds and ditches; promotes the creation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems; and which prevents development which “reduces the ability of the site to alleviate flooding, or which results in increases in surface water run-off rates that would have a detrimental effect off-site, unless suitable mitigation is put in place.”

4.6 LANDSCAPE / TOWNSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

- 4.6.1
- There are no international landscape designations (e.g. World Heritage Sites) or national landscape designations (e.g. National Parks / The Broads, National Landscapes (formerly AONB)) covering the Application Site or within the wider Study Area.
- 4.6.2
- At a local level there are no Conservation Areas, however, an area of Spencers Wood opposite the site on Basingstoke Road is designated as an “Area of Special Character” under Policy TB26 of the Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (see above for details); and the Council also have an emerging policy (NE6) in their forthcoming Local Plan which places the Site within the ‘Ridge and Rivers Valued Landscape’ (for area refer to drawing 1070-A-04 in Appendix 3).²⁷

4.7 HABITAT DESIGNATIONS (refer to drawing 1070-A-05);

- 4.7.1
- Details of habitat designations are listed here for contextual purposes and to assist with the consideration of landscape value, however, assessment of the effects on habitats and species is a specialist area undertaken by consultant ecologists and falls outside the scope of this assessment.
- 4.7.2
- There are no international habitat designations (e.g. Ramsar Sites, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)) or national statutory habitat designations (e.g. National Nature Reserves) covering the Application Site or within the Study Area, however, as set out above the Application Site lies within 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA which places a requirement for SANG to offset potential impacts should development be approved.
- 4.7.3
- There is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) found at ‘Stanford End Mill and River Loddon’, but it is located some 1.6km to the southeast of the Site and falls well outside of the Zone of Visual Influence. However, the woodland located to the south of ‘Highlands’ is recorded as a ‘Local Wildlife Site’ on the interactive Proposal Map, the edge of which just falls within the estimated Zone of Visual Influence of the development.
- 4.7.4
- The northern part of the Site and surrounding area (including the 57 unit Site and the landscape surrounding Wellington Court) is also recorded as falling within an area of ‘Wood-pasture and Parkland’ Priority Habitat;²⁸ and there are various areas recorded as ‘Deciduous Woodland’ Priority Habitat including the woodland around Wellington Court.²⁹

4.8 REVIEW OF EXISTING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS (refer to drawing 1070-A-03)

- 4.8.1
- The landscape around Spencers Wood falls within ‘Character Area 129, Thames Basin Heaths’ of the National Landscape Character Assessment, and been considered in great detail and at a local level within the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment.³⁰
- 4.8.2
- The ‘Thames Basin Heath’s’ National Character Area covers a large and varied area stretching westwards from Weybridge in Surrey to the countryside around Newbury in Berkshire and provides no additional detail or insight into the landscape around the Application Site than is set out within the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment.

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) (refer to Appendix 9 for relevant extracts)

²⁶ Page 17.

²⁷ Although this Policy is contested by CESL and others.

²⁸ Although it should be noted that the nature of BAP area to the east and west of the Site has been completely changed as a result of the building of the adjacent 57 unit site to the east and the planting of the SANG land to the west.

²⁹ See:

<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.html?chosenLayers=ancwoodIndex,ancwoodrevIndex,bapdecIndex,bapwoodIndex&box=469036:165979:472950:167807>

³⁰ Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment, Land Use Consultants, November 2019.

4.8.3 The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment identifies 14 Landscape Types and 28 Landscape Character Areas.

4.8.4 The whole of the area around Spencers Wood (including the Application Site) falls within area J3, 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay Character Area'. The area is summarised as follows:

“An undulating landscape of large arable fields with some pasture. Ongoing development in the north of the area, part of the South of the M4 SDL, is increasing the settled character of the area adding to the urbanising influence of its proximity to Reading. The south remains rural with a number of woodlands remnant parklands and open pasture.

The Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay is a locally prominent clay ridge that separates A2: Loddon River Valley on its eastern edge from I3: Grazeley Farmed Clay Lowland on its western boundary. Both boundaries are defined by topography, where the clay ridge ends. The northern boundary extends into the urban edge of Woodley-Earley, and the southern boundary by the borough boundary, although the landscape character extends into West Berkshire.”

4.8.5 Key characteristics are listed as:

- **“Rolling clay ridge** above the Loddon Valley to the east and the lowlands to the west, **rising to a flat sandy plateau** at 66m AOD.
- Small scattered mixed deciduous woodland blocks and copses including some of ancient origin, many designated as LWS, most located on the steep west and south facing slopes of the ridge.
- **Fragmented unimproved meadow habitats**, with BAP priority habitat lowland meadow, are found on lower slopes, for example Clare's Green Road LWS.
- **Large arable fields with some pasture, with an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow oaks.** Horse paddocks feature on the edge of settlements or around large farmsteads e.g. Sheepridge Court and Loddon Court Farms. Smaller and irregular field boundaries around Three Mile Cross and Spencers Wood are still evident, indicating early enclosure.
- **Remnant parkland** at Shinfield Grange, Loddon Court, Shinfield Lodge, Stanbury Park and Highlands. A number of these are clustered along the top of the ridge overlooking the clay lowlands of Grazeley to the west. These parklands contain BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland and ancient woodland. Visually prominent parkland veteran trees include many Wellingtonias, there is a prominent avenue of these trees along the drive to Wellington Court, originally the Stanbury Park estate.
- **The GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features** built during the summer of 1940 to contain the threatened German invasion.
- **Densely settled landscape, with new large-scale residential estate development** around the substantially 20th century settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross, as part of South of the M4 SDL.
- **To the south of the area, settlement is more scattered with traditional farmsteads many with a strong vernacular** of polychromatic Reading brick and weatherboarding. A number of farmhouses are listed including Grade II* Sheepridge Court. There is a permanent mobile home site at Loddon Court Farm and some agricultural buildings have been converted to other uses e.g. Lambs Farm Business Park.
- **Network of rural lanes** bordered by water-filled ditches connect the original settlement pattern. Some B roads have urbanised features including kerbs and pavements. The A33 form the western border and is very busy, while the M4 crosses the area north of Shinfield, and introduces noise and movement.
- **Sense of elevation from the ridgeline and good views over surrounding lowlands** including to the Loddon valley and over West Berkshire.”

4.8.6 Landscape condition is identified as:

*“The survival of former field patterns, the remnants of historic parklands, woodland blocks and the hedgerow network are in **good condition**. The new South of the M4 SDL and other development, and urban edge of Reading fragment the rural character of the northern part of the area, while the major transport corridors introduce noise and movement, except where well screened by ground modelling or trees.”*

4.8.7 The following Key Issues are identified:

- Loss of deciduous woodland or changes in woodland structure due to loss of species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands have occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management, leading to a change in character. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effects on tree heath or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- Hedgerow and tree loss and soil erosion associated with settlement expansion and intensification of agriculture.
- Past use of fertilisers and pesticides resulted in a polluted run-off affecting water quality and biodiversity within the water filled ditches
- Potential for agricultural land to be kept in 'hope' value, and therefore not well managed, particularly around settlement edges and on the urban fringe.
- Pressure for horse/pony paddocks, particularly at settlement edges leading to a decrease in rural intactness.
- Drainage operations have resulted in loss of wetland habitats. This threat continues as a result of drainage schemes associated with new building works and agriculture.
- Lack of the recruitment of young trees (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure, such as the South of the M4 Strategic Development, impacting landscape character and leading to further pressure to amalgamate the separate settlements
- Pressure to develop the undulating slopes of the clay ridgeline which are visually prominent.
- Pressure for new commercial premises, including the further major expansion of the Thames Valley Science Park, over a 20 year period.
- Increased traffic on rural roads due to expanding residential development leading to further loss of tranquillity, and erosion of road version and demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.
- There is continuing pressure for new roads or additional lanes on existing roads, associated with the South of the M4 SDL particularly in this well populated and commercially vibrant area, leading to visual intrusion of transport corridors and fragmentation of the landscape.
- Light pollution at night causing 'sky glow'.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in the open landscape.
- Decline or decay of historic features including those of the GHQ Stop Line.

- 4.8.8 Under Landscape Strategy it states:

“To maintain the landscape character of the Spencers Wood Farmed and Settled Clay the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the rural character of the agricultural landscape. The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the pattern of hedgerows, remnant parkland, trees and avenues, views to the Loddon Valley and west Berkshire, the rural character of the lanes, and the GHQ Stop Line. There are opportunities for woodland planting to integrate the M4, busy roads and expanding urban fringes of Reading, in particular around the expanding settlements of Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross as part of the South of the M4 SDL.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the rural character of the landscape and gaps between settlements while maintaining the integrity of settlement identity.”
- 4.8.9 The Landscape Guidelines are therefore:

 - **“Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape.** Conserve ancient woodlands and woodland copses. Continue to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
 - **Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields** by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods around intensively farmed fields.
 - **Conserve and manage hedgerows with standard oaks** as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinststate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.
 - **Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields** and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.
 - **Manage the integration of equine related activities into the landscape** through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and control of associated built elements.
 - **Conserve and protect the parkland landscapes** associated with former manor houses, particularly in areas of BAP priority habitat lowland wood pasture and parkland. Plan for the next generation of parkland and avenue trees.
 - **Conserve features associated with the GHQ Stop Line.**
 - **Conserve, enhance and manage woodland and meadow habitats,** particularly BAP priority habitats and LWS, from development and changes in land use. An area of land between Sheepridge Court and Loddon Court Farm is part of the Loddon Valley South BOA. The farmland bordering the Loddon is potentially important for farmland birds such as Yellowhammer. An appropriate woodland and meadow management regime is critical.
 - **Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges** through wooded boundaries, hedgerows and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas.

