



5.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This Chapter has been prepared by Pegasus Group and comprises a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of the Proposed Development. The LVIA refers to the details set out in chapters 3 and 4 of the ES, and provides additional detail where required, to ensure a comprehensive assessment.
- 5.1.2 The site comprises a parcel of five fields of agricultural land situated to the south of the main settlement area of Spencers Wood, as shown on the Site Location Plan (Figure 1.1). For ease of reference in this LVIA, the fields will be referred to as Fields 1 to 5, numbered from north to south, as shown on the Site Location Plan (Figure 1.1).
- 5.1.3 Additional information and a more detailed description of the physical components, landscape character and visual amenity of the site and study area are set out in later sections of this Chapter. The parameters assessed for this Chapter are set out on the EIA Parameters Plans (Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2) and described further in Chapter 4 of the ES.
- 5.1.4 This Chapter aims to identify and describe the effects that are likely to occur including whether they are adverse or beneficial. It aims to assess the likely significance of the effects identified; and it includes proposals for measures designed to avoid, prevent or reduce any significant adverse effects.
- 5.1.5 This LVIA will consider existing landscape and visual receptors in the study area, these include:
- Physical landscape resources;
 - Landscape character; and
 - Views and visual amenity experienced by residents, recreational users (including visitors and tourists) and road users.
- 5.1.6 Principles and good practice for undertaking landscape and visual impact assessment are set out in the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of



Environmental Management (IEMA) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (2013)¹ (GLVIA3).

- 5.1.7 The detailed methodology used for the LVIA is set out in later sections of this Chapter.
- 5.1.8 The Development Framework Masterplan for the proposed development is included in the Appendices to Chapter 4, along with the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (ILMP) (refer to **Figure 5.9**).
- 5.1.9 Other Figures and Appendices that form part of this Chapter are listed in the following table.

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¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2013) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition*



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5.2 Scoping, Consultation and Overview of Potential Effects

Preliminary Landscape and Visual Work

- 5.2.1 Input on landscape and visual matters was provided to the EIA Screening Request (January 2024), and the EIA Scoping process (March 2024). A review of landscape and visual constraints and opportunities was also undertaken (January 2024), which has fed into the Development Framework Plan.
- 5.2.2 A formal scoping response was received from Wokingham Borough Council on the 21st February 2025 (**Appendix 1.1**). In relation to landscape and visual matters, the scoping response highlights:
- Trees and green infrastructure networks;
 - The location of the site within Landscape Character Area 'J3 Spencers Wood Settled and farmed Clay';



- Views across the site to the south, up to Farley Hill;
- The presence of the 'Ridges and Rivers Valued Landscape';
- Views from roads and footways immediately adjacent to the site (including Basingstoke Road and Barracks Lane, noting the latter is a narrow track providing access to a small cluster of private dwellings);
- The landscape officer's suggestion that there is a sense of 'leaving the settlement' travelling south along Basingstoke Road;
- The landscape officer's suggestion that the field provide 'valuable' visual separation between the settlements of Swallowfield and Spencers Wood;
- Commentary from the landscape officer on the initial layouts;
- Broad agreement with the viewpoints proposed to be included in the LVIA, notwithstanding a suggested view from Barracks Lane
- Separate commentary on the initial SANG layout;

5.2.3 Where necessary, these matters have been considered in this LVIA and also in respect of the iterative design process for the proposed development and SANG.

Limitations to the Assessment

5.2.4 This Chapter has been prepared with the following known limitations:

- The proposed development for assessment is as illustrated on the ES Parameter Plans; and
- During the baseline survey, there were some areas which were inaccessible (such as private land, commercial premises and residential buildings). In these instances, professional judgement has been used to approximate the likely views from these locations.

5.2.5 Within the limitations identified, the information on the proposed development and baseline information is considered sufficient to undertake a robust assessment of landscape and visual effects for the purposes of an ES.



5.3 Assessment Methodology

Overview

5.3.1 The approach and methodology used for this report has been developed using best practice guidance, as set out in the following documents:

- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013), *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition* (GLVIA3);
- Landscape Institute (2024), Technical Guidance Note 2024-01: Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition;
- Natural England (2014), *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*;
- Landscape Institute (2019), Technical Guidance Note 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals; and
- Landscape Institute (2021), Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations.

5.3.2 Use has also been made of additional sources of data and information, such as published character assessments, aerial imagery (Google Earth), and Ordnance Survey (OS) base mapping. These are referenced in the relevant sections of the baseline information.

5.3.3 Supporting plans and figures have also been produced as part of this LVIA and are included as **Figures 5.1 to 5.10**.

Level of assessment

5.3.4 Principles and good practice for undertaking LVIA are set out in the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of Environmental Management (IEMA) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA, 2013).

5.3.5 In August 2024, the Landscape Institute published new technical guidance in relation to LVIA, the 'Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3)' (LI TGN 2024-01). This TGN



supersedes previous clarifications and guidance in respect of the GLVIA3, and has been taken into account where relevant.

- 5.3.6 The methodology used for this Chapter is based upon this guidance.
- 5.3.7 The Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) 2013 acknowledge that LVIA can be carried out either as a standalone 'appraisal' or as part of a broader EIA. The GLVIA note that the overall principles and core steps in the process are the same but that there are specific procedures in EIA with which an LVIA must comply.
- 5.3.8 Landscape assessment is the systematic description and analysis of the landscape resource, including physical features and elements of the landscape, of how their composition forms distinct areas of character, appraisal of the sensitivity, and assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development on the landscape. These elements include topography and landform, vegetation pattern, land use, hydrology, development and transport patterns, and public access.
- 5.3.9 Visual assessment is the description and analysis of the views experienced by receptors from residential properties, public buildings, public open spaces, public rights of way, open access areas, transport corridors and places of work, and the potential effect of the proposed development on these receptors.
- 5.3.10 The iterative process of LVIA has been applied to the proposed development and has enabled the early identification of constraints and opportunities related to landscape and visual matters. In turn this has informed the landscape mitigation strategy and influenced the design of the proposed development.
- 5.3.11 Landscape features and elements provide the physical environment for flora and fauna and the associated importance of biodiversity assets. This LVIA does not consider the value, susceptibility or importance of ecology and biodiversity, nor does it consider impacts from an ecological stance.
- 5.3.12 Heritage assets such as Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas all contribute to the overall landscape character, context and setting of an area. These aspects have also been given consideration in the LVIA in terms of setting and landscape character (and trees where relevant). However,



this assessment does not address the significance or importance of heritage assets and designations or the potential impacts of the development proposal on such assets.

Night Time Impacts/Lighting Impacts

5.3.13 At paragraph 6.12, GLVIA3 notes that for some types of development, the visual effects of lighting may be an issue, and in such cases, it may be important to carry out night-time 'darkness' surveys of the existing conditions in order to address the potential effects of lighting.

5.3.14 Further reference to nighttime impacts and lighting is made in later sections of this Chapter.

Scope of the Assessment

5.3.15 This assessment aims to determine the likely effects of the proposed development on the existing landscape and visual receptors in the study area. The following landscape resources and visual receptors have been addressed:

- Physical landscape features and elements;
- Landscape character; and
- Views and visual amenity experienced by residents, recreational users (including visitors and tourists) and road users.

5.3.16 This assessment details the impacts that may result as a consequence of the proposed development and considers the likely significance of effect arising as a result.

5.3.17 The overall approach to the identification and assessment of landscape and visual effects is summarised as follows:

- Determining the scope of the assessment;
- Collating baseline information for landscape and visual receptors, including completing desk study research and undertaking field-based survey work;



- Reviewing the proposed development and identify and describe the likely impacts of the proposed development (enabling specific judgments to be made on sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors);
- Establishing the sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors (balancing judgments on susceptibility and value);
- Determining the magnitude of impacts (balancing judgments on size / scale, duration and reversibility);
- Assess the likely significance of landscape and visual effects through a balanced approach and clear description of judgments on sensitivity and magnitude; and
- Identify measures to avoid or remedy impacts and the subsequent re-assessment of likely effects.

5.3.18 Additional sources of data and information have also been used were appropriate to do so, such as published character assessments, aerial imagery (Google Earth), and Ordnance Survey (OS) base mapping. These are referenced in the relevant sections of the baseline information.

Determining the Scope of Assessment

Spatial Scope

5.3.19 The spatial scope for the assessment has been determined by a two-stage approach. Firstly a 'preliminary study area' is identified. This is based on the wider landscape context of the site and sets the broad parameters for collation of baseline information; this scope is also considered sufficient to account for the likely effects that will be generated by the proposed development.

5.3.20 In order to focus on the key sensitive receptors and likely effects the spatial scope of the preliminary study area is then refined through the initial stages of the assessment (i.e. desk study and field survey work).

5.3.21 To inform the assessment at the early stages, a computer generated 'zone of theoretical visibility' (ZTV) diagram has been produced for the site (refer to **Figure 5.5 Public Rights of Way, ZTV and Viewpoint Locations**). Further details of this

are set out later in this Chapter.

Collating Baseline Information

- 5.3.22 To capture a comprehensive description of the baseline position for landscape and visual receptors, information has been collated using a process of desk study and field survey work.
- 5.3.23 The desk study includes reference to published landscape character studies and other published policy documents relevant to landscape and visual matters, such as OS 1:25,000 base mapping and aerial imagery.
- 5.3.24 Field survey work was completed during December 2023, with additional site visits completed in 2024. A series of representative photographs were taken with a full-frame digital SLR camera with a 50mm fixed focal length lens, set at approximately 1.8 metres Above Ground Level (AGL). These are presented as a series of viewpoints and have been used to inform both the landscape and, separately, visual appraisal work (included as **Figure 5.6, Site Photographs A to E**, and **Figure 5.7 Viewpoint Photographs 1 to 10**).
- 5.3.25 The field survey and viewpoint photography were undertaken in December when the majority of deciduous vegetation was not in leaf. Consequently, the viewpoints effectively illustrate a worst-case scenario in terms of potential visibility of the proposed development. Where appropriate, consideration has therefore also been given to the potential for reduced visibility during the summer months when deciduous vegetation is in full leaf.
- 5.3.26 The viewpoint photographs used for the assessment are presented as both a series of contextual panoramic photographs with a 60° horizontal field of view (HFoV), supplemented by a full-size single image centered on the site, with a 39.6° HFoV and a 27° vertical field of view (VFoV), as advised by the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19. These have been used to inform the assessment of both landscape and visual impacts.

Assessment of Effects

- 5.3.27 Having established the relevant baseline position the assessment process then completes the following specific stages:

- Evaluate the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and visual receptors, specifically in response to the type of proposed development (sensitivity of landscape resources is not standard and depends on the nature and type of development proposed);
- Identify the potential magnitude of impact on the physical landscape, on landscape character and on visual receptors; and
- Combine professional judgments on the nature of the receptor (sensitivity) and the nature of the change or impact (magnitude) to arrive at a clear and transparent judgment of significance.