- **Conserve the open and rural character of the farmed landscape** which provides a physical and visual separation or gaps between settlements. Protect the individual identity of towns and villages, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. Resist pressure for development on the slopes or the ridgeline which provides physical and visual separation between settlements, particularly Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross.
- **Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes** resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage, particularly in the most rural areas.
- **Enhance sense of place through careful design** (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.
- **Use appropriate woodland, hedgerow and tree planting to help integrate roads into the landscape** including the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road. Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.
- **Take care in the siting and design of vertical elements** e.g. communication masts and the siting and design of large agricultural buildings so they do not impact on the valuable characteristics of this landscape.
- **Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution** through the sensitive siting of any new development, including infrastructure, and especially any proposed night-time lighting.

4.9 REVIEW OF OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

- 4.9.1 Other documents that give insight into the landscape character and value of the landscape around the Application Site include the Borough Design Guide and the Village Character Statement referenced above.

Borough Design Guide
- 4.9.2 Reference to existing character within this document is largely contained within Section 3B (and through the Village Design Statements), however, references are made to existing features throughout the document in order to demonstrate design points made.
- 4.9.3 Within Section 3B.2.3 Spencers Wood is listed as a “Loose village” Character Type which is described as follows:

“The character of these villages is defined by a dominance of landscape. They are generally more spacious, with streets being less enclosed than in the above character areas. Landscape and the rural hinterland penetrate into the village with trees and vegetation between buildings and along boundaries. These villages generally consist of housing areas that have been built at various times, with the landscape creating a consistency in character.

Typical examples of villages including this character are Spencers Wood, Shinfield, Three Mile Cross, Risely, Hurst and Finchampstead village. Common characteristics include:
 - Typically developed over time from a scattered settlement pattern, often with a variety of development character throughout the settlements;
 - Buildings are loosely arranged and tend to be detached;
 - Generally few established building lines;
 - Some buildings are set back from the highway and some are set close to it; and
 - Planting tends to dominate the front gardens and boundary treatments.”

4.9.4 Under Section 3B.3.3 the countryside (defined under 3B.3 as “the largely unbuilt area between settlement boundaries”) around Spencers Wood is not listed as one of the areas of highest landscape quality.³¹ It is described under the “Clay Landscapes” Character Type as follows:

“Clay landscapes cover the majority of the Borough to either side of the Loddon Valley. The landscape is distinguished by a shelving/undulating landform, with two predominant land uses - arable farming and urban settlement.

The major areas of settlement include Wokingham and the areas of Woodley and Earley to the east of Reading.

To the east and west, London Clay dominates smaller areas of lowland vale landscape. This has given rise to a sparsely settled landscape dominated by large-scale arable and pastoral fields with denuded hedgerows, often set within wooded horizons. In these areas settlements comprise manor houses and farmsteads, the former with modern agricultural buildings, the latter typically built with traditional brick, weatherboard and clay tile.

Some of the clay landscapes are characterised by large rural settlements, such as Shinfield and Spencers Wood, giving a ‘settled’ character to these areas.”

The Village Character Statement

4.9.5 Within the village Character Statement it is clear that the area is seen as being “Semi-rural”³² in character.

4.9.6 It is also explicitly stated that “the rural atmosphere is greatly appreciated by residents and the proximity of houses and the countryside is the reason most people choose to live here”;³³ but that the “noise from the M4, A33 and connecting roads is an ever-present disturbance to an otherwise quiet environment”.³⁴

4.9.7 There are several references to Mary Russell Mitford (the document’s name has been taken from the title of the books she published between 1824 and 1832) and the opinion is expressed that “many of her descriptions of the fields, streams and copses are valid today”.³⁵

4.9.8 Key issues within this document are set out in paragraph 4.5.49 above.

4.10 LANDSCAPE FUNCTION, CONDITION AND SCENIC QUALITY

4.10.1 In terms of **function**, this is an agricultural and urban fringe landscape which has value in terms of its function as part of the river Thames catchment (with the ridge on which Spencers Wood is located sitting on the boundary between the River Kennet (west) and River Loddon (east) catchments).³⁶

4.10.2 The Site also has some functional value in terms of its contribution to the general setting of Spencers Wood; and some (limited) value in terms of its contribution to the remnants of the parkland surrounding Wellington Court; and it has limited value in terms of its current agricultural function (albeit the surrounding landscape contributes more fully to wider agricultural value).

4.10.3 The recreational function of the landscape is also limited (the exception being the area west of the A33 where the National Cycle route passes through the landscape); and although the wider landscape has a function in contributing to a wider appreciation of the cultural associations linked to the CHQ Stop Line, the Site itself (and the immediately surrounding fields) has no direct link to this feature.

³¹ The areas of highest landscape quality are listed on page 30 as: “the river landscapes surrounding the River Thames and Loddon; parts of the chalk landscape in the north of the borough; and much of the area of sand and gravel landscapes around Finchampstead and Farley Hill.”

³² Pages 4, 17 and 19.

³³ Page 9.

4.10.4 The landscape also has no physical or functional links with any National Landscape designation (such as National Parks or a National Landscape).

4.10.5 The landscape is generally in good physical **condition**, although the A33 to the west of Spencers Wood is a notable detracting feature.

4.10.6 **Scenic quality** around the Site is moderate; but from the higher ground within the SANG to the west of the Site scenic quality increases to good where there are open views across the landscape to the west; and from this landscape from some areas scenic quality is good where there are open views back towards the clay ridge on which Spencers Wood is located.

4.11 OVERALL LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

4.11.1 Landscape value for each of the Key Constituent Elements of the environmental baseline is assessed within the tables contained within Appendix 5. For convenience these are copied below:

Physical influences

Receptor	Value
Geology / geomorphology	Medium value
Soils / pedology	Medium value
Vegetation	High value
Landform / topography	Medium value
Drainage / water bodies	Low value

Human influences

Receptor	Value
Heritage assets	Medium value
Land use / management	Medium value
Pattern / character of settlement	Medium value
Character of buildings & built form	Medium value
Dark skies	Medium value
Recreational access / movement	Medium value
Landscape pattern	Medium value
Cultural associations	High value

Aesthetic and perceptual factors

Receptor	Value
Landscape scale	Medium value

³⁴ Page 17.

³⁵ Pages 7 to 8.

³⁶ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/RiverBasinDistrict/6>

Complexity	Low value
Degree of Enclosure / Openness	Medium value
Tranquillity	Medium value
Wildness	Low value
Remoteness	Low value
Sense of place	Medium value

- 4.11.2 Referring to Table A.2 of the landscape methodology (LVA Appendix 2), these assessments and the analysis set out in the text above (with respect to designations, the existing Landscape Character Assessment, Design Guide, and the Village Character Statement) make it clear that the landscape of the study area is one that is of **medium overall value**.
- 4.11.3 The landscape is one that is undesignated and in close proximity to the settlement (where Spencers Wood and the A33 exerts an urbanising influence on the surrounding rural landscape); however, there are valued elements and the landscape is valued at a local level.
- 4.11.4 Referring to Table A.3 of the landscape methodology, the **susceptibility** of the overall landscape is also judged to be **medium**. The landscape has moderate ability to accommodate the nature of the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and / or achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies.
- 4.11.5 Therefore with reference to Table A.4 of the landscape methodology, the overall sensitivity of the landscape resource is judged to be **medium**.

5 **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

5.1 **INTRODUCTION**

5.1.1 As set out in paragraph 1.1.1 above, this document is submitted in support of an Outline Planning Application, with all matters reserved for future detailed consideration other than access to the Site. Information submitted with this application includes an Indicative Masterplan (see Appendix 7), however, detailed designs have not been prepared and the assessments contained within this document are therefore based purely on the information contained within the descriptions below.

5.2 **DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT** (refer to Indicative Masterplan drawing I070-MP-01, Appendix 7).

5.2.1 The proposed development is for up to 63 new homes laid out around an internal road layout in a manner similar to that shown on the Indicative Masterplan.

5.2.2 Pedestrian and vehicular access would be taken from the Basingstoke Road via 'Copenhagen Rise' (within the existing 57 unit scheme), and pedestrian access to the immediately adjacent SANG would be provided via an existing gateway located part-way along the western boundary of the Site.

5.2.3 Limited streetlighting would be used within the scheme; and all properties would be two storey (measuring approximately 5.65m from ground level to eaves, and up to 8m to the ridge) with garages being single storey (up to 4.5m in height). Materials would be primarily red brick under slate tiled roofs (with occasional rendered properties and detailing patterned to match the local vernacular (including the adjacent 57 unit scheme) in a manner set out within the Village Character Statement).³⁷

5.2.4 All trees are to be retained on Site with the exception of one Category C Ash and one (almost dead) Category U Oak within the hedgerow separating the main Site area from the southern field; ³⁸ and a 10m length of hedgerow (separating the northern and southern fields) would also be lost.

5.2.5 In the centre of the site a small green space is proposed, and two further open spaces containing SUDS attenuation ponds are proposed either side of the retained woodland at the southeast corner of the Site.

5.2.6 This attenuation basins would be designed to maximise their aesthetic and wildlife opportunities, with permanent water, areas of reeds (which also assist water quality / filtration) and marginal and open water aquatic species. The basins would be designed to be easily maintained and may be fenced off / partially fenced for safety using post and rail fencing and low level stock fencing, and would include interpretation boards to explain the water and wildlife benefits associated with these features.

5.2.7 The housing in the southeast corner of the Site would also be linked to the adjacent 57 Unit scheme with an informal path through the woodland which would be constructed of permeable materials such as bound gravel, mulch or timber boardwalks, with a small bridge/s over the associated drainage ditch as required. This path would improve pedestrian permeability across the Site, linking the southerly field to both the adjacent 57 Unit development and to the Basingstoke Road more directly than the road through the Site.

5.2.8 All soil would be retained and re-used on site, and planting would be designed to enhance wildlife connectivity and to reflect the rural edge location. Hedgerows and verges would be used in preference to ornamental shrub planting. New planting would involve:

- Mixed native hedgerows along the northern part of the western boundary and along part of the north boundary adjacent to the SANG (and where required elsewhere for gapping up existing

hedgerows). These would be planted using 1 + 2 transplants (0.8m - 1m tall in year 1), in a triple staggered row with 6 plants per linear metre.

- Specimen trees in gardens and within the public areas. These would be focused on native species (although in gardens more ornamental species may also be proposed) and would be planted at between 4.5 and 6m in height (depending on species), as Extra Heavy Standard specimens (14-16cm Girth), Advanced Nursery Stock (16-18cm and 18-20cm girth) and Semi-Mature specimens (20-25cm girth).
- Ornamental shrub planting around the frontage of houses and within rear gardens. These would be chosen for both ornamental and maximum wildlife benefit.
- Amenity grass areas would be used within the rear and front gardens of the proposed properties, within the central open space (and other periphery public spaces); and wildflower grass would be used on the banks of the attenuation ponds, along the southern and western edge of the Site, and elsewhere within the scheme where space permits.

5.2.9 Where space allows, trees located 10m or more from the closest buildings would be considered for planting using large scale species such as Beech or Oak to reflect those found on the site. These would include trees planted around the central green space; around the attenuation ponds; along the southern and western boundary of the Site, and occasionally within the housing itself.

³⁷ Page 16 of the Village Character Statement.

³⁸ For Category references refer to tree survey by Barrell Tree Consultancy.

6 **POTENTIAL IMPACTS - LANDSCAPE EFFECTS**

6.1 **INTRODUCTION**

- 6.1.1 This section describes and evaluates the effects of the proposed scheme on individual elements of the landscape resource on and around the Site; and on Overall Landscape Character.
- 6.1.2 It makes reference to Appendix 5, where detailed investigations have been undertaken for 20 key constituent elements of the landscape and (where appropriate) effects have been assessed during construction; and in the short; medium; and longer term; and finally concludes the effect of the proposed development on Overall Landscape Character.

6.2 **ELEMENTS ASSESSED**

- 6.2.1 The landscape resource has been assessed by considering the effects of the development on the following constituent elements of the landscape:

Physical influences

- Geology / geomorphology
- Soils / pedology
- Vegetation
- Landform / topography
- Drainage / water bodies

Influences of human activity

- Heritage assets (including designated Sites of Archaeological Importance / Conservation Areas / Listed Buildings / Scheduled Monuments / Registered Parks and Gardens / and Historic Battlefields; and non-designated heritage assets; and their settings)
- Land use / management
- Pattern / character of settlement
- Character of buildings and built form
- Dark skies
- Recreational access / movement
- Landscape pattern
- Cultural associations

Aesthetic and Perceptual factors

- Landscape scale
- Complexity
- Degree of enclosure / openness
- Tranquillity
- Wildness
- Remoteness
- Sense of place

- 6.2.2 For each element a baseline study has been undertaken and an initial assessment made of the likely potential for significant effects. In this case the restricted area over which the development proposals would be seen significantly limits the area of the surrounding landscape over which effects may be felt, and only Vegetation; Land use/Management; and Pattern/Character of Settlement were consider

to have the potential for significant effects and have been carried forward to detailed reporting. The remaining elements were excluded from detailed reporting on the following basis:³⁹

- In terms of **physical influences**, underlying geology / geomorphology would not be affected by development of the nature proposed; soils would be retained on site for re-use (and there would therefore be no change (as a result of soils) to characteristics of the landscape such as drainage or vegetation); topography can be accommodated without the need for significant change; and in terms of drainage / water bodies any changes are unlikely to have an effect on the existing drainage features, and although additional ponds are proposed on Site this would not have an effect on the wider landscape character.
- In terms of **influences of human activity**, the ‘Library School House’ (the only designated heritage asset present in the Study Area) and the nearby “Area of Special Character” would not be affected; and there would be no meaningful effects on the remnants of the former parkland associated with the now destroyed Stanbury Manor. Regarding the Character of Buildings and Built Form, at the detailed design stage buildings would be designed to be compatible with the local vernacular and whilst the nature of development would result in significant new built form within the Application Site, the scheme would sit behind the 57 unit development located on the Basingstoke Road frontage (and other existing buildings located along Basingstoke Road) and is unlikely to have a significant effect on the character of buildings and built form in the area. There would be little effect on the Dark Skies as the proposals would be seen in the context of other lighting already present within the landscape and would have little effect on darkness of night skies in the wider area. Recreational access / movement through the landscape would be largely unaffected;⁴⁰ the development would be contained within exiting field boundaries and the wider Landscape Pattern would be retained; and the proposals would not impact on any remnants of the GHQ Stop Line or any remaining links to the writings of Mary Mitford in any meaningful way.
- In terms of **aesthetic and perceptual factors**, field boundaries would be retained (and enhanced) and buildings would be of a similar scale to those existing around the Site (and therefore compatible). Complexity would not be affected as the development would not introduce any elements not already present in the landscape; the area is not wild or remote; other than on the Site itself there would only be minor changes to the degree of enclosure / openness and tranquillity experienced within the study area; and Sense of Place would not be significantly affected as the proposals would not introduce elements not already present in the landscape or remove any special elements or views to or from the urban area;.

6.3 **SUMMARY OF LIKELY LANDSCAPE EFFECTS DURING CONSTRUCTION**

- 6.3.1 The following table summarises the likely level of effects judged to exist during construction for those aspects of the landscape resource where it has been assessed that there is the potential for significant adverse effects. The full assessments are set out in Appendix 5 and should be referred to for further detail.

³⁹ Refer to Appendix 5 for further detail.

⁴⁰ Additional public access within the Application Site is not of considered to be of significant benefit in itself unless links to the wider countryside are created; and in this case the associated SANG land already has permission and has separate

access, and therefore there would only be minimal benefits in terms of access to the SANG land and wider countryside through the Application Site.

Table 1 - Summary of likely significant landscape effects during construction

Landscape receptor	Direct / indirect effects	Sensitivity	Magnitude of effect	Overall level of effect	
				Adverse effect	Beneficial effect
Vegetation	Direct (on vegetation on site)	Medium-high	Medium adverse	Appreciable adverse	
	Indirect (on the wider setting)		Neutral	Neutral	
Land use / Management	Direct (on land use on site)	Medium	High adverse	Major adverse	
	Indirect (on the wider setting)		Medium-low adverse	Slight adverse	
Pattern / Character of Settlement	Direct (on the settlement pattern)	Medium	Low adverse	Very slight adverse	

- 6.3.2

During construction ‘Significant’ adverse effects⁴¹ are only judged to exist on site for vegetation and land use, however:

 - Given that this is a greenfield site a significant adverse effect on land use on Site is inevitable, as the change of the majority of the Site from a pastoral field to a residential construction site would clearly have a significant effect on the land use on the Site itself. In this case a **major adverse effect** exists.
 - Similarly, the effect on vegetation on the site itself would almost inevitably generate a fairly significant adverse effect as a consequence of the change in the use of the site. In this case an **appreciable adverse effect** is judged to exist, as despite the retention of all of the trees on Site (with the exception of one Ash and one almost dead Oak), a 10m length of hedgerow would be lost and the majority of existing grassland would be removed.
- 6.3.3

Seen in the context of the wider setting, however, the proposed land use would not be out of keeping with the adjacent residential area; and the effects on vegetation would be negligible as the vegetation lost is barely seen from the surrounding landscape. In the context of the wider setting effects on vegetation are judged to be **neutral**; and it is largely the presence of a construction site which creates a **slight adverse effect** on land use.
- 6.3.4

With respect to the effects on the pattern and character of the settlement, impacts during construction would be fairly minimal. There would be limited effects on settlement character (which would remain suburban); however, the development would only have a minor effect on the pattern of Spencers Wood as a whole; the proposals would not introduce development to the west side of the road in an area where it is currently not present; and this change would only be appreciated on the Site itself and from a few publicly accessible locations in the immediately surrounding landscape. For this element only **very slight adverse effects** are judged to exist.

⁴¹ Only Appreciable, Major, Major / Substantial, Substantial, Severe and Abundant effects are considered to be ‘Significant’ – refer to Landscape Methodology (Appendix 2), paragraph 6.24.

6.4 SUMMARY OF LIKELY LANDSCAPE EFFECTS DURING OPERATION

- 6.4.1

The assessment of effects during the operational period of the development has been divided into short, medium and long term.
- 6.4.2

The following tables summarise the likely level of effects judged to exist in each of these periods for those aspects of the landscape resource where it has been assessed that there is the potential for significant adverse effects.