5.3.28 The assessment of impacts has been undertaken for three scenarios:

- During construction – assuming a worst-case scenario whereby emerging built form is apparent, but construction activity is ongoing;
- At completion (Year 1) accounting for the proposed development with its inherent mitigation incorporated into the layout, or at least implemented, but not yet established; and
- At completion (Year 15) accounting for the proposed development with inherent mitigation implemented and established to a stage whereby it performs its intended function (e.g. new landscape planting and screening) (these are also considered to be residual effects).

5.3.29 For both landscape and visual effects, the final conclusions on significance are based on the combination of sensitivity and magnitude. The overall judgment on significance is based on the combination of each of the criteria. The rationale for the balance and justification for each judgement is expressed in the detailed analysis.

5.3.30 To draw a distinction between different levels of significance, a scale for the degrees of significance, along with criteria and definitions, have been developed. These provide a structure for making judgements which are clear and objective. However, landscapes and interactions in the landscape are both complex and subtle; as such an element of subjectivity remains. No landscape will fit wholly into any one definition and to try would require extensive and complex criterion.



- 5.3.31 Consequently, professional judgements draw together conclusions in respect of sensitivity, magnitude and significance and these are fully and clearly described by the detailed written analysis presented in the LVIA, supported by descriptive thresholds and criteria for each of these stages in relation to landscape impacts and, separately, visual impacts are set out in the following sections.

Overview of Landscape Sensitivity

- 5.3.32 Although landscape has some intrinsic sensitivity, different landscapes have different elements and features that can accommodate a variety of development types.
- 5.3.33 To reliably inform detailed assessment of impacts, landscape sensitivity needs to be determined with reference to the changes arising from a specific type of development. Therefore, landscape sensitivity is assessed combining judgements on the value attached to a landscape and the susceptibility to the type of change or nature of the development proposed.

Landscape Value

- 5.3.34 Landscape value is the relative value attached to a potentially affected landscape. Landscape value will vary in relation to the different stakeholders and different parts of society that use or experience a landscape.
- 5.3.35 Although factors such as formal designations are an important component when determining value, other aspects are also considered as part of the judgement process.
- 5.3.36 These include issues related natural and cultural heritage (for example ecological, geological or heritage matters), landscape condition, associations (in terms of connections with people, arts or events), distinctiveness (i.e. a sense of unique identity in the landscape), recreational opportunities, perceptual aspects (including scenic quality, wildness and tranquillity) and landscapes with a clearly identifiable role or function.
- 5.3.37 Even where a landscape is included in the boundaries of a formal designation, landscape value will vary in response to the specific landscape that is being considered based on its condition, sense of seclusion or isolation, the presence or



absence of detracting features, the presence or absence of rare or distinctive elements and features, and, the degree to which these form key characteristics.

5.3.38 Factors that have been considered in making judgements on landscape value include designations (both national and local), local planning documents, status of features (e.g. TPOs or Conservation Areas) and local community and interests (for example local green spaces, village greens or allotments).

5.3.39 The following table sets out the criteria that have been considered for determining landscape value. These are informed by the factors identified the LI TGN 02/21.

Table 5.3 – Criteria for Landscape Value	
Value	Criteria
High	Designated areas at an International or National level (including, but not limited to, World Heritage Site, National Parks, AONB's) and also considered an important component of the country's character, experienced by high numbers of tourists. Evidence of natural and cultural heritage interests which contribute positively to the landscape are prominent. Landscape condition in respect of the physical state of individual elements or overall structure is good. Landscape associations might be understood in the national context. The distinctiveness of the landscape reflects a strong sense of identity. Recreational opportunities where the experience of landscape is important and/or promoted are extensive. Perceptual scenic/visual qualities are objectively considered as good. Perceptual qualities of wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies are elevated. Elements of the landscape make a strong contribution to a clearly identifiable landscape function. Functions themselves are landscape specific.
Medium	Designated areas at a Regional or County level (including, but not limited to, green belt, regional scale parks, designated as open space or a Conservation Area in local planning documents) and also considered a distinctive component or the region/county character experienced by a large proportion of its population. Evidence of natural and cultural heritage interests which contribute positively to the landscape are apparent.



	Landscape condition in respect of the physical state of individual elements or overall structure is fair. Landscape associations might be understood in the local context. The distinctiveness of the landscape reflects a common sense of identity. Recreational opportunities where the experience of landscape is important and/or promoted are available. Perceptual scenic/visual qualities are objectively considered as ordinary. Perceptual qualities of wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies are fair. Elements of the landscape make a fair contribution to a clearly identifiable landscape function. Functions themselves are landscape related.
Low	No formal designations but a landscape of local relevance (including, but not limited to, public or semi-public open spaces, village greens or allotments) and also green infrastructure and open spaces within residential areas likely to be visited and valued by the local community. Evidence of natural and cultural heritage interests which contribute positively to the landscape are discreet. Landscape condition in respect of the physical state of individual elements or overall structure is poor. Landscape associations which might be understood are highly localised or esoteric. The distinctiveness of the landscape reflect a generic sense of identity. Recreational opportunities where the experience of landscape is important and/or promoted are limited. Perceptual scenic/visual qualities are objectively considered as poor. Perceptual qualities of wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies are degraded. Elements of the landscape make a limited contribution to a clearly identifiable landscape function. Functions themselves are generic.

5.3.40 Not all considerations for landscape value carry equally weighting in all scenarios. Consequently, professional judgement is applied to establish a balance, and interim categories of 'low to medium' and/or 'medium to high' are employed as necessary.



Landscape Susceptibility

- 5.3.41 The second component of landscape sensitivity relates to susceptibility. Landscape susceptibility to change is the ability of a landscape to accommodate change without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation. In this context, the term landscape receptors can be expanded to cover character areas, particular landscape character types or an individual landscape element or feature. Landscape susceptibility will vary in response to the specific landscape that is being considered and to the nature or type of change that may occur².
- 5.3.42 The following table sets out the criteria that have been considered for determining landscape susceptibility.

Table 5.4 – Criteria for Landscape Sensitivity	
Susceptibility	Criteria
High	Scale of enclosure – landscapes with a low capacity to accommodate the type of development proposed due to the nature of, and interactions between, landscape components (e.g. topography, vegetation cover and built form). Nature of land use – landscapes with no or very little existing reference or context to the type of proposed development. Nature of existing elements – landscapes with components that are not easily retained, replaced or substituted or that reflect strategies for landscape conservation. Nature of existing features – landscapes where detracting features or major infrastructure is not present or where these are present but their influence on the landscape is limited.
Medium	Scale of enclosure – landscapes with a medium capacity to accommodate the type of development proposed due to the nature of, and interactions between, landscape components (e.g. topography, vegetation cover and built form). Nature of land use – landscapes with some existing reference or context to the type of proposed development. Nature of existing elements – landscapes with components that are easily retained, replaced or substituted or that reflect strategies for landscape maintenance or enhancement. Nature of existing features – landscapes where detracting features or major infrastructure is present and the influence of these on the landscape is noticeable.

² Landscape Institute TGN 02/21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations, Paragraph 2.2.13



Low	Scale of enclosure – landscapes with a high capacity to accommodate the type of development proposed due to the nature of, and interactions between, landscape components (e.g. topography, vegetation cover and built form). Nature of land use – landscapes with extensive existing reference or context to the type of proposed development. Nature of existing elements – landscapes with components that are easily retained, replaced or substituted, or where there are few/no existing elements present or that reflect landscape strategies for landscape creation or restoration. Nature of existing features – landscapes where detracting features or major infrastructure is present and the influence of these on the landscape is dominant.
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- 5.3.43 Not all considerations for landscape susceptibility carry equally weighting in all scenarios. Consequently, professional judgement is applied to establish a balance, and interim categories of 'low to medium' and/or 'medium to high' are employed as necessary.

[Landscape Sensitivity](#)

- 5.3.44 Landscape sensitivity is a term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements of the susceptibility of the receptor to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value related to that receptor. Receptors can include specific elements or features or may be judged at a wider scale and include landscape character parcels, types or areas.
- 5.3.45 Having considered in detail the contributing factors to landscape value and the susceptibility of the site and surrounding area to the type of the development being proposed, conclusions on landscape sensitivity can be drawn by balancing the judgements on value and susceptibility.
- 5.3.46 As advocated in the GLVIA3, professional judgement is used to balance judgements on value and susceptibility in order to determine sensitivity. Each of these aspects of the analysis will vary subject to the scale and detail of the assessment.
- 5.3.47 Overall judgements on landscape sensitivity are subsequently described as 'high', 'medium' or 'low' (or combinations of these).



- 5.3.48 In drawing together judgements on landscape value and susceptibility in respect of landscape sensitivity, higher levels of landscape sensitivity will occur where landscape value and landscape susceptibility are toward the upper end of the scale.
- 5.3.49 Lower levels of sensitivity will occur where value and susceptibility are toward the lower end of the scale.
- 5.3.50 More central levels of sensitivity will occur where one component is toward the higher end of the scale whilst one is toward the lower.
- 5.3.51 It is important to note that there are graduations within the process which are not clear cut, and professional judgment is used to balance these and determine an overall judgement on sensitivity.

Magnitude of Landscape Impacts

- 5.3.52 The effect on landscape receptors is assessed in relation to the size or scale of impact, the geographical extent of the change and the duration and the reversibility of the impact. The magnitude of landscape effects has been assessed in accordance with the criteria set out in the following table.

Table 5.5 – Criteria for Determining Magnitude	
Magnitude	Criteria
Very high	The size and scale of change is considered very large due to the extent and proportion of loss of existing landscape elements or the degree of alteration to aesthetic or perceptual aspects. The nature and scale of change to key characteristics which are critical to character is considered very large. Where the geographical extent would have a very substantial influence on the landscape at a regional scale, i.e. across several landscape character areas/types. Duration of impacts would be considered very long term and where the potential reversal of the impact is not likely and in practical terms would be very difficult to achieve.
High	The size and scale of change is considered large due to the extent and proportion of loss of existing landscape elements or the degree of alteration to aesthetic or perceptual aspects. The nature and scale of change to key characteristics which are critical to character is considered large.