Table 2 - Summary of likely significant landscape effects in the short term (year 1)

Landscape receptor	Direct / indirect effects	Sensitivity	Magnitude of effect	Overall level of effect	
				Adverse effect	Beneficial effect
Vegetation	Direct (on vegetation on site)	Medium-high	Low adverse	Slight adverse	
	Indirect (on the wider setting)		Neutral	Neutral	
Land use / Management	Direct (on land use on site)	Medium	High adverse	Major adverse	
	Indirect (on the wider setting)		Low adverse	Very slight adverse	
Pattern / Character of Settlement	Direct (on the settlement pattern)	Medium	Low adverse	Very slight adverse	

Table 3 - Summary of likely significant landscape effects in the medium term (year 7)

Landscape receptor	Direct / indirect effects	Sensitivity	Magnitude of effect	Overall level of effect	
				Adverse effect	Beneficial effect
Vegetation	Direct (on vegetation on site)	Medium-high	Neutral	Neutral	
	Indirect (on the wider setting)		Neutral	Neutral	
Land use / Management	Direct (on land use on site)	Medium	High adverse	Major adverse	
	Indirect (on the wider setting)		Low adverse	Very slight adverse	
Pattern / Character of Settlement	Direct (on the settlement pattern)	Medium	Low adverse	Very slight adverse	

Table 4 - Summary of likely significant landscape effects in the longer term (year 15)

Landscape / townscape receptor	Direct / indirect effects	Sensitivity	Magnitude of effect	Overall level of effect	
				Adverse effect	Beneficial effect
Vegetation	Direct (on vegetation on site)	Medium-high	Low beneficial		Slight beneficial
	Indirect (on the wider setting)		Very low beneficial		Very slight beneficial
Land use / Management	Direct (on land use on site)	Medium	High adverse	Major adverse	
	Indirect (on the wider setting)		Low adverse	Very slight adverse	
Pattern / Character of Settlement	Direct (on the settlement pattern)	Medium	Low adverse	Very slight adverse	

6.4.3 During the operational period 'Significant' adverse effects are only judged to exist for land use on Site, however, as for the construction phase, given that this is a greenfield site a significant adverse effect on land use on site is inevitable (refer to paragraph 6.3.2 above). As for the construction phase a **major adverse impact** would exist for all periods.

6.4.4 Seen in the context of the wider setting, however, the proposed land use is not out of keeping due to the presence of the adjacent residential area and a **very slight adverse** effect is therefore judged to exist for all periods.

6.4.5 With respect to the effects on the character and pattern of the settlement, impacts remain fairly minimal. Whilst the proposals would be slightly damaging to the linear pattern of development seen in this location, there would be limited effects on settlement character (which would remain suburban); the development would only have a minor effect on the pattern of Spencers Wood as a whole; development would not introduce development to the west side of the road in an area where it is currently not present; and this change would only be appreciated on the Site itself and from a few publicly accessible locations in the immediately surrounding landscape. For these elements only **very slight adverse effects** are judged to exist for all periods.

6.4.6 It is only with respect to vegetation that the effects would significantly change over time. New planting on the Site would include new native hedgerows, tree planting (including some large scale trees) within rear gardens and public spaces; hedge and shrub planting around the house frontages; and marginal and aquatic species within the attenuation ponds. The existing grassland would be replaced with grass within gardens and within the central grassed space; and with wildflower grass on the banks of the ponds, around the Site boundaries, and elsewhere where space permits.

- In the **short term** whilst planting and re-seeding would be complete, plants would be of limited stock sizes and would have only limited effect on the vegetation resource on Site. At this stage the loss of the single Ash and the nearly dead Oak tree, the 10m length of hedge, and grass across the Site would not be adequately mitigated by the new planting, and when considered with the new planting the loss would be slightly damaging to the vegetation resource (which combined with the medium-high sensitivity would result in a **slight adverse effect**). Seen from the wider landscape the effects on vegetation would be negligible, however, as the vegetation lost is barely seen from the surrounding landscape. In the context of the wider setting effects on vegetation are judged to be **neutral**.
- In the **medium term** planting would be well established. The grass areas and hedges would be fully established and specimen trees would begin to contribute more significantly to the landscape resource. At this stage vegetation lost would be adequately compensated for by new planting and the effect on both the Site and the wider landscape would be **neutral**.
- In the **longer term** grass areas would be fully established and the proposed tree and hedgerow planting would become a significant landscape resource and would integrate fully with the character of the existing landscape. At this stage the new planting would more than adequately compensate for the loss of the single Ash and the (almost dead) Oak tree, the 10m of hedgerow and the grass on Site, and on site a **slight beneficial effect** is judged to exist. On the wider landscape the effect of the additional planting would be less significant as the Site is not extensively seen from the surrounding landscape, and only a **very slight beneficial effect** is judged to exist.

6.5 CONCLUSION OF EFFECTS ON OVERALL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

6.5.1 Overall it is clear that the effects on the landscape resource are limited. Of the 20 constituent elements investigated 17 would have no potential for significant adverse effects, and for the majority of these the effects of the development would most likely be between slight and neutral (for instance there would be no real effects on underlying Geology / Geomorphology, Soils / Pedology, Landform / Topography, Cultural Associations, Landscape Scale, Complexity, Remoteness or Wildness; and effects on Drainage / Water Bodies, Heritage Assets, the Character of Buildings and Built Form, Dark

Skies, Recreational access / movement, Landscape Pattern, the degree of Enclosure / Openness, Tranquillity and Sense of Place would be minimal).

6.5.2 Clearly there would be a significant effect on the land use on Site itself, as the majority of the Site would change from a pastoral agricultural field to a residential area, however, residential land uses are found immediately adjacent to the Site and are not out of keeping with the surrounding landscape. Similarly, whilst there would be an adverse effect on the vegetation on Site during construction and the early years of the operational phase of the development, in the medium term the planting proposed would mitigate this impact and in the longer term there would be a beneficial impact on the vegetation resource. Excluding the effects on the Site itself (which would clearly remain throughout the life of the development), the longest lasting effects of the development proposals would be those on the pattern and character of settlement, however, these have been judged to be minimal (very slight adverse effects), as whilst there would be a slight change to the linear nature of the settlement, there would be limited effects on settlement character (which would remain suburban) and the development would only have a minor effect on the pattern of Spencers Wood as a whole. Furthermore, these changes would only be appreciated on the Site itself and from a few publicly accessible locations in the immediately surrounding landscape.

6.5.3 Overall the effects on the landscape resource are small. With reference to Table A.6 of the Landscape Methodology (Appendix 2), the overall magnitude of effect is judged to be **low adverse** in both the short and medium to long term.

Overall landscape sensitivity has been judged to be **medium**, (refer to Section 4.11 above) and therefore with reference to Table A.7 of the Landscape Methodology, the level of effect on overall landscape character is judged to be a **very slight adverse effect** in all periods. Ultimately the development would integrate well with existing landscape / townscape character, but there would be a permanent change in land use on Site and the extension of the residential area to the west of Basingstoke Road would have a permanent effect on the settlement pattern of Spencers Wood.

7 **POTENTIAL IMPACTS - VISUAL EFFECTS**

7.1 **INTRODUCTION**

- 7.1.1 This section summarises visual effects of the proposed development.
- 7.1.2 It makes reference to Appendices 4 and 6, where detailed investigations have been undertaken for 19 viewpoints which have been chosen to demonstrate the visual effects of the proposals on receptors in the public domain around the site; and having done this it also considers the effects on receptors within private residences located within the Zone of Visual Influence.

7.2 **VIEWPOINTS ASSESSED**

- 7.2.1 The estimated Zone of Visual Influence of the proposed development is described in paragraph 4.3.3 above and is shown on drawings 1070-A-07 and A-08 in Appendix 3.
- 7.2.2 Despite the location on the ridgeline, the primary Zone of Visual Influence is entirely contained within a distance of less than approximately 575m of the centre of the site. It measures only 0.4 square kilometres (approximately) and is located almost entirely to the west of Basingstoke Road, covering a restricted area of the landscape largely to the south and west of the Site.
- 7.2.3 Locally to the Site the Zone of Visual Influence is heavily restricted by existing built form (to the east) and vegetation (to the north and south); and from the west vegetation and the effect of topography prevents most views from the bottom of the hillside (on Woodcock Lane).
- 7.2.4 From the landscape further west (beyond the A33) vegetation on the hillside immediately west of the site combined with the flat landscape in the valley; vegetation along the A33; high lane-side hedgerows; tree lined lanes; vegetation along the raised Basingstoke to Reading railway line; trees along the course of the Foudry Brook; and trees along intervening field boundaries prevents all but glimpsed views of the area around the Application Site.
- 7.2.5 Of the 19 viewpoints presented in Appendix 6, four are located in the landscape to the west of the A33 to demonstrate the effect of distance and vegetation on the views from this direction; one is taken from a layby on the A33 to represent the views from this major road; four are taken from Woodcock Lane (Shinfield Byway 25) to demonstrate the effects from this path; three are taken from within the adjacent SANG land; one is taken from Kiln Lane (Shinfield Bridleway 24); one is taken from the footpath crossing the Highlands estate (Shinfield Footpath 23); and 5 are taken from the Basingstoke Road.
- 7.2.6 For each viewpoint a baseline study has been undertaken and an initial assessment made of the likely potential for significant effects. In this case the restricted visibility of the site means that only three viewpoints (Viewpoints 13, 17 and 18) were considered to have any potential for significant effects and have been carried forward to detailed reporting. The remaining elements were excluded from detailed reporting on the following basis:

From the landscape to the west of the A33

- **Viewpoint 1** was excluded as intervening vegetation screens the housing area (particularly in summer), the Application Site is distant, is only seen at 90 degrees to the main activity of the receptor and would barely be appreciated in the scene; and at night any glimpse of lighting that might be seen in the early years following completion of the scheme would scarcely be appreciated by receptors using the lane.
- **Viewpoint 2** was excluded as intervening vegetation screens the housing area (particularly in summer), and the Application Site is relatively distant. A glimpse of houses would just be possible through / between foreground tree canopies in winter, however, this would barely be appreciated in the scene or at worst would only have a slightly detrimental effect on the character of the scene. At night a glimpse of lighting within the development would also be visible during construction and in the early years

following completion of the scheme, however, as above this would scarcely be appreciated by receptors.