Table 5.5 – Criteria for Determining Magnitude

Magnitude	Criteria
	Where the geographical extent would have a substantial influence on the landscape at a regional scale, i.e. across several landscape character areas/types. Duration of impacts would be considered long term and where the potential reversal of the impact is not likely and in practical terms would be very difficult to achieve.
Medium	The size and scale of change is considered moderate due to the extent and proportion of loss of existing landscape elements or the degree of alteration to aesthetic or perceptual aspects. The nature and scale of change to key characteristics which are critical to character is considered moderate. Where the geographical extent would influence the landscape at a local scale, i.e. a single landscape character area/type (or potentially multiple areas/types where a site is located on the boundary between areas). Duration of impacts would be considered midterm and where the potential reversal of the impact is likely and in practical terms would be difficult to achieve.
Low	The size and scale of change is considered small due to the extent and proportion of loss of existing landscape elements or the degree of alteration to aesthetic or perceptual aspects. The nature and scale of change to key characteristics which are critical to character is considered small. Where the geographical extent would influence the landscape in the immediate setting of the site, i.e. limited to the influence of part of a single landscape character area/type. Duration of impacts would be considered short term and where the potential reversal of the impact is more likely and in practical terms would easily be achieved.
Negligible	The size and scale of change is considered very small due to the extent and proportion of loss of existing landscape elements or the degree of alteration to aesthetic or perceptual aspects. The nature and scale of change to key characteristics which are critical to character is considered very small. Where the geographical extent would substantially influence the landscape of the site only. Duration of impacts would be considered very short term and where the potential reversal of the impact is very likely or committed and in practical terms would very easily be achieved.
Nil	There is no perceived change to the landscape.

5.3.53 As with landscape value and landscape susceptibility, interim categories are employed where necessary.



- 5.3.54 These judgements are then taken forward to an assessment of the significance of landscape effects.

Assessment of Visual Effects

- 5.3.55 Visual receptors include a particular person or groups of people likely to be affected at a specific viewpoint or series of viewpoints.
- 5.3.56 The assessment of visual effects considers the receptor at a location, selected as a point that is either particularly representative of a visual experience or where it is the worst-case scenario of a view (for example, a more elevated location at an open point of a PROW, rather than somewhere enclosed by vegetation, even if the route is predominantly enclosed by vegetation).

Visual Sensitivity

- 5.3.57 Sensitivity of visual receptors is determined through balancing judgements on the value attached to a particular view against the receptors susceptibility to change in a view or visual amenity. Given the need to address the specific issues of the proposed development these factors in the context of visual sensitivity are considered as part of the assessment of visual effects.
- 5.3.58 The value attached to a view includes recognition of value through formal designations (for example planning designations or heritage assets), indicators of value attached to views by visitors (for example inclusion on maps/guidebooks, provision of facilities, presence of interpretation).
- 5.3.59 For example, views of higher value are likely to be from designated landscapes where the condition or scenic quality of the view is higher and where distinctive elements or features form a prominent part of a view; views of lower value are likely to be from area of landscapes where the condition and scenic quality of the view is poorer, where there is no reference to distinctive elements or features and where detracting features are prominent in the view.
- 5.3.60 The susceptibility of different visual receptors to changes in views and visual amenity is judged based on the activity of people experiencing the view at any given time or location and the extent to which their attention would be focused on the view and visual amenity rather than on the activity being undertaken.



5.3.61 For example, views more susceptible to change are likely to be permanent views, in unenclosed or elevated positions in the landscape and where the landscape forms a primary focus for the activity of the receptor; views less susceptible to change are likely to be transient or temporary views, located in enclosed areas of the landscape where the landscape is a secondary focus or consideration to the activity of the receptor.

5.3.62 The following table sets out the definitions of sensitivity for different visual receptors. The considerations set out in the table draw together matters of value and matters of susceptibility.

Table 5.6 – Criteria for Visual Sensitivity	
Sensitivity	Criteria
Very high	Designated or protected views or views from publicly accessible locations in protected landscapes Tourists and visitors to heritage assets, or other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience and visit
High	Occupiers of residential properties People who are engaged in outdoor recreation whose attention is likely to be focussed on the landscape People travelling through the landscape on roads, rail or other transport routes where this involves recognised scenic routes and an awareness of views and visual amenity
Medium	People travelling more generally through the landscape on roads, rail or other transport routes People staying in hotels and healthcare institutions People at work and in educational institutions where visual amenity is an important contributor to the setting and quality of working life
Low	People at work and in educational institutions where the visual setting is not important to the quality of working life People engaged in formal sports where the visual setting may play a role, but attention is focused on the activity Views from publicly accessible locations in degraded landscapes

5.3.63 As with landscape value and landscape susceptibility, interim categories are employed where necessary.

5.3.64 It should be noted that as professional judgement is applied to the balance of value and susceptibility of visual receptors, in order to determine sensitivity as set out in

the table above; there may be some instances where a typical receptor is defined a different degree of sensitivity to the guidance included in the table, above.

Magnitude of Visual Impacts

5.3.65 The effect on visual receptors is also assessed in relation to the size or scale of change, the geographical extent of the change, the duration of the change and the reversibility of the impact. The magnitude of visual impacts has been assessed in accordance with the criteria set out in the following table.

Table 5.7: Criteria for Determining Magnitude of Visual Impacts

Table 5.7 – Criteria for Determining Magnitude of Visual Impacts	
Magnitude	Criteria
Very High	The size and scale of change is considered very substantial due to the extent of loss, addition or alteration of features, the changes to the composition of the view including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposal, the degree of contrast and the nature of the experience The geographical extent in relation to the angle, distance and proportion of visibility is considered as very extensive Duration of impacts would be considered long term and where the potential reversal of the impact is not likely and in practical terms would not be achievable Alteration in very close proximity
High	The size and scale of change is considered substantial due to the extent of loss, addition or alteration of features, the changes to the composition of the view including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposal, the degree of contrast and the nature of the experience The geographical extent in relation to the angle, distance and proportion of visibility is considered as extensive Duration of impacts would be considered long term and where the potential reversal of the impact is not likely and in practical terms would be very difficult to achieve Alteration in close proximity
Medium	The size and scale of change is considered fair due to the extent of loss, addition or alteration of features, the changes to the composition of the view including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposal, the degree of contrast and the nature of the experience The geographical extent in relation to the angle, distance and proportion of visibility is considered as small or intermediate Duration of impacts would be considered medium term and where the potential reversal of the impact is likely and in practical terms



Table 5.7 – Criteria for Determining Magnitude of Visual Impacts	
Magnitude	Criteria
	would be difficult to achieve
Low	The size and scale of change is considered small due to the extent of loss, addition or alteration of features, the changes to the composition of the view including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposal, the degree of contrast and the nature of the experience The geographical extent in relation to the angle, distance and proportion of visibility is considered as limited Duration of impacts would be considered short term and where the potential reversal of the impact is very likely and in practical terms would easily be achieved
Negligible	The size and scale of change is considered very small due to the extent of loss, addition or alteration of features, the changes to the composition of the view including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposal, the degree of contrast and the nature of the experience The geographical extent in relation to the angle, distance and proportion of visibility is considered as very limited Duration of impacts would be considered very short term and where the potential reversal of the impact is very likely or committed and in practical terms would very easily be achieved
Nil	There is no view of the proposed development in the view

5.3.66 Interim categories are employed where necessary. These judgements are then taken forward to an assessment of the significance of visual effects.

Determining Significance of Effects

5.3.67 For both landscape and visual effects, the final conclusion on the significance of an effect is based on the combination of sensitivity of receptor and magnitude of change (or impact). The rationale for the overall judgement on significance is based on the combination of each of the criteria individually leading to the balance and justification of these.

5.3.68 Detailed assessment is a means of drawing together, in a systematic way, an assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of a proposed development; however not all landscape and visual effects arising will be significant.



- 5.3.69 Determination of the significance of an effect requires the application of professional judgement to balance the findings in relation to the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of the predicted impacts.
- 5.3.70 The GLVIA3 advocate a move away from formulaic matrices and tables and encourages an approach using professional judgement. Analysis and consideration of value and susceptibility gives rise to a spectrum of judgements on sensitivity, which along with magnitude inform judgements on the effects and help inform the overall judgement of a decision maker.
- 5.3.71 The criteria for determining the significance of effects for landscape and visual impacts are set out in the following tables, below. These criteria are based on guidance provided by the Landscape Institute.

Table 5.8 – Criteria for Determining Significance of Landscape Effects	
Significance of Effect	Description
Major Adverse	The proposed development project would cause major deterioration to a view from a highly sensitive receptor, and would constitute a major discordant element in the view.
Moderate Adverse	The proposed development would cause obvious deterioration to a view from a moderately sensitive receptor, perceptible damage to a view from a receptor of lower sensitivity or limited damage to views to receptors of higher sensitivity.
Minor Adverse	The proposed development would cause limited deterioration to a view from a moderately sensitive receptor, or cause greater deterioration to a view from a receptor of lower sensitivity.
Negligible Adverse	The proposed development and associated changes would be barely perceptible in a view. Changes will be negative (adverse) however this degree of change is not likely to be material and therefore no distinction is made.
Neutral	The change in the view would be barely perceptible but would not be apparent as either a positive or negative change.
Nil	There would be no view of the proposed development.
Negligible Beneficial	The proposed development and associated changes would be barely perceptible in a view. Changes will be positive (beneficial) however this degree of change is not likely to be material and therefore no distinction is made.
Minor Beneficial	The proposed development would cause limited improvement to a view from a moderately sensitive receptor, or would cause greater improvement to a view from a receptor of lower sensitivity.



Table 5.8 – Criteria for Determining Significance of Landscape Effects

Significance of Effect	Description
Moderate Beneficial	The proposed development would cause obvious improvement to a view from a moderately sensitive receptor, perceptible improvement to a view from a receptor of lower sensitivity or limited improvements to views to receptors of higher sensitivity.
Major Beneficial	The proposed development would lead to a major improvement in a view from a highly sensitive receptor.

Table 5.9 – Criteria for Determining Significance of Visual Effects

Significance of Effect	Description
Major Adverse	The proposed development project would cause major deterioration to a view from a highly sensitive receptor, and would constitute a major discordant element in the view.
Moderate Adverse	The proposed development would cause obvious deterioration to a view from a moderately sensitive receptor, perceptible damage to a view from a receptor of lower sensitivity or limited damage to views to receptors of higher sensitivity.
Minor Adverse	The proposed development would cause limited deterioration to a view from a moderately sensitive receptor, or cause greater deterioration to a view from a receptor of lower sensitivity.
Negligible Adverse	The proposed development and associated changes would be barely perceptible in a view. Changes will be negative (adverse) however this degree of change is not likely to be material and therefore no distinction is made.
Neutral	The change in the view would be barely perceptible but would not be apparent as either a positive or negative change.
Nil	There would be no view of the proposed development.
Negligible Beneficial	The proposed development and associated changes would be barely perceptible in a view. Changes will be positive (beneficial) however this degree of change is not likely to be material and therefore no distinction is made.
Minor Beneficial	The proposed development would cause limited improvement to a view from a moderately sensitive receptor, or would cause greater improvement to a view from a receptor of lower sensitivity.



Table 5.9 – Criteria for Determining Significance of Visual Effects	
Significance of Effect	Description
Moderate Beneficial	The proposed development would cause obvious improvement to a view from a moderately sensitive receptor, perceptible improvement to a view from a receptor of lower sensitivity or limited improvements to views to receptors of higher sensitivity.
Major Beneficial	The proposed development would lead to a major improvement in a view from a highly sensitive receptor.

5.3.72 GLVIA3 suggests that scales of three or four (but a maximum of five) categories are preferred (GLVIA3, para 3.27).

5.3.73 However, for both landscape and visual effects, interim categories of 'negligible to minor', 'minor to moderate' and 'moderate to major' are used where the judgements for an effect are determined to fit across the descriptive criteria for the relevant significance banding.

Assessment of Significance

5.3.74 Significance can only be defined in relation to each development and its specific location, and in landscape and visual terms there are no definitive rules as to what constitutes a significant effect.

5.3.75 The GLVIA3 state that, in relation to the EIA Regulations:

"emphasis is on the identification of likely significant environmental effects. This should embrace all types of effect and includes for example those that are positive/beneficial and negative/adverse... Identifying significant effects stresses the need for an approach that is in proportion to the scale of the project and the nature of its likely effects."

5.3.76 For the purposes of this LVIA, in relation to the site and proposed development, effects are considered to be '**significant**' where these are judged to be 'moderate to major' or 'major' (either adverse or beneficial).

5.3.77 However, it is important to note that there remains an element of professional judgement when drawing together an 'overall judgment' on effects and that one single 'significant effect' might not lead to landscape and visual effects being significant on balance (for example, one viewpoint determined to be subject of a



‘significant effect, may not equate to visual effects being significant overall, given the significance judgements of those receptors in the round).

5.4 Baseline Conditions

Landscape Planning Framework

- 5.4.1 In the context of the relevant planning framework, the following section sets out a summary of those policies specific to the landscape and visual issues pertaining to the proposed development and which will have implications for the landscape mitigation strategy presented in this Chapter.

European Landscape Framework

- 5.4.2 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes. The ELC was adopted on 20 October 2000 and came into force on 1 March 2004. It defines landscape as:

“...an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors).”

- 5.4.3 This definition is important in that it focuses on landscape as a resource in its own right and moves beyond the idea that landscapes are only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.4.4 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in December 2024, setting out the Government’s planning policies for England and providing a framework within which the appropriate local council can produce local and neighbourhood plans; the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions³.
- 5.4.5 The NPPF sets out three dimensions to achieving sustainable development that include economic, social and environmental considerations. It places an onus on the planning system to perform a role in relation to the environment that ‘contributes to the protection and enhancement of our natural, built and historic

³ Para 2, MHCLG, NPPF (December 2024)



environment...' going on to note that sustainable solutions should take account of local circumstances and reflect the character of each area. This underpins the strategic guidance set out in the NPPF in relation to landscape and visual matters.

- 5.4.6 In relation to landscape and visual matters, achieving well-designed places (Section 12) aims to ensure that developments are 'visually attractive', are sympathetic to local character (including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting) and to establish and maintain a strong sense of place⁴.
- 5.4.7 Section 15 of the NPPF addresses on 'conserving and enhancing the natural environment' stating that policies and decisions should contribute to this by 'protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (noting that this should be commensurate with a statutory status or identified quality identified in a development plan) and also recognising the 'intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'⁵.
- 5.4.8 NPPF notes the importance that designs 'evolve' in response to local issues and to the views of the community⁶.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 5.4.9 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is a web-based resource prepared by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The PPG sets out guidance across various topics and effectively supersedes previous guidance on many aspects of planning; topics are updated as required.
- 5.4.10 The PPG for the 'Natural Environment' was updated in February 2025 and addresses agricultural land, green infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape.
- 5.4.11 In relation to green infrastructure (GI) the PPG acknowledges how a 'range of spaces and assets' can provide 'environmental and wider benefits'. The PPG states that GI can include:

"...parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and

⁴ Para 135, MHCLG, NPPF (December 2024)

⁵ Section 15 and para 187, MHCLG, NPPF (December 2024)

⁶ Para 137, MHCLG, NPPF (December 2024)



'blue infrastructure' such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies."

5.4.12 The PPG goes on to recognise how GI can help achieve well designed spaces, and conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. The PPG also recognises the benefit of considering GI 'at the earliest stage of development proposals, as an integral part of development and infrastructure provision, and taking into account existing natural assets'.

5.4.13 In relation to landscape, the PPG reiterates the requirements of the NPPF in terms of 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'. The PPG states that:

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

5.4.14 The PPG also notes the relevance of landscape character assessment, landscape sensitivity/capacity assessment and landscape and visual impact assessment. However, whilst recognising these different aspects of landscape analysis, the PPG does not reflect the subtle variations in these and potential overlap between their different uses and requirements.

5.4.15 This LVIA includes reference to published landscape character assessments which have been prepared at a range of scales and detail. Reference has also been made to the local landscape character by reference to the key characteristics of the site and its immediate context, including existing, enhanced and potentially new green infrastructure. Therefore, this LVIA responds fully to the requirement of the PPG.

Local Planning Guidance

5.4.16 The following section sets out local planning policy background relevant to both the site and landscape and visual matters (refer to **Figure 5.2, Landscape Related Planning Designations**).



5.4.17 The site is located within the administrative area of Wokingham Borough Council. The current local plan is in two parts:

- the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document (the Core Strategy), adopted in January 2010; and
- the Wokingham Borough Development Plan Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan, adopted in February 2014.

5.4.18 Relevant policies are summarised in the following table.

Table 5.10 – Summary of Wokingham Core Strategy adopted policies relevant to landscape and visual matters	
Policy Ref	Summary of Policy
CP1: Sustainable Development	Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that: 1) Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment; ... 10) Provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes; ...
CP3: General Principles for development	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. ... 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; ... j) Do not lead to a loss of community or recreational



Table 5.10 – Summary of Wokingham Core Strategy adopted policies relevant to landscape and visual matters

Policy Ref	Summary of Policy
	facilities/land or infrastructure unless suitable alternative provision is available.
CP8: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area	Development which alone or in combination is likely to have a significant effects [sic] on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) will be required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects are delivered.
CP11: Proposals outside development Limits (including countryside)	In order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where: ... 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; ...

Table 5.11: Summary of Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan adopted policies relevant to landscape and visual matters

Policy Ref	Summary of Policy
Policy CC03: Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping	... 2. Development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieved the following criteria within scheme proposals: a) Provide new or protect and enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development b) Promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green corridors including public rights of way such as footpaths, cycleways and bridleways c) Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside d) Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features e) Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme. 3. Development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable. 4. Development proposals within the River Valley areas shall improve or contribute toward:

	a) The establishment of a Loddon/ Blackwater riverside footpath and bridleway, as defined on the Policies Map, to accommodate dual use ...
Policy TB21: Landscape Character	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.
Policy TB24: Designated Heritage Assets (Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Areas)	1. Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Monuments and Conservation Areas are shown on the Policies Map. 2. The Borough Council will conserve and seek the enhancement of designated heritage assets in the Borough and their settings by: a. Requiring 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. b. Supporting development proposals or other initiatives that will 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.
Policy SAL05: Delivery of avoidance measures for Thames Basin Heaths SPA	The policy relates to already allocated SANG areas, but the site does not include any such areas.

5.4.19 The emerging Local Plan Update will cover the period up to 2040. The process of developing and adopting the Local Plan Update is expected to take until at least 2026. Although not yet adopted and therefore carrying limited weight, emerging policies within the Draft Local Plan Public Consultation 2020 which are of relevance to this LVIA are listed in the following table.



Table 5.12: Summary of Wokingham Draft Local Plan Public Consultation 2020 emerging policies relevant to landscape and visual matters

Policy Ref	Summary of Policy
Policy SS13: Development in the Countryside	Only restricted types of development will be permitted in the countryside. Where development is permitted, it should: a) Recognise and respect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; b) Not lead to the physical, visual or perceived coalescence of existing settlements; ... f) Maximise opportunities to improve public access to the countryside; ...
Policy C8: Green and Blue Infrastructure and Public Rights of Way	Protection and enhancement/improvement of existing green and blue infrastructure network, including Public Rights of Way (PROWs).
Policy NE2: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area	Development within the SPA zone of influence will be required to deliver appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures prior to occupation of new dwellings and in perpetuity. Requirement for appropriate SANG for developments within the SPA zone of influence.
Policy NE3: Trees, woodland and hedgerows	Protection and enhancement of trees (especially veteran trees), woodlands (especially ancient woodland) and hedgerows.
Policy NE4: Development and existing trees, woodland and hedgerows	Requirement for tree survey/Arboricultural Impact Assessment. Incorporate existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows into the design of developments, allowing sufficient space for their future development. Protect retained trees, woodland and hedgerows during development activities.
Policy NE5: Landscape and Design	Respect, conserve and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the local landscape by adopting a landscape led approach to development design. Incorporate appropriate high quality landscaped public open spaces and green/blue infrastructure in all developments.