- **Viewpoints 15 and 16** were excluded as intervening vegetation entirely screens the housing area (particularly in summer) and the Application Site is relatively distant. Any possible (but unlikely) glimpse of rooftops or glimpse of lighting within the development would scarcely be appreciated by receptors.

From Woodcock Lane and the A33

- **Viewpoints 3 to 6** were all excluded as there would be no views of development on the Application Site.
- **Viewpoint 7** was excluded as foreground vegetation along the side of the lane screens the housing area (entirely in summer) and the Application Site is only glimpsed at 90 degrees to the main activity of the receptor. A glimpse of rooftops may just be possible through foreground vegetation in winter, however, this would barely be appreciated in the scene or at worst would only have a slightly detrimental effect on the character of the scene. At night a winter glimpse of lighting within the development may be visible during construction and in the early years following completion of the scheme, however, if visible this would scarcely be appreciated by receptors using the lane.

From the adjacent SANG land

- **Viewpoint 19** was excluded as the Site is largely screened by intervening vegetation, and although it is likely that glimpses of rooftops would be visible through the vegetation (mainly in winter), the development (and associated glimpses of lighting) would have little effect on the scene. Once the new planting within the SANG land (and on Site) begins to mature, the glimpses of rooftops would also likely be lost.

From Kiln Lane (Shinfield Bridleway 24)

- **Viewpoint 14** was excluded as the Site is largely screened by intervening vegetation (particularly in summer), and although there may be glimpses of development along the southern boundary, the development (and associated glimpses of lighting) would have a limited effect on the scene. The majority of the view would not change, and the housing would appear as an extension to the 57 unit scheme.

From the Basingstoke Road:

- **Viewpoints 8 to 11** were excluded as none of the proposed housing (or associated lighting) would be visible from these locations. Although the Site entrance can be seen, there would be no changes in this area.
- **Viewpoint 12** was excluded as the Application Site is not visible in summer; and in winter whilst receptors may get glimpses of development along the southern Site boundary (seen through the entrance to 'Highlands'), the overall effect would be little different to the existing. The Site lies at an acute angle to the main activity of receptors and any glimpse of rooftops or lighting within the development would scarcely be appreciated by receptors using Basingstoke Road.

7.3 SUMMARY OF LIKELY VISUAL EFFECTS FROM THE PUBLIC DOMAIN DURING CONSTRUCTION

7.3.1 The following table summarises the likely levels of effect judged to exist during construction for those viewpoints in the public domain where it has been assessed that there is the potential for significant adverse effects on visual receptors. The full assessments are set out in Appendix 4 and should be referred to for further detail.

Table 5 - Summary of likely significant visual effects during construction

Viewpoint Number	Sensitivity	Timeframe
		Construction
13 On Shinfield Footpath 23, crossing the field to the south of the access drive to 'Highlands'.	Medium-high	Summer Daytime
		Neutral
		Summer Nighttime
		Neutral
		Winter Daytime
		Slight adverse
		Winter Nighttime
17 Within the adjacent SANG land, just south of 'Wellington Court'.	Medium-high	Summer Daytime
		Appreciable adverse
		Summer Nighttime
		Slight adverse
		Winter Daytime
		Appreciable adverse
		Winter Nighttime
18 Within the adjacent SANG land, just north of 'Highlands'.	Medium-high	Summer Daytime
		Appreciable adverse
		Summer Nighttime
		Moderate adverse
		Winter Daytime
		Appreciable adverse
		Winter Nighttime
		Moderate adverse

7.3.2 During the construction period Appreciable (and therefore 'Significant') adverse effects are judged to exist for receptors within the eastern end of the adjacent SANG land (Viewpoints 17 and 18), where the proposed development would take up a large proportion of the view when looking southeast / east. Glimpses / views of lighting would also be seen through intervening vegetation, however the lighting would be seen in the context of glimpses of lighting from properties within the 57 unit scheme beyond; and restricted working hours would limit this impact. Effects on receptors at these viewpoints therefore would not be 'significant' during nighttime.

7.3.3 No other receptors within the surrounding landscape would experience 'significant' effects.

7.3.4 Only slight adverse effects would exist for Viewpoint 13 (the only other viewpoint carried through to detailed assessment), which is representative of the open views across the fields within the Highlands Estate from Shinfield Footpath 23. From this viewpoint the development would be completely screened by existing vegetation along the site boundary during the summer months; and in winter only slight adverse effects would exist by day. Glimpses of construction processes in the southern part of the Site would be possible, however, views would be heavily filtered by the existing trees in the Highlands Estate and along the southern boundary of the Site, and the construction site would only have a minor effect on the overall character of the scene. At night the construction site may just be evident when lighting is present, however, any lighting would be seen in the context of lighting within the adjacent 57 Unit scheme and along the Basingstoke Road and from properties on the Highlands Estate; restricted working hours would limit this impact; and outside working hours the development would not be appreciated.

7.4 SUMMARY OF LIKELY VISUAL EFFECTS FROM THE PUBLIC DOMAIN DURING OPERATION

- 7.4.1 The assessment of effects during the operational period of the development has been divided into short (year 1), medium (year 7), and long term (year 15).
- 7.4.2 The following table summarises the likely levels of effect judged to exist for those viewpoints in the public domain where it has been assessed that there is the potential for significant adverse effects on visual receptors. As above, the full assessments are set out in Appendix 4 and should be referred to for further detail.

Table 6 - Summary of likely significant visual effects during operation

Viewpoint Number	Sensitivity	Timeframe		
		Year 1	Year 7	Year 15
13 On Shinfield Footpath 23, crossing the field to the south of the access drive to 'Highlands'.	Medium-high	Summer Daytime		
		Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
		Summer Nighttime		
		Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
		Winter Daytime		
		Slight adverse	Slight adverse	Slight adverse
17 Within the adjacent SANG land, just south of 'Wellington Court'.	Medium-high	Summer Daytime		
		Appreciable adverse	Moderate adverse	Slight adverse
		Summer Nighttime		
		Slight adverse	Slight adverse	Very slight adverse
		Winter Daytime		
		Appreciable adverse	Moderate adverse	Slight adverse
18 Within the adjacent SANG land, just north of 'Highlands'.	Medium-high	Summer Daytime		
		Appreciable adverse	Moderate adverse	Very slight adverse
		Summer Nighttime		
		Moderate adverse	Slight adverse	Very slight adverse
		Winter Daytime		
		Appreciable adverse	Moderate adverse	Very slight adverse
		Winter Nighttime		
		Moderate adverse	Slight adverse	Very slight adverse

7.4.3 As during construction, 'Significant' effects would continue in the short term (year 1) for receptors within the SANG land immediately adjacent to the Site (Viewpoints 17 and 18). The proposed development would continue to form an immediately obvious element in the scene by day, having an Appreciable adverse effect on the character of the scene in both summer and winter. Effects at night would be less than 'Significant', with glimpses of lighting seen in the context of other existing development.

7.4.4 Over time as the proposed mitigation planting and the existing planting within the SANG matures, the proposed development would become more screened, and daytime effects would fall to moderate adverse (year 7) and slight / very slight adverse (year 15) (not 'Significant'). Nighttime effects would be slight / very slight adverse.

7.4.5 From Viewpoint 13, effects would be limited to winter months and would be slight adverse in all periods.

7.5 VISUAL EFFECTS FROM PRIVATE VIEWPOINTS

7.5.1 Planning is primarily concerned with effects on the public domain. The assessments made in Appendix 4 (and discussed above) are therefore representative of viewpoints within the public domain. They are taken at standing eye level (1.6m) in areas accessible to the public.

7.5.2 However, views would also be possible from viewpoints within the private domain. These include areas of private ground; commercial and industrial premises; and views from gardens and houses / flats within the estimated Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI).

7.5.3 As set out in the Limitations of Appraisal (Section 3.3), the visibility of the Site from private properties has been estimated both by looking towards the Site from public areas, and by standing on Site and looking outwards. No attempt has been made to access private property for more detailed assessment. With this in mind the assessments below have been undertaken on a conservative basis and present what is believed would be the worst-case scenario.

Visual effects on private commercial / industrial properties

7.5.4 There are several commercial premises along the eastern side of Basingstoke Road; at least part of 'Highlands' is used for commercial uses; and the Wellington Industrial Estate falls along the southern edge of the area identified within the estimated Zone of Visual Influence on drawing 1070-A-07.