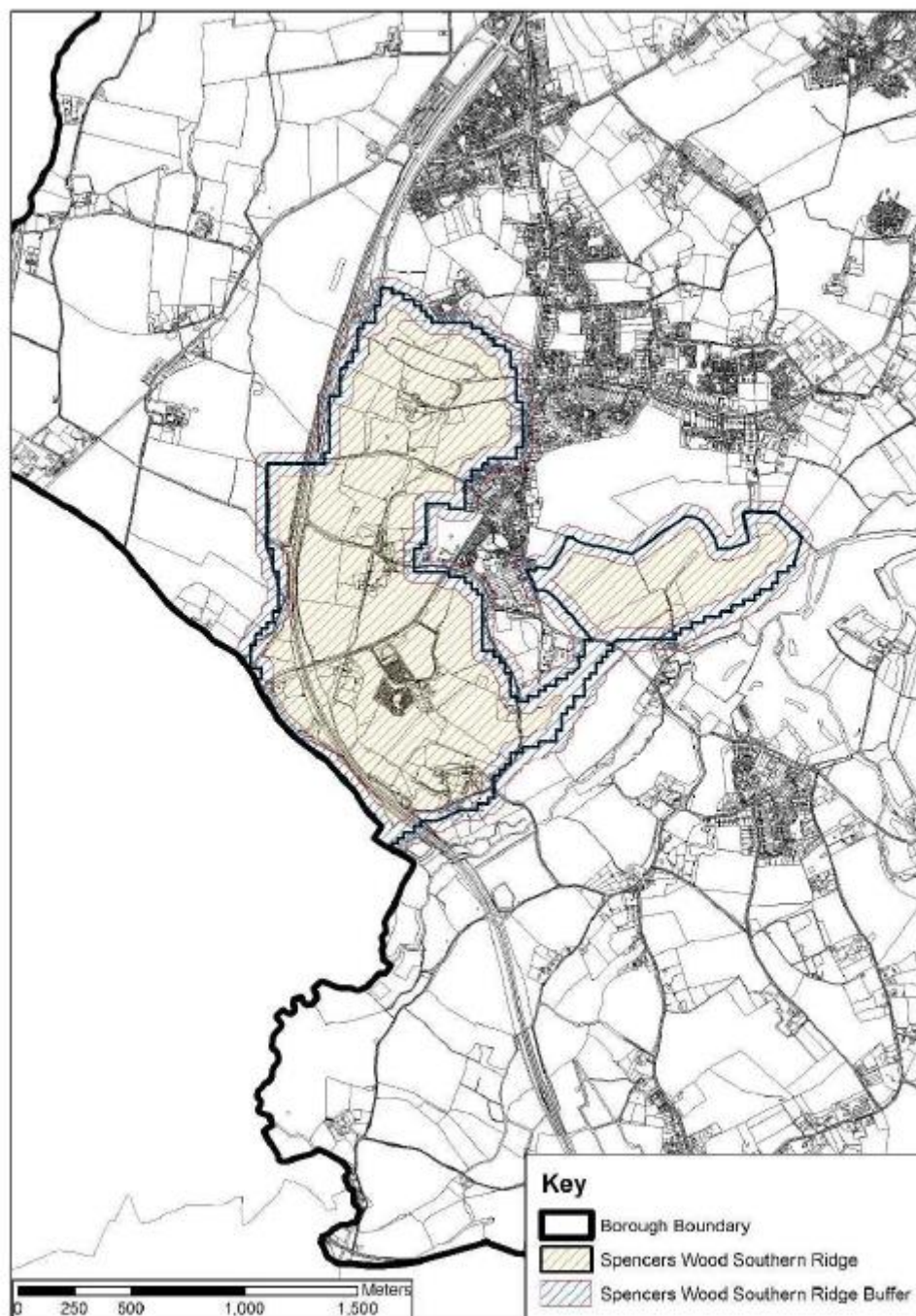
Table 5.12: Summary of Wokingham Draft Local Plan Public Consultation 2020 emerging policies relevant to landscape and visual matters

Policy Ref	Summary of Policy
Policy NE6: Landscape Character, Value and Green Routes	1. Development proposals must take into account key characteristics, sensitivities and strategies, including key issues and guidelines of the landscape, in order to safeguard intrinsic character, scenic beauty and perceptual qualities, for example tranquillity and dark skies, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment. 2. Valued landscapes are identified on the Policies Map. Development proposals will only be permitted where they protect and enhance features that contribute to the character, quality and interpretation of valued landscapes and specifically the criteria set out in the Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) Box 5.1: a. Landscape quality (condition) b. Scenic quality c. Rarity d. Representativeness e. Conservation interests f. Recreation value g. Perceptual aspects h. Associations 3. Development proposals on or in proximity to Green Routes will only be permitted where existing trees are retained and should contribute to the improvement of Green Routes through landscape schemes, including tree and hedge planting.

5.4.20 The Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape Areas (VLA) referred to in emerging Policy NE6 includes Field 4, while the 50m VLA buffer includes parts of Fields 2, 3 and 5 – see extract below:

Plate 5.1: Extract from emerging Local Plan Update: Valued Landscape Areas

Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape





Neighbourhood Planning

- 5.4.21 At the time of writing this LVIA, there was no adopted Neighbourhood Plan for Shinfield, the parish which includes Spencers Wood.

Landscape Related Designations

- 5.4.22 The site and its immediate environs are not subject to any local planning designations specific to landscape (refer to **Figure 5.2, Landscape Related Planning Designations**).
- 5.4.23 As noted above, one of the Valued Landscape Areas (VLAs) referred to in emerging Policy NE6 includes Field 4, while the 50m VLA buffer includes parts of Fields 2, 3 and 5. However, the Local Plan Update is not expected to be adopted until at least 2026, and the emerging policies are therefore considered to carry only limited weight at the current time in the determination of planning applications.
- 5.4.24 Swallowfield Park, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden (RPG), lies approximately 675m to the south-east of the site, on the south-east side of the River Loddon.
- 5.4.25 There are several designations on site and in the local landscape context which have some relevance to landscape and visual matters:, including
- The Thames Basin Heaths SPA (coincidental with Bramshill SSSI) lies approx. 3.6km to the south-east of the site. Whilst not directly relevant to landscape and visual matters, the SPA designation does have implications in respect of mitigation and provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) as the site lies within the SPA Zone of Influence/Linear Mitigation Zone, as defined in the adopted Core Strategy.
 - The Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI (off Basingstoke Road, ca. 395m to the south, of the site);
 - There are no Listed Buildings (LBs) within the site, but there are multiple LBs present within the wider study area, the closest of which are:
 - several Grade II LBs within the settlement of Spencers Wood, including a number scattered along the corridor of Hyde End Road, with the nearest being



approx. 160m from the site;

- two Grade II* LBs at Sheepbridge Court and Sheepbridge Court Farm, approx. 350m to the south of the site;
- a Grade II milestone on Basingstoke Road, approx. 350m to the south of the site; and
- a number of Grade II and II* LBs at Swallowfield Park, approx. 850m to 1.6km from the site.
- There is a Scheduled Monument (SM, a moated site) at Sheepbridge Court, approx. 350m to the south of the site;
- There are a number of areas of Ancient Woodland, with the nearest being:
 - to the south of Shinfield, approx. 900m to the north-east of the site;
 - at Moor Copse, approx. 1.5km to the east of the site;
 - at Great Wood on the western side of Swallowfield Park, approx. 1.1km to the east-south-east of the site; and
 - at Beech Hill Coverts and Priory Copse, approx. 1.1km to the south-west of the site.
- There are numerous Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs, individual or group) within Spencers Wood and to the west of the B3349 Basingstoke Road, with the nearest being the group TPO covering the belt of trees on the western side of Basingstoke Road, approx. 60m to the north-west of the site.
- National Cycle Route 23 (Reading to Southampton) passes approx. 1.7km to the west of the site (and west of the A33) including through the small village of Grazeley.

5.4.26 Where relevant, these matters are considered in the analysis of constraints and opportunities and the subsequent appraisal, including considerations of landscape value.

5.5 Landscape and Visual Baseline



- 5.5.1 The following section describes the individual components of the physical landscape that are present on the site and in the study area. These have been described in order to establish an understanding of the specific landscape baseline, including individual elements and features that contribute to landscape character.

Site Description

- 5.5.2 The site comprises a parcel of five fields of agricultural land situated to the south of the main settlement area of Spencers Wood, and east of the B3349 (Basingstoke Road). For ease of reference in this LVIA, the fields will be referred to as Fields 1 to 5, numbered from north to south, as shown on **Figure 5.1, Site Location**.
- 5.5.3 The boundaries to the site are all aligned to the existing field boundaries. The boundaries are formed:
- To the north by the southern edge of the existing settlement of Spencers Wood, specifically hedgerows and trees on the garden boundaries of residential development on Barracks Lane, Blackwater Close, Magill Close, Beckingham Place, Hyde End Road, and Century Drive;
 - To the east by hedgerows and hedgerow trees of variable condition, with farmland (and to the north-east by residential properties on Sussex Lane) beyond;
 - To the south by hedgerows and hedgerow trees of variable condition, with farmland beyond, as well as the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate; and
 - To the west by hedgerows and hedgerow trees and then the B3349 Basingstoke Road, with existing residential development and the Heron Industrial Estate (to the south-west) beyond.
- 5.5.4 The surrounding landscape within the valley of the River Loddon is a mix of farmland (arable and pastoral, and of varying scale), existing development (predominantly residential but with some commercial/light industrial), and transport infrastructure (the M4 motorway to the north and the A33 dual carriageway to the west). Tree cover is variable.



5.5.5 The site lies outside of any landscape designation, either national/statutory or local/non-statutory. Swallowfield Park, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden (RPG), lies approximately 675m to the south-east of the site, on the south-east side of the River Loddon.

5.5.6 Policy NE6 of the emerging Local Plan Update identifies Valued Landscape Areas (VLAs) within Wokingham Borough. The proposed Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VLA includes Field 4, while the 50m VLA buffer includes parts of Fields 2, 3 and 5.

Landscape Context / Physical Landscape Resource

5.5.7 A detailed description on the physical components, landscape character and visual amenity of the site and study area are set out in the following sections.

Topography and Landform

5.5.8 The landform of the site slopes from west to east, from ca. 55-60m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) on the boundary close to the B3349 Basingstoke Road, down to ca. 48m AOD on the eastern boundary near Sussex Lane. There are also occasional gentle undulations within the site.

5.5.9 Within the surrounding landscape there is a slight ridge of higher ground (at ca. 60-65m AOD) to the west of the site, running north-east to south-west, with topography generally falling gently towards the River Loddon and its tributary, The Broadwater (see **Figure 5.3, Topography**). There are occasional local high points, such as at Chill Hill and Farley Hill approximately 3-3.2km to the south-east of the site (at ca. 82-84m AOD), and to the west of Riseley, approximately 2.5km to the south of the site (at ca. 79m AOD). These hills form an important backdrop to some local views from the site and its environs, notably from sections of the B3349 Basingstoke Road and sections of Footpaths SHIN22A, SWAL18 and SWAL19 to the east, south-east and south of the site

Hydrology and Water Features

5.5.10 There are a number of field boundary ditches within the site:

- on the boundaries between Fields 1 and 2;



- on the boundary between Field 2 and the properties on Century Drive and Lansdowne Gardens;
- between Fields 2 and 3/4;
- between Fields 3 and 4; and
- between Fields 4 and 5.

5.5.11 These drainage ditches do not form prominent landscape elements. There are also a number of small ponds in some of the gardens adjacent to the site.

5.5.12 Within the wider surrounding landscape, the south-west to north-east flowing River Loddon (and its southern tributary, The Broadwater) forms a prominent landscape feature, eventually connecting to the River Thames to the north-east of Reading. Both the Loddon and The Broadwater are lined by riverine trees, further increasing their prominence in the landscape.

Land Use

5.5.13 The site is currently in agricultural use, with some cyclic arable uses prevailing.

5.5.14 The surrounding landscape within the valley of the River Loddon is a mix of farmland, woodlands and tree belts, historic parkland (Swallowfield Park), existing development, and transport infrastructure.

5.5.15 The farmland is a mix of arable and pastoral, and of varying scale, but also with some horse paddocks and associated stables, fencing etc. such as at Sheepbridge Court Farm. This 'horsey-culture' can be a detracting feature in some views. Tree cover is variable, ranging from tree belts and lines of riverine trees along the Loddon, to more substantial woodlands such as Great Wood on the western side of Swallowfield Park.