7.5.5 However, it is extremely unlikely that there would be anything more than glimpsed views of the development proposals from these locations. On the Highlands Estate it is not believed that there would be any views from ground or first floor windows within 'Highlands' itself, or from its immediate grounds which are located to the south of a belt of existing mature trees. Some glimpses in winter may exist from the second floor, however, only three windows face north towards the Site, and views are seen over the flat roof of the northern extension of the building. Any glimpse of the development from 'Highlands' in winter would scarcely be appreciated in the scene.

7.5.6 Effects on commercial and industrial properties are therefore considered to be negligible.

Visual effects on receptors at private residential properties

7.5.7 Private residential properties within the ZVI surrounding the Site can be divided into the following areas:

- Properties within the adjacent 57 unit scheme ('Copenhagen Rise').
- Properties on the Highlands Estate to the south of the Site.
- Properties in Wellington Court to the northwest of the Site.
- Properties along Clements Close to the south of the Highlands Estate.

7.5.8 For each of these areas assessments of the level of effect have been made below.

7.5.9 In accordance with Table B.3 in Appendix I, the susceptibility of receptors within their private homes and gardens would be high; and value attached to views by the receptors would also be high. Using Table B.4 the sensitivity of receptors within these properties is therefore **high**.

7.5.10 The level of effect on potential receptors within these parts of the properties are therefore as follows:

- Properties at the western end of the recently constructed 57 unit scheme (Copenhagen Rise) would have views of the proposed development from both ground level and upper floors. This includes views from windows on the end (west-northwest facing) elevation of number 29; oblique views from the front elevation south-southwest facing windows of number 29 and from rear upper floor windows on number 27 and 34; potential oblique to very oblique views from windows on the front elevations of even numbers from number 30 to 42; and potential views from the upper floor rear windows of odd numbers from 15 to 25.⁴² (For locations of properties refer to Appendix 10.)
 - Of these the majority of views would be seen at oblique to very oblique angles or in the context of other foreground properties and their gardens and **would not be significant**; but from the west-northwest facing windows on number 29 there would be clear views of the proposed housing (seen across the adjacent road), having a substantially detrimental effect on the scene. Using the methodology set out in Appendix I the magnitude of effect from number 29 would be High Adverse, resulting in a **substantial (and therefore significant) adverse effect**.⁴³
- On the Highlands Estate there are three properties located to the north of the Highlands access drive with views towards the Site. 'Highlands Cottage' (divided into two properties which sit close to the southern boundary of the Site) and 'Inner Lodge' (a bungalow located closer to the Highlands Access drive).
 - Due to the orientation of windows there would not be any views from within 'Number 1 Highlands Cottage', however, from 'Number 2 Highlands Cottage' and from the gardens of both properties there would be views of the housing proposed at the southwestern end of the Site in both summer and winter. From these properties the proposed housing on Site would be seen through an existing hedgerow/tree belt which sits along the Site boundary, but the development would be clearly apparent, having a notably detrimental effect on the character of the scene in summer, and a moderately detrimental effect in winter. Using the methodology set out in Appendix I the magnitude of effect in all periods would be Medium-low Adverse in summer and Medium adverse in winter, resulting in **appreciable (summer) to major adverse (winter) (and therefore significant) effects**.
 - From 'Inner Lodge' there would also be views of the housing proposed at the southwestern end of the Site in both summer and winter, and again the proposed housing on Site would be seen through an existing hedgerow/tree belt which sits along the Site boundary, but from this property the proposals would only have a very-slightly detrimental effect on the character of the scene in summer and would form a less visible element in the scene in winter (having a slightly detrimental effect). Using the methodology set out in Appendix I the magnitude of effect in all periods would be Very-low Adverse in summer and Low adverse

in winter, resulting in **slight (summer) to moderate adverse (winter) (and therefore not significant) effects**.

- From Wellington Court views are largely screened by their surrounding vegetation and by the nature of topography. In summer views are likely to be restricted to a glimpse of the housing along the northern site boundary from the private driveway, which would be seen through the intervening woodland and beyond / alongside the recently constructed 57 unit scheme, and would scarcely be appreciated. In winter, however, views from the driveway would be slightly more open, and there are also likely to be relatively short term views of the proposed housing along the western boundary of the Site from a small number of the properties themselves (mainly from upper floors), through their intervening vegetation and across the SANG. In the medium to longer term, however, these views would become filtered / screened by the proposed mitigation planting and by the planting within the SANG itself. Using the methodology set out in Appendix I in the short term the magnitude of effect would be Very-low Adverse (at worst) in summer and Low adverse in winter, resulting in **slight (summer) to moderate adverse winter effects**; but in the medium term effects would fall to **neutral throughout. Effects would not be significant**.
- From Clements Close views would be seen past foreground boundary vegetation, across the fields and past vegetation on the Highlands Estate, and past vegetation along the southern boundary of the Site, and it is unlikely that there would be anything more than glimpsed views of the development proposals. **Effects from these properties would not be significant**.

⁴² Rear windows at ground level on all these properties face into their rear gardens and are screened by surrounding fences.

⁴³ There is one upper floor northwest facing window on number 34, but this is a bathroom window with frosted glass and there is no clear view.

8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

- 8.1.1 This report considers the Landscape and Visual effects resulting from the development proposed on the Application Site.
- 8.1.2 The report sets out the methodology of appraisal (Appendix 1 and 2); a detailed baseline study of the Site and surrounding area; a description of the proposals; and then evaluates the likely Landscape and Visual effects of the proposals.
- 8.1.3 The conclusions of these assessments are set out below. For detailed assessments refer to Appendices 4 (Visual) and 5 (Landscape); and Sections 6 and 7 above.

8.2 LIKELY LANDSCAPE EFFECTS CONCLUSION

- 8.2.1 The assessment of the likely effects of the development on the Landscape resource has been undertaken in two phases. Firstly the assessment has considered the effects on key constituent elements of the landscape, and then the effect on overall landscape character has been considered. This is the effect on the landscape resource as a whole, and is based on the assessments of effect on the individual elements contributing to its character.
- 8.2.2 The assessment of the key constituent elements of the Landscape has been undertaken in Appendix 5, where 20 components have been considered under three headings:
- **Physical influences**
 - **Influences of human activity**
 - **Aesthetic and Perceptual factors**
- 8.2.3 A baseline study has been undertaken for each element and an initial assessment made of the likely potential for significant effects; and then detailed assessments have been carried out for those elements considered to have this potential.
- 8.2.4 In this case the restricted area over which the development proposals would be seen significantly limits the area of the surrounding landscape over which effects may be felt; and only Vegetation; Land use/Management; and Pattern/Character of Settlement were carried forward to detailed reporting. The remaining elements were excluded on the basis that there was no potential for significant effects (refer to paragraph 6.2.2 above).
- 8.2.5 In concluding the effects of the development on overall landscape character it is clear that the effects on the landscape resource are limited. Of the 20 constituent elements investigated 17 have no potential for significant adverse effects (meaning any adverse effects would be no greater than moderate) and for the majority of these the effects of the development would most likely be between slight and neutral (for instance there would be no real effects on underlying Geology / Geomorphology, Soils / Pedology, Landform / Topography, Cultural Associations, Landscape Scale, Complexity, Remoteness or Wildness; and effects on Drainage / Water Bodies, Heritage Assets, the Character of Buildings and Built Form, Dark Skies, Recreational access / movement, Landscape Pattern, the degree of Enclosure / Openness, Tranquillity and Sense of Place would be minimal).
- 8.2.6 Of the three key constituent elements carried forward to detailed assessment:
- Whilst there would be an adverse effect on the **vegetation** on site during construction and the early years of the operational phase of the development, in the medium term the planting undertaken would mitigate this impact and in the longer term there would be a beneficial impact on the vegetation resource:

- The effects on Site (direct effects) were assessed as **appreciable adverse** during construction falling to **slight adverse** in year 1; **neutral** in year 7 and **slight beneficial** in year 15.
- The effects on the wider setting (indirect effects) were assessed as **neutral** during construction and at years 1 and 7, and **very slight beneficial** in year 15.
- For **Land use**, whilst clearly there would be a significant effect on the Site itself (as the majority of the Site would change from a pastoral agricultural field to a residential area), residential land uses are found immediately adjacent to the Site and are not out of keeping with the surrounding landscape:
 - The effects on Site (direct effects) were assessed as **major adverse** in all periods.
 - The effects on the wider setting (indirect effects) were assessed as **slight adverse** during construction falling to **very slight adverse** in years 1, 7 and 15.
- For **Pattern / Character of Settlement**, there would be limited effects on settlement character (which would remain suburban); and a slight change to the existing linear settlement pattern along the Basingstoke Road; however, the development would only have a minor effect on the pattern of Spencers Wood as a whole; development would not introduce development to the west side of the road in an area where it is currently not present; and this change would only be appreciated on the Site itself and from a few publicly accessible locations in the immediately surrounding landscape.
 - The effects were assessed as **very slight adverse** in all periods.

8.2.7 In conclusion the overall the effects on the landscape resource are minimal. Considering the effect on overall landscape character, using the methodology in Appendix 2, the landscape sensitivity has been judged to be **medium** (refer to section 4.11), and the magnitude of effect is judged to be **low adverse** in both the short and medium to long term (refer to paragraph 6.5.3 above).

8.2.8 Using table A.7 of the Landscape Methodology the level of effect on overall landscape character has therefore been judged to be a **very slight adverse effect** in all periods. Ultimately the development would integrate well with existing landscape / townscape character, but there would be a permanent change in land use on Site and the extension of the residential area to the west of Basingstoke Road would have a permanent effect on the settlement pattern of Spencers Wood.