5.5.16 Analysis of historic mapping⁷ indicates a history of field amalgamation.

5.5.17 There is a solar farm of approximately 11ha to the north-east of Sheepbridge Court Farm and south of Sussex Lane.

⁷ [Side by side georeferenced maps viewer - Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](#)



- 5.5.18 An application is currently in-planning for a 25ha solar farm to be constructed on the two fields to the immediate south of the site. Note that the scoping response from WBC highlight the temporary nature of the solar installation, its low lying nature and that the landscape retains a predominantly rural feel.

Vegetation Patterns

- 5.5.19 The northern boundary (Field 1) is formed by the settlement edge of Spencers Wood (refer to **Figure 5.6, Site Photographs, Viewpoint B**). The edge is mixed in terms of its prominence and enclosure, with some sections strongly vegetated and existing built form well-screened, but other sections characterised by a strong residential influence which is clearly visible from within the site and from locations further to the south.
- 5.5.20 The northern part of the eastern boundary (Fields 1 and 2) is also formed by the settlement edge of Spencers Wood, and again there is variable visibility of the adjacent built form depending on the strong of vegetated boundaries to the gardens of the adjacent properties (refer to **Figure 5.6, Site Photographs, Viewpoint C**).
- 5.5.21 The southern part of the western boundary, and the southern boundary, are formed by tightly managed native hedgerows with relatively limited numbers of hedgerow trees, with further farmland beyond (refer to **Figure 5.6, Site Photographs, Viewpoint A**).
- 5.5.22 The western boundary is formed by the B3349 Basingstoke Road (refer to **Figure 5.6, Site Photographs, Viewpoints D and E**). Some parts of the boundary lie tight against the road, while other sections are separated from the road by residential properties and their gardens on the east side of the road. These properties, and those on the west side of the road, form a prominent finger of development extending out from the south-west corner of the main part of Spencers Wood.
- 5.5.23 Internal field boundaries within the site are formed by tightly managed native hedgerows with variable but generally limited numbers of hedgerow trees. Fields 3, 4 and 5 generally have higher numbers of trees, and many of these boundaries also have drainage ditches. The boundary between Fields 1 and 2 is not entirely demarcated on the ground – the western section is formed by another native



hedgerow and ditch approximately 465m long, while the eastern section is not vegetated. Aerial imagery suggests that the two fields are (or have been) managed/cropped separately.

- 5.5.24 Within the wider surrounding landscape, field boundaries within the farmland are generally formed by hedgerows with variable frequency of hedgerow trees. Where fields are used for horse grazing, they are generally divided into smaller paddocks by the use of post and wire or electric fences. Scattered parkland trees are also an important component of the landscape of Swallowfield Park itself, though historic mapping shows a decline in the number of these parkland trees. The same historic mapping shows an increase in the riverine trees along the River Loddon.

Public Access

- 5.5.25 There is no formal public access to the site itself. Access close to the site is available along the paved walkways of the B3349 Basingstoke Road adjacent to the western edge of the site and Barracks Lane on the north-western edge of the site (noting the latter is a narrow route serving only a small cluster of existing residential dwellings).
- 5.5.26 A Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT SHIN33) forms a loop running south-east from Hyde End Road, and then turns north-east and back to Hyde End Road, running adjacent to part of the northern boundary of the site. This route is both physically and visually contained by strong existing vegetation.
- 5.5.27 A second BOAT (SHIN22) passes to the east of the site, running south from Hyde End Road along Sussex Lane and then becoming a footpath (SHIN22A and SHIN18) which runs south-west to Sheepbridge Court Farm, before rejoining the B3349. This route is physically separated from the site by a small parcel of land on the west side of Sussex Lane comprising residential properties and horse paddocks between the route and the eastern site boundary. Further to the south and south-west, the route is separated from the site by an arable field which is at least 200-250m across.
- 5.5.28 Within the wider surrounding landscape, the PRoW network is generally sparse, particularly on either side of the Loddon, though there are a number of routes in the vicinity of Farley Hill.



- 5.5.29 The promoted Blackwater Valley Path follows a 37km route along the Blackwater valley, from Aldershot in Hampshire to Swallowfield. There may be some limited visibility of the proposed development from restricted sections of the route to the south-east of Swallowfield.

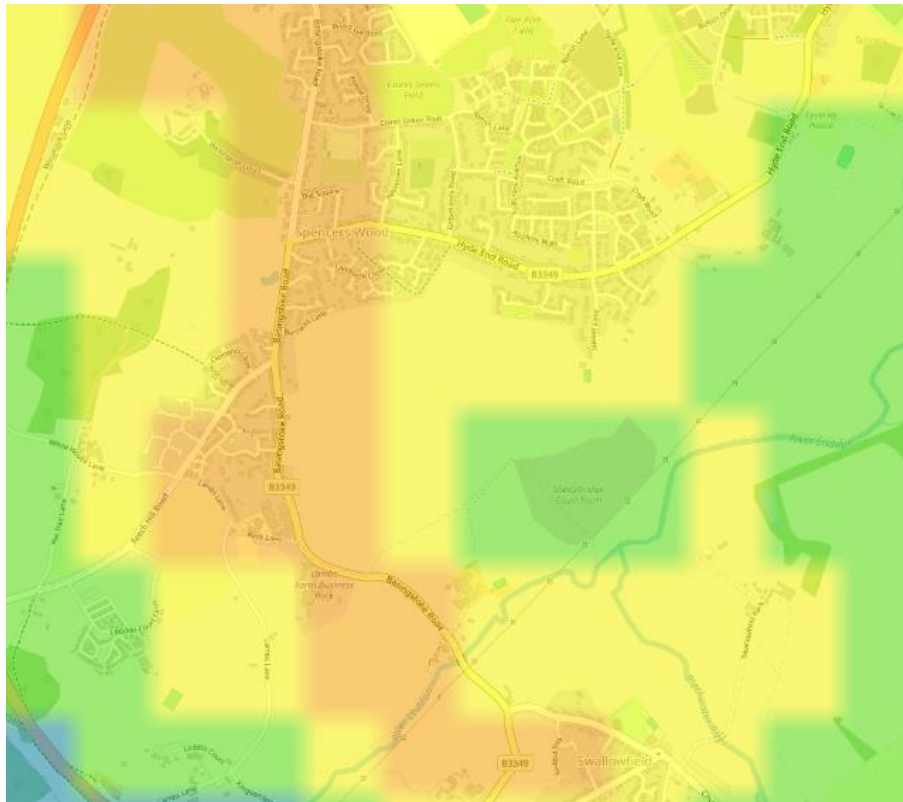
Development and Transport Patterns

- 5.5.30 Existing development is predominantly residential, ranging in scale from the large town of Reading (to the north of the M4), to medium-sized settlements such as Spencers Wood (which forms the context for the site to the north and west) and Shinfield, to smaller settlements such as Swallowfield and Riseley. There are also numerous hamlets, farms, and individual residential properties, and some small light industrial/commercial developments, such as the Heron Industrial Estate (to the west of site and the Basingstoke Road), and the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate (to the south of site and the Basingstoke Road).
- 5.5.31 Beyond the immediate environs to the site, transport infrastructure is also a prominent part of the landscape in some views, with the north-south aligned A33 dual carriageway approximately 1km to the west of the site, and the east-west aligned M4 motorway approximately 2km to the north. The proposed development would not be discernible in views from either of these routes.
- 5.5.32 The Reading to Basingstoke railway line lies approximately 2.4km to the west of the site.

Nighttime Lighting

- 5.5.33 The B3349 Basingstoke Road is illuminated by streetlights as far south as the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate. Hyde End Road and the residential streets within Spencers Wood to the north of the site are also all illuminated, though Sussex Lane is not lit. Properties adjacent to the site are also likely to have varying levels of external lighting within their gardens.
- 5.5.34 The site and its environs are therefore not an area that would be considered to have 'dark skies'. Notwithstanding the lack of light sources on the site, this is further demonstrated by reference to the Council for Protection of Rural England 'England's Light Pollution and Dark Skies' mapping shows the site and the wider area of Spencers Wood.

Plate 5.2: CPRE Dark Skies Extract



- 5.5.35 This shows the site and its local landscape context as being in the 'mid to upper range' of the CPRE classification⁸ (i.e. 2-4 NanoWatts/cm²/sr for the site, rising to 4-8 across parts of the existing settlement (and western parts of the site).

Landscape Character

- 5.5.36 Reference has been made to published guidance on landscape character for the area. The Site is located in the following landscape character types/areas (refer to **Figure 5.4, Landscape Character**):

- National Character Area (NCA) 129: Thames Basin Heaths;
- Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2019: Landscape Character Area (LCA) J3 – Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay, within the Settled and Farmed Clay Landscape Character Type (LCT).

⁸ <https://www.cpre.org.uk/light-pollution-dark-skies-map/>



5.5.37 The following sections set out a summary of the characteristics relevant to the site and its local context.

National Landscape Character

5.5.38 The site lies within NCA129: Thames Basin Heaths⁹. The NCA covers a massive area (approx. 118,527 ha), and the site therefore occupies only 0.03% of the land area. The key characteristics of the NCA are therefore considered to be of limited relevance to this assessment. The key characteristics of the NCA include:

- *'Plateaux of Tertiary sands and gravels in the London Basin, with intervening river valleys floored by London Clay. In the far west, Chalk forms the Hampshire Downs escarpment and the river beds of the Kennet and Pang.*
- *High woodland cover, offering an array of colour in the autumn. Conifers and large plantations on former heathland are dominant features in the east, while the west is scattered with small, semi-natural woodlands on ancient sites.*
- *Acid, leached soils mean that farming on the plateaux is limited to rough pasture, and that alternative land uses (such as forestry, golf courses and horse paddocks) have emerged. Heather, gorse, oak and birch all thrive here. Arable land and improved pasture are found in the valleys, on alluvium.*
- *Beyond the large areas of heathland and woodland, there is a patchwork of small to medium-sized fields with woods. The legacy of historic hunting forests includes veteran trees, ancient woods, ancient hedgerows and parklands. Historic meadows remain as fragments along watercourses.*
- *Prehistoric earthworks such as barrows and hill forts mark promontories on the plateaux. Archaeology is well preserved on historic heathland. Mosaics of open heathland and grassland with scrub, secondary woodland and plantation. Valley bogs, ponds and streams enhance diversity. Large, continuous mosaics are found in the east: they include Thursley, Ash,*

⁹ Natural England (2024) National Character Area Profiles – via [Thames Basin Heaths – National Character Area Profiles \(nationalcharacterareas.co.uk\)](https://nationalcharacterareas.co.uk) [accessed August 2024]



Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Chobham Common National Nature Reserve (NNR).