8.3 LIKELY VISUAL EFFECTS CONCLUSION

- 8.3.1 Despite the location of the Application Site on the ridgeline to the west of Basingstoke Road, the primary Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) of the proposed development is very small and there are very few publicly accessible areas of the landscape (or private residences) from where the proposed development would be seen.
- 8.3.2 The ZVI is located almost entirely to the west of Basingstoke Road covering a restricted area of the landscape largely to the south and west of the site within a distance of less than approximately 575m of the centre of the site; and measures only 0.4 square kilometres (approximately).
- 8.3.3 Locally to the site the Zone of Visual Influence is heavily restricted by existing built form (to the east) and vegetation (to the north and south); and from the west vegetation and the effect of topography prevents most views from the bottom of the hillside (on Woodcock Lane).

8.3.4 From the landscape further west (beyond the A33) vegetation on the hillside immediately west of the site combined with the flat landscape in the valley; vegetation along the A33; high lane-side hedgerows; tree lined lanes; vegetation along the raised Basingstoke to Reading railway line; trees along the course of the Foudry Brook; and trees along intervening field boundaries prevents all but glimpsed views of the area around the Application Site.

Likely effects on receptors at viewpoints within the Public Domain

8.3.5 Of the 19 viewpoints in the public domain considered in detail in Appendix 4, only three have been carried forward to detailed reporting. The remaining viewpoints were excluded on the basis that there was no potential for significant effects, as the development proposals are either not visible; would scarcely be appreciated by receptors; or at worst would only have a slightly detrimental effect on the character of the scenes (refer to paragraph 7.2.6 above).

8.3.6 The viewpoints considered to have the potential for significant effects were assessed in detail for day time and night time effects in both summer and winter during the construction phase of the development; and in the short (year 1), medium (year 7) and longer term (year 15):

- The most significant effects in the public domain are those experienced by receptors looking west from the adjacent SANG land in the part of the SANG in close proximity to the Site (Viewpoints 17 and 18). From this part of the SANG the proposals would be clearly visible during construction and in the short term, but in the medium to longer term the proposals would become filtered / screened by the proposed mitigation planting and (most notably) by the existing planting recently undertaken in the SANG itself:
 - During construction and in the short term **appreciable (and therefore significant) adverse effects** would exist in daytime; and **slight to moderate adverse effects** (not significant) would exist at night.
 - Once operational, however, in the short term **appreciable (and therefore significant) adverse effects** would continue to exist in daytime and **slight to moderate adverse effects** (not significant) would exist at night; but in the medium term these would fall to **moderate adverse effects** during the day and **slight adverse effects** at night; and in the longer term effects would fall to **slight to very slight adverse effects throughout. In the medium to longer term effects would not be significant.**
- Looking north from Shinfield Footpath 23 (crossing the Highlands Estate to the south of the Site):
 - In winter during construction **slight adverse effects** would exist in daytime only; and once operational **slight adverse effects** would exist in all periods (day time and at night in the short, medium and longer term).
 - In summer development on the Site would not be seen from this footpath during the daytime; and at night the proposals are unlikely to be appreciated. **Effects would not be significant.**

8.3.7 From the public domain the overall effects of development on the Application Site would be very small.

Likely effects on receptors at private viewpoints

8.3.8 Within the private domain at least part of 'Highlands' is used for commercial uses and the Wellington Industrial Estate falls on the southern edge of the area identified within the estimated Zone of Visual Influence; however, it is extremely unlikely that there would be anything more than glimpsed views of the development proposals from these premises.

8.3.9 From residential properties there would be no views of significance from properties in Clements Court; and there would be no views of significance from properties within Wellington Court (although receptors using their private drive and in a few properties on the southwest side of this housing would experience **slight adverse** (summer) to **moderate adverse** (winter) effects in the short term).

8.3.10 Similarly, effects on receptors in the majority of properties along Copenhagen Rise in the recently completed 57 unit scheme **would not be significant.**

8.3.11 From the private domain it is receptors within west-northwest facing rooms in number 29 Copenhagen Rise and within two private residential properties (numbers 1 and 2 'Highlands Cottage') on the Highlands Estate that would be most significantly affected. From these properties:

- Receptors in number 29 Copenhagen Rise would experience **substantial adverse (and therefore significant) effects in all periods.**
- Receptors in 'Numbers 1 and 2 Highlands Cottage' would experience appreciable (summer) to major adverse winter (and therefore significant) effects in all periods.

Conclusion of effects on overall visual amenity

8.3.12 In conclusion, considering all of the above, the effects of the proposed development on receptors at individual viewpoints; and the effects of the proposed development on overall visual amenity (the overall pleasantness of the views that receptors enjoy of their surroundings) are very limited.

8.3.13 Views of the Site are restricted by surrounding vegetation, built form and the effects of topography, and in the public domain only the effects experienced by receptors within the part of the SANG land in close proximity to the Site boundary are judged to be "significant" (and only in the short term). In the medium to longer term there would be no "significant" effects on receptors in the public domain.

8.3.14 Although it should be noted that planning is primarily concerned with effects on the public domain there would, however, be "significant" adverse effects on receptors within one property within the immediately adjacent 57 unit scheme along Copenhagen Rise, and for receptors at two private residences on the Highlands Estate.

8.3.15 Overall, however, visual effects of this development are considered to be minimal.

9 REFERENCES

9.1 DOCUMENT REFERENCES

- 9.1.1 Landscape Institute & Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment; (2013); Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition.
- 9.1.2 Landscape Institute; (2019); Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 06/19 and appendices; Visual Representation of Development Proposals.
- 9.1.3 Landscape Institute, (2019); Technical Guidance Note 2/19; Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA).
- 9.1.4 Landscape Institute; (2021); Technical Guidance Note 02/21 'Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations'.
- 9.1.5 Landscape Institute; (2024); Technical Guidance Note LITGN-2024-0; Notes and clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third edition (GLVIA3).
- 9.1.6 Historic England; (2017); Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in planning Note 3 (second edition) (GPA3); The Setting of Heritage Assets.
- 9.1.7 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; (December 2024; National Planning Policy Framework.
- 9.1.8 Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document: January 2010
- 9.1.9 Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan Document Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan: February 2014.
- 9.1.10 Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan Document Adopted Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan: January 2023.
- 9.1.11 Natural England; London and Southeast Region 1:250,000 series Agricultural Land Classification Map.
- 9.1.12 Natural England National Character Area Profile: 129 Thames Basin Heaths.
- 9.1.13 Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment. Land Use Consultants: November 2019.
- 9.1.14 West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment. Land Use Consultants: August 2019.
- 9.1.15 Wokingham Borough Council Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document: June 2012.
- 9.1.16 A Vision for our Villages, Ryesh Green, Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross. Shinfield Parish Council: April 2008 with Notification of Amendments dated August 2009.
- 9.1.17 Shinfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan. Shinfield Parish Council; February 2017.

9.2 WEBSITE REFERENCES

- 9.2.1 Wokingham Borough Council online policy map: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d76c713282874f3da74b3e46bc473d3f>
- 9.2.2 Wokingham Borough Council online planning pages: <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/>
- 9.2.3 Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC). Web link - <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>
- 9.2.4 Historic England List entry – 'Library The School House' - <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1312952>
- 9.2.5 Historic England - <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/map-search?clearresults=True>

- 9.2.6 CPRE Tranquillity mapping: <https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/tranquility-map-england/>
- 9.2.7 CPRE's Light Pollution and Dark Skies map: <https://www.cpre.org.uk/light-pollution-dark-skies-map/>
- 9.2.8 Sustrans National Cycle Network: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/national-cycle-network/>
- 9.2.9 British Geological Survey Geology Viewer: <https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/>
- 9.2.10 Cranfield University's Soilscape viewer: <https://www.landis.org.uk/soilscape/>
- 9.2.11 Google maps: <https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@51.393647,-0.9750295,14z>
- 9.2.12 Bing maps: <https://binged.it/2SE9HVZ>

9.3 MAP REFERENCES

- 9.3.1 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map.

10 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary is intended to define terms and assist with understanding the approach taken within the above assessment. It sets out some general terms and then explains the approach taken to the consideration of effects on key components of the landscape which contribute to character, using the three headings of Physical Influences, Influences of Human Activity, and Aesthetic and Perceptual Factors.

GENERAL TERMS

10.1 Impact

10.1.1 Impact is defined in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) as “the action being taken”.⁴⁴

10.2 Effect

10.2.1 Effect is defined in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as “the change resulting from that action”.⁴⁵ Put simply, ‘impacts’ have an ‘effect’.