- *Historic commons offer tranquillity and unenclosed views, while other rights of access are enjoyed across farmland, canals and downland. Ministry of Defence ownership restricts (but does not entirely prevent) public enjoyment.*
- *'Churring' nightjars, dragonflies and purple heather are all readily identified with heathland. The Thames Basin Heaths SPA protects internationally important populations of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler.*
- *Valley floors are wet with ditches, numerous watercourses, ponds, waterfilled gravel pits, reedbeds and carr. Historic features include mills, relict water meadows, and canals such as the River Wey Navigations.*
- *20th-century conurbations, including Camberley, sprawl along the Blackwater Valley, with associated roads (including the M3) dissecting heathland and woodland into blocks. Elsewhere, there are winding lanes and historic dispersed villages and farmsteads of traditional, locally-made brick and tile.'*

5.5.39 The NCA incorporates a large and diverse area of landscape, of which the site forms only a small proportion of the NCA area. Given the scale, and the general abundance of key characteristics across the NCA which are only partly reflected across the site, impacts at this level are not likely to give rise to significant effects. Consequently, the NCA is excluded from the detailed assessment of landscape effects.

5.5.40 To complete a more detailed appraisal of potential landscape and visual issues, reference has been made to the published landscape character assessment prepared at a finer grain and more local scale, as set out in the following section.

Borough Landscape Character

District Landscape Character – The Site

5.5.41 The Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment¹⁰ places the site within LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay, within the Settled and Farmed Clay LCT.

5.5.42 The LCT is described thus:

'The LCT is characterised by a shelving and undulating landform underlain by London Clay. There are large tracts of post-war settlement, connected by both major and minor roads cutting across the landscape. Areas of large arable fields remain, as well as tributaries draining towards the Loddon.'

5.5.43 LCA J3 is summarised thus:

'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.'

5.5.44 The key characteristics of the LCA are described 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.*
- *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 [to the north of] Spencers Wood are still evident, indicating early enclosure.*

¹⁰ Wokingham Borough Council (2019) Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment – via [Evidence studies \(wokingham.gov.uk\)](https://www.wokingham.gov.uk) [accessed August 2024]



- *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.'*

5.5.45 Valuable landscape assets are noted as:

- *'Remnant historic parklands and visually prominent parkland trees, including many Wellingtonias, especially the avenue of this species which provide time-depth, visual diversity and a sense of orientation to the landscape.*



- *Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provide a rural character away from the urban areas and provide an important separation between settlements.*
- *Small-scale woodlands provide visual diversity in the landscape, as well as ecologically important habitats.*
- *Strong hedgerow network with standard oaks provides a wooded character and visual interest within the rural landscape.*
- *Network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches provide evidence of the original settlement pattern.*
- *Views to the surrounding lowlands provide a sense of place and of orientation.*
- *Undeveloped slopes of the clay ridgeline which is visually prominent and provides separation between settlements.*
- *The GHQ Stop Line and associated Second World War features which follows the course of the Foudry Brook crossing the southern end of the clay ridge and along the River Loddon.*
- *Open area of former common land to the west of Basingstoke Road at 'Highlands'.*
- *Beaumys Castle, a rare example of a defensive moated site in medieval times and on the front line of the GHQ defence in the Second World War.*
- *Isolated traditional farmsteads and their associated buildings, particularly in the south of the LCA.'*

5.5.46 Landscape condition is described thus:

'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.'

5.5.47 The above assessment of landscape condition is broadly similar to that in the previous 2004 landscape character assessment. The latter considered the landscape to be of moderate quality, and moderate sensitivity.

5.5.48 Key issues of relevance to the site are noted as:

- *'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.*
- *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.*
- *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...*
- *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.'*

5.5.49 The landscape strategy is stated as:

'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.'

5.5.50 Relevant landscape guidelines are stated as:

- *'Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape.*



- *Conserve and manage hedgerows with standard oaks.*
- *Conserve, enhance and manage woodland and meadow habitats.*
- *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...*
- *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...*
- *Reduce and prevent further noise and light pollution.*

District Landscape Character – Surrounding Area

5.5.51 The ZTV (refer to **Figure 5.5**) indicates that there may be visibility of the proposed development from, and therefore indirect experiential/perceptual effects on the landscape character of, the following LCTs/LCAs within the surrounding wider landscape:

- LCA A2: Loddon River Valley, within the River Valley LCT – land, typically within approx. 1km of the site, within the river valleys to the east, south-east and south;



- LCAC1: Arborfield River Terrace, within the River Terrace LCT – a very restricted area in the vicinity of Kenney's Farm and White's Farm, approx. 2.2km to the east of the site;
- LCA I2: Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland, within the Farmed Clay Lowland LCT – a restricted area around Handpost Farm, approx. 1km to the south of the site;
- LCA J2: Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay, within the same Settled and Farmed Clay LCT as the site – a very restricted area in the vicinity of Kenney's Farm, approx. 2.5km to the east of the site;
- LCA L2: Farley Hill Sand and Gravel Hills, within the Sand and Gravel Hills LCT – restricted areas to the east of Rowe's Farm and north/north-west of Clarks Farm, approx. 2.5km to the south-east of the site.

5.5.52 The likely very limited visibility of the proposed development from the majority of these LCAs means that indirect effects on landscape character are likely to be similarly limited. Only effects on LCA A2: Loddon River Valley are therefore considered further in this LVIA.

5.5.53 LCA A2 is summarised thus:

'This area occupies the flat alluvial floodplain of the River Loddon and its tributaries the Broadwater and the Blackwater. An agricultural landscape of irregular fields, with large scale arable fields on better drained areas and small scale wet meadows on frequently flooded land adjacent to the river. A largely peaceful area, disturbance comes from major roads which cross the floodplain including the M4, and adjacent developments in Earley, Winnersh, the expanding settlement of Shinfield and new Science and Innovation Park.'

5.5.54 Relevant key characteristics are summarised as [text adapted from the published LCA description]:

- A broad, flat alluvial floodplain, within which the River Loddon follows a meandering course within braided channels. Streams and tributary rivers (including The Blackwater) join the Loddon;



- A wooded backdrop is formed by scattered blocks of deciduous woodland and copses, interlinked woodland belts and scattered mature trees and scrub;
- Pasture and arable farmland in medium and large irregular geometric fields, divided by fences, gappy hedgerows and drainage ditches;
- Important wetland character and habitats;
- Historic riverside features such as bridges and watermills;
- Extensive designed parkland landscape at Swallowfield Park;
- Low-density scattered settlement pattern of villages and farmsteads;
- Tranquil and rural character away from river crossings and visual influence of large-scale settlement in adjacent areas;
- Little public access to the floodplain except for the Blackwater Valley Path which runs south and east of Swallowfield.
- Busy roads cross the flood plain, including the A33, M4 and Winnersh and Shinfield Eastern Relief Roads, and create physical and visual severance along the floodplain;
- Pylons, residential and commercial development are distinctive visual features in this open and flat landscape, with development very visible along the edges of this character area.

5.5.55 The landscape is considered to be in moderate condition, but the visibility of large-scale development in adjacent LCAs is noted, as is the pressure for new residential and commercial development in these same areas. The 2004 landscape character assessment considered the character of the LCA to be of high quality, and high sensitivity.

Local Landscape Character

5.5.56 There is no adopted Neighbourhood Plan for Shinfield Parish which defines local landscape character or identifies key local views in the vicinity of the site.

5.5.57 The physical characteristics of the site and its environs are described in earlier



sections of this Chapter, and this information feeds into the summary below.

Landscape Character Summary

5.5.58 From the detailed evaluation undertaken for this LVIA, the immediate context to the site shares many of the characteristics identified in the baseline landscape character assessment of LCA J3 described above. Those considered to be of particular relevance include:

- 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.
- Large arable fields with some pasture, with an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow oaks, interspersed with scattered small woodlands and copses. Horse paddocks feature on the edge of settlements or around large farmsteads e.g. Sheepridge Court.
- Sense of elevation from the ridgeline and good views over surrounding lowlands including to the Loddon valley.

5.5.59 Key issues of relevance to the site include:

- Loss of woodland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Pressure for large-scale residential development affecting landscape character, and resulting in potential amalgamation of separate settlements.
- Pressure for development on the visually prominent slopes of the clay ridge.
- Urbanisation of rural roads.
- Light pollution.

5.5.60 Landscape guidelines of particular relevance include:

- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape, including native hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Use of structural planting on the boundaries of new development to improve

integration and visual screening, and create a positive interface between urban and rural.

- Maintain countryside between settlements to avoid coalescence.
- Maintain character of rural roads through appropriate planting and design.
- Minimise light pollution.

5.5.61 The landscape-led approach to the design of the proposed development, guided by this LVIA, is considered to be in alignment with these guidelines.

Visual Baseline

5.5.62 This section provides a description of the nature and extent of the existing views from, towards and between the site and the surrounding area. It also includes reference to specific locations that will potentially be subject to impacts as a result of the proposed development of the site.

5.5.63 Establishing the specific quality of these views identifies the context and setting of representative viewpoints and also the nature of views in terms of distance, angle of view, and seasonal constraints associated with specific visual receptors (refer to **Figure 5.5, PROW, ZTV and Viewpoint Locations** and **Fig 5.6, Site Photographs A to E** and **Figure 5.7, Viewpoint photographs 1 to 10**).

Overview

5.5.64 The visual envelope is the area of landscape from which a site or proposed development will potentially be visible. It accounts for general judgements on the theoretical visibility of a site or proposed development and sets a broad context for the study area within which to address landscape and visual impacts. Overall, the visual envelope for the site is limited by the undulating landform; layers of trees and hedgerows along roads and field boundaries.

5.5.65 A preliminary computer generated ZTV has been produced for the site and the proposed development (refer to **Figure 5.5, PROW, ZTV and Viewpoint Locations**); this is based on initial assumptions regarding the potential for development (including building heights) and accounts for some degree of screening by existing built form and vegetation.



- 5.5.66 The ZTV was prepared at the early stages of the process, based on an indicative development envelope (albeit landscape led) and gives an overview of potential visibility to inform the site visit and field work.
- 5.5.67 Although the ZTV represents a 'screened' scenario, the OS data sources only tend to include substantial blocks of trees and woodland. Given that much of the existing green infrastructure around the site forms a 'layering effect' due to the lower-level hedgerows, hedgerow trees and also smaller scale woodlands/tree belts, these are not included in the ZTV. Consequently, overall screening value is underestimated and the ZTV represents a 'worst-case scenario'.
- 5.5.68 Based on the initial ZTV and informed by subsequent site survey and observations from the field work, the visual envelope is broadly defined as follows:
- To the north, the visual envelope is restricted by existing development and boundary vegetation along the majority of the northern site boundary. There may be occasional restricted views of the built form within the proposed development from properties on the settlement edge, and from certain locations where gaps between the built form align.
 - To the north-east, there are narrow bands of theoretical visibility to the south of Shinfield, out to approximately 3-3.5km
 - To the east, the visual envelope extends as far as the woodlands at Moor Copse and Rounds Copse, with a more limited band of visibility as far as the western side of Arborfield Green, and a further restricted area to the west of the woodlands at Farley Hill.
 - To the south-east, there would visibility across much of the Loddon Valley, with some limited visibility from some western parts of the Swallowfield Park RPG. There would also be a band of visibility extending to Rowe's Farm and along the south side of The Broadwater as far as the edge of the Bramshill Plantation.
 - To the south, the visual envelope extends as far as the River Loddon, with a further area of visibility around Handpost farm and Goddard's Farm.