10.3 Setting of a heritage asset

10.3.1 Setting of a heritage asset is defined in the NPPF as “the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced”.⁴⁶

Reference is sometimes made to the ‘immediate’, ‘wider’ and ‘extended’ setting of heritage assets, but Historic England’s Advice Note 3 makes it clear that “the terms should not be regarded as having any particular formal meaning.”⁴⁷

Historic England’s Advice Note 3 provides further guidance on the setting of heritage assets and should be referred to for further detail. It also makes it clear that “setting is not itself a heritage asset, nor a heritage designation, although land comprising a setting may itself be designated Its importance lies in what it contributes to the significance of the heritage asset or to the ability to appreciate that significance.”⁴⁸

10.4 Scenic quality

10.4.1 Scenic quality is “the term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily, but not wholly the visual senses).”⁴⁹

Scenic quality can be influenced by a variety of factors including elements such as a distinctive sense of place; striking landform; visual interest created by patterns of land cover; or elements which appeal to the senses (including strong aesthetic qualities reflecting factors such as scale and form, degree of openness or enclosure, colours and textures, simplicity or diversity, and ephemeral or seasonal interest; memorable or unusual views and eye-catching features or landmarks; and characteristic cognitive and sensory stimuli (e.g. sounds, quality of light, characteristic smells, characteristics of the weather)).⁵⁰

10.5 Visual amenity

10.5.1 Visual amenity is defined in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as “the overall pleasantness of the views that receptors enjoy of their surroundings”.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. (2013) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third edition* (GLVIA3), Oxford: Routledge, Paragraph 1.15.
⁴⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁶ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (2023) *National Planning Policy Framework*, London: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Annex 2: Glossary, Page 72.
⁴⁷ Historic England. (2017) *The Setting of Heritage Assets, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3*. 2nd edn. Page 5.
⁴⁸ Ibid., Page 4, Paragraph 9.
⁴⁹ GLVIA3, Page 84, Box 5.1.

10.6 Landscape function

10.6.1 Landscape function refers to the natural purpose of the landscape, or the role it fulfils. A landscape may have several functions including as a consequence of land use (for example as part of an agricultural landscape); and the way in which it contributes to the functioning of elements such as natural hydrological systems (e.g. acting as part of a river catchment or flood plain), areas of undisturbed and healthy soils, areas that form carbon sinks (such as a peat bog, woodland or ocean), areas of diverse landcover, pollinator rich habitats (such as wildflower meadows), and Green Infrastructure networks; and may also include its function as part of a National Park or AONB or as part of the setting of such landscapes.

A landscape may also have a spatial function, although it should be noted that “the presence of a spatial designation (e.g., Green Belt or Green Gap) is not in itself an indicator of high landscape value”.⁵²

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TERMS

Physical Influences

10.7 Geology / geomorphology

10.7.1 In landscape character terms effects on geology / geomorphology are considered in terms of physical effects on geological features in the landscape (such as characteristic scarp slopes, ridges or low lying river valleys). Effects on less visually obvious aspects of geology such as effects on groundwater reserves are the domain of other experts and fall outside the scope of Landscape Character Assessment.⁵³

10.8 Soils / pedology

10.8.1 In landscape character terms effects on soils are considered in terms of effects on the characteristics of that landscape. For example, clay soils give rise to poorly draining landscapes where water (ponds, lakes, streams etc.) often becomes a characteristic feature, and vegetation is characterised by clay loving species such as English oak.⁵⁴

10.9 Vegetation

10.9.1 In landscape character terms effects on vegetation are considered both in terms of the effects on the physical resource (the amount and type of vegetation added or lost as a consequence of the proposals); and the effects on the wider landscape character.

10.10 Landform / topography

10.10.1 In landscape character terms effects on topography / landform are considered both in terms of the effects on the physical resource (the amount the existing landform is changed by cut and fill operations to accommodate the proposals); and the effects on the wider landscape character.

10.11 Drainage

10.11.1 In landscape character terms effects on drainage are considered both in terms of the effects on the physical resource (for example an effect on the course of a river or stream itself); and any effects on

⁵⁰ Natural England. (2011) *Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England*, Natural England, Appendix 1, Page 25.
⁵¹ GLVIA3, Paragraph 2.20.
⁵² Landscape Institute. (2021) *Technical Guidance Note 02/21, Assessing landscape value outside national designations*, Page 12.
⁵³ Such effects will not affect landscape character unless they impact so greatly as to affect other landscape elements such as vegetation.
⁵⁴ Effects on soil structure or quality caused by moving soils during construction of a project are not considered as part of the assessment of landscape effects as it is assumed that these effects would be managed and minimised through a detailed construction method statement and would, therefore, have a negligible effect on landscape character.

wider landscape character (for example the change in wider character caused by draining of an area of flood plain normally subject to seasonal flooding).

Influences of Human Activity

10.12 Heritage assets

10.12.1 In landscape character terms effects on designated heritage assets (including World Heritage Sites / Conservation Areas / Listed Buildings / Scheduled Monuments / Registered Parks and Gardens / Registered Battlefields / Protected Wreck Sites) and non-designated assets (such as non-designated parkland or locally listed non-designated heritage assets)⁵⁵ are considered in terms of the way the heritage assets affect the character of the landscape, and whether any changes to these assets or the way they are experienced (as a consequence of the development) would change this established character. Effects are therefore considered both in terms of any effects to the physical heritage assets themselves, and in terms of any effects on how they are experienced in the landscape (i.e., its setting - for example if views are screened or opened up / or if a designed vista is blocked by the proposals). In short, in landscape character terms we assess the way the assets contribute to landscape character and whether this is changed as a consequence of the proposed development.⁵⁶

10.13 Land use / management

10.13.1 In landscape character terms effects on land use are considered both in terms of the effects on the site itself and effects on wider landscape character (considering the nature of surrounding land uses, and the visibility of the site). The questions that are considered are “what are the effects on the site itself”; and “what are the effects of this change on the wider setting”.

10.14 Landscape / settlement pattern

10.14.1 In landscape character terms effects on landscape / settlement pattern are considered in terms of effects on the pattern of the landscape created by elements such as built-up areas, fields, heathlands, woodlands, copses etc. and boundary features including water courses, roads, rail lines, Public Rights of Way, hedgerows, shelter belts etc.

10.15 Character of settlement

10.15.1 In landscape character terms effects on the character of settlement are considered in terms of their shape (e.g. linear, nucleated, dispersed, isolated etc.); and effects on their character (urban, suburban, rural etc.).

10.16 Character of buildings / built form

10.16.1 In landscape character terms effects on the character of buildings and built form are considered in terms of architectural style, heights, materials, massing etc. of buildings / built form; and whether the proposals will be compatible with the existing built form found in the surrounding landscape.

10.17 Dark Skies

10.17.1 In landscape character terms effects on dark skies are considered in terms of whether lighting is proposed, whether this will integrate with existing lighting in the landscape surrounding a site, and whether this would have an effect on the darkness of night skies in the area.

10.18 Recreational access / movement

10.18.1 In landscape character terms effects on access / movement are considered in terms of effects on public access within the landscape (roads, footpaths, bridleways, byways, access land etc.).

10.19 Cultural associations

10.19.1 In landscape character terms effects on cultural associations are considered in terms of whether there are any references to the landscape in well-known art, literature, poetry, TV / film and music; associated with science, other technical achievements or a notable historic event; or associated with a famous person or people (such as Constable’s view of Salisbury Cathedral or references to the “Secret Low Weald” in Rudyard Kipling’s Poem Puck’s Song), and the effects development would have on these characteristics.

Aesthetic and Perceptual Factors

10.20 Scale

10.20.1 In landscape character terms effects on scale are considered in terms of effects on the size of elements in the landscape such as fields or woodland areas (where large scale refers to large elements such as large fields / large areas of woodland and small scale refers to small fields / elements); and effects on the scale of built form.

10.21 Complexity

10.21.1 In landscape character terms effects on complexity are considered in terms of the effects on the number and type of differing elements that make up the landscape (where a complex landscape is composed of many interconnected parts; and a simple landscape contains few component elements).

10.22 Degree of enclosure / openness

10.22.1 In landscape character terms effects on the degree of enclosure / openness are considered in terms of the openness (or otherwise) of views across the landscape (where openness refers to a landscape with wide, expansive views across an area). Landscape enclosure / openness is generally determined by the number of elements above eye level; including buildings, slopes, tall vegetation such as woods and tall hedgerows, and walls / fences.

10.23 Tranquillity

10.23.1 Tranquillity is considered in terms of both noise (aural tranquillity) and visual intrusion (visual tranquillity). In landscape character terms a tranquil place is one that is calm, peaceful, quiet, serene; without detractors both aural and visual. Effects on tranquillity are therefore considered in terms of the effects on these characteristics of the landscape on and around a site.

10.24 Wildness

10.24.1 A truly wild landscape is one that is uninhabited, uncultivated, unaffected by human intervention. Although clearly there are degrees of wildness, in landscape character terms effects are considered in terms of the effects on these characteristics both on site, and in the wider landscape.

⁵⁵ Some Local Planning Authorities compile lists of non-designated heritage assets. These are “buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified by plan-making bodies as having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets” as defined in paragraph 039 of the Historic Environment section of the Government’s Planning Practice Guidance. The appearance of a non-designated asset on a local list does not give it statutory protection but it does identify that it is a valued asset and ensures that it is taken account of in the planning process.

⁵⁶ Effects on the significance of the heritage assets themselves (including how their setting (defined in the NPPF as “the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced”) contributes to this significance) are considered by Heritage Consultants and fall outside the scope of this assessment.

10.25 Remoteness

- 10.25.1 A remote landscape is one that is located far away, distant, far from civilization. Although clearly there are degrees of remoteness, in landscape character terms effects are considered in terms of the effects on these characteristics both on site, and in the wider landscape.

10.26 Sense of place

- 10.26.1 In landscape character terms, sense of place is considered in terms of whether there are characteristics (or a combination of characteristics) that makes a place distinctive. A location with a strong sense of place has something unique or particular to that location, whilst one with little sense of place is unremarkable and looks much like many other similar locations.