- To the south-west, the visual envelope extends approximately 750m out to Loddon Court Farm.
- To the west and north-west, the visual envelope is restricted by existing built form on the B3349 Basingstoke Road, with limited areas of visibility to the east of the woodlands at White House Farm, and to the east and north-east of Highlands.

5.5.69 Given the scale of the site, many views do not experience the site as a whole, but see various edges or parts of the site. Views from the north tend to retain potential views of wider panorama which encompass the majority of the site, however notwithstanding the wider field of view, views into the site vary considerably based on elevation of the receptors, whereby at lower levels the site is more readily screened by topography and green infrastructure.

5.5.70 Access to the landscape around the site is relatively limited, so more direct and near distance views to the site and proposed development are also limited to just a few shorter PROW and residential edges. Potential views from the wider PROW network are more distant and more generally screened.

5.5.71 Within this overall visual envelope there are variations in the degree of inter-visibility between areas and in the nature and extent of views due to the presence or absence of screening, and the inherent character of the baseline in any views (e.g. existing dwellings/built form). Overall, views and visibility are tested further through the detailed field work and the consideration of visual effects.

[Representative Viewpoints and Visual Receptors](#)

5.5.72 The visual assessment references a series of viewpoints that are representative of visual receptors in the area.

5.5.73 These illustrate views towards the site in the context of the surrounding landscape and are used to inform judgements on impacts for specific receptors. Representative visual receptors include:

- PROW users:
- on Footpath SHIN23 between Spencers Wood and Highlands – Viewpoint (VP)2;



- on Footpath SHIN22A to the south of Sussex Lane – VP5;
- on Footpaths SHIN22A/SWAL18 to the south-east of the site – VP6;
- on Footpath SWAL18 to the south-east and south of the site – VP7, 8 and 9;
- on Footpath SWAL19 to the south of the site – VP10;
- Users of the POS/play area at the south-eastern end of Blackwater Close – VP3;
- Road users:
 - on the B3349 Basingstoke Road – VP1;
 - on the B3349 Hyde End Road to the north of the site – VP4;
- Residential occupiers in properties:
 - on the B3349 Basingstoke Road – VP1;
 - on Blackwater Close – VP3;
 - on the B3349 Hyde End Road to the north of the site – VP4; and
 - at the southern end of Sussex Lane – VP5.

5.5.74 These visual receptors are considered further as part of the assessment of visual effects.

5.5.75 There may also be very limited visibility from restricted sections of some other PRoWs and roads, and from some other residential properties, within the wider surrounding landscape.

5.6 Mitigation Measures

5.6.1 This section describes the measures which are required to mitigate any significant environmental effects.

Mitigation by Design

Overview

- 5.6.2 It is considered that the approach to mitigation, and the inclusion of a robust landscape and green infrastructure strategy, will lead to a physically and visually well contained proposed development which shows clear defensible boundaries to the emerging settlement and consequently, a well considered masterplan will be acceptable in landscape and visual terms, can be assimilated into the landscape and can both recognise and respect elements of the local landscape context.
- 5.6.3 The early design of the proposed development has been influenced by the landscape and visual constraints and opportunities, which are apparent on the site and in the surrounding area. During the design stages the masterplan has evolved in response to environmental work and an iterative process of LVIA.
- 5.6.4 This process ensures that the location, scale and character of the proposed development has evolved in response to the local landscape character (and relevant constraints and opportunities). The Parameter Plans show the areas of the development envelope subject to a strategy for building heights, and those areas of retained and new green infrastructure, both of which combine to address the local landscape and visual constraints as far as possible.
- 5.6.5 The development framework has undergone some iterations as part of this process, and ensures that a 'landscape led' approach has been considered as part of the design.
- 5.6.6 Adopting this approach has ensured that the preliminary development and landscape strategy incorporates mitigation as an inherent component of the proposed development, intending to avoid or reduce the adverse effects of a development proposal.
- 5.6.7 The principles for mitigation measures aim to:
- Conserve and enhance the surrounding landscape character;
 - Retain and make best use of existing landscape elements and features where possible;



- Avoid loss or damage to those retained landscape elements and features; and
- Optimise protection and screening for visual amenity receptors.

5.6.8 Together these place a particular emphasis on green infrastructure across the site (including strategic landscape planting). These aims and principles can be taken forward through an iterative approach to inform an evolving design process at an increasing level of detail through the planning process.

Analysis of Constraints and Opportunities

5.6.9 To form judgements on the capacity of any given landscape to accommodate specific types of development (without an undue degree of landscape and visual impact) it is necessary to understand the nature and characteristics of the type of development proposed.

5.6.10 This section of the LVIA considers the type of development proposed and the nature of the impacts that are likely to occur; thereafter it draws the landscape and visual baseline information together and summarises the key constraints and opportunities in the existing landscape.

5.6.11 In summary, the proposed development comprises:

- residential development with associated infrastructure, accessed from the B3349 Basingstoke Road, with the development envelope located on the northern and western parts of the site, adjacent to the existing developed edge of Spencers Wood;
- a primary school and local centre;
- an area proposed for employment in the southern part of the site, adjacent to the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate;
- Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs), Local Areas of Naturalised Play, and Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP);
- Public Open Space, including formal and informal areas for sports, a multi-function open space, a trim trail, walking and walking routes (with connections to existing PRowS), a community orchard, SuDS basins and swales, and tree



and shrub planting within the site and around the site boundaries;

- retention and enhancement of existing boundary hedgerows, trees and other vegetation, and the reinstatement of some field boundary vegetation which has been previously lost through field amalgamation;
- structural landscape buffer adjacent to existing residential properties along Basingstoke Road, Hyde End Lane, Century Drive, Barracks Lane and Blackwater Close;
- the creation of a SANG (approx. 8.13ha), comprising heathland and wildflower planting, tree and shrub planting, a primary walking route, SuDS ponds and swales, and naturalised wildlife ponds; and
- the retention of existing long-range views to the south-east towards the River Loddon and the wider landscape beyond, with similar views also made available from locations within the site which are currently not publicly accessible.

Likely Causes of Impact

5.6.12 Although a landscape has some intrinsic sensitivity, different landscapes contain a range of components which will respond differently to change, subject to the type of the development that is proposed. Consequently, in order to inform the analysis of impacts, judgements should be made with reference to the specific changes which arise from the type of development being considered.

5.6.13 The following section sets out the likely causes of impacts which would occur in relation to the specific type of development proposed (i.e. residential-led development).

Causes of Temporary Impact during Construction

5.6.14 The temporary construction works which may give rise to impacts on landscape and visual receptors are listed as follows:

- Installation of tree and hedgerow protection fencing;
- Presence and movement of construction vehicles and plant;



- Presence of construction compounds, site offices and welfare facilities;
- Temporary construction lighting;
- Site clearance works (including any necessary removal of existing vegetation and trees);
- Earthworks, groundworks and infrastructure/service installation;
- Construction of the proposed accesses off the B3349 Basingstoke Road;
- Construction of new residential dwellings; and
- Landscaping operations associated with the green infrastructure, landscape buffers, public open space and private garden spaces.

Causes of Impact at Completion

5.6.15 The permanent components of the proposed development which may give rise to impacts on landscape and visual receptors are listed as follows:

- The built form of residential and mixed-use development (incorporating highways infrastructure and including lighting); and
- Mitigation integrated into the proposed development (i.e. green infrastructure and strategic landscaping), including retained trees, hedgerows, open space provision, SUDs and attenuation areas and new planting.

5.6.16 Together the cause of impacts at construction and operation inform the analysis of constraints and opportunities.

5.6.17 The following key constraints and opportunities have been identified during the landscape and visual analysis (including reference to field work and desk study of landscape character guidance).

5.6.18 Constraints associated with the site are summarised as follows:

- Existing green infrastructure across the site, including on some sections of the settlement boundary where this screens views of existing built form, hedgerows along the short sections of open road, the remaining hedgerow



field boundaries in the more degraded parts of the site, and the network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees in the smaller scale parts of the site;

- Localised views into and across the site, particularly from small pockets of open space on the settlement edge as well as short sections of road on the route out of Spencers Wood to the south – these views (albeit transient) look across the site to the attractive backdrop of low-lying hills;
- The route of the public right of way to the south, which affords views directly towards the site for receptors using that route;
- The nature of existing landscape elements in the southern parts of the site which, together, have direct relevance to 'landscape value', and which could be perceived as the justification for the emerging policy designation of the Valued Landscape Area;
- The site is located within the Thames Basin Heaths SPA buffer, requiring provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace as part of a proposal; and
- The location of the southern parts of the site as this area forms part of a threshold and gateway to Spencer's Wood.

5.6.19 Opportunities for the site are considered to be:

- The existing settlement pattern is located directly adjacent to the site along much of its northern and western boundaries, with parts of the settlement edge currently exposed, providing strong context of residential development and also making large parts of the site physically and visually well contained;
- Aside from the agricultural land use, there are few landscape elements across the site, and where these exist, the site is of sufficient scale that they can be readily retained as part of an emerging masterplan;
- At the threshold to the settlement, existing commercial and industrial units are present which present a detracting feature as part of the gateway;
- The B3449 Basingstoke Road forms the main road from the south of the settlement, but views from this into and across the site are relatively limited;



- The PRoW to the south passes through a broad and variable landscape. The quality of views is equally variable, including views north (across the site) which include existing residential built form on the settlement edge of Spencers Wood;
- Detracting features are present in parts of the landscape, such as the large solar farm to the south-east;
- Views to the site are limited from the wider landscape, including potentially more sensitive locations such as Swallowfield Park; and
- The scale of the site as a whole is sufficient to accommodate a balanced approach to potential development that incorporates a robust strategy for extensive green infrastructure and open space as mitigation.

5.6.20 The analysis of these can be used to inform the design process and to avoid or minimise potential impacts.

Mitigation Strategy for Landscape and Visual Matters

5.6.21 Having considered the landscape and visual analysis, the constraints and opportunities have been used to influence the design of the emerging masterplan and layout. This ensures that matters of landscape character and visual amenity are embedded in the proposals and mitigation measures included to avoid or minimise impacts are an integrated part of the proposed development.

5.6.22 As noted earlier in this LVIA, a 'landscape led' approach has been adopted from the outset of the planning and design process for the site, effectively setting the main parameters for development and the strategic design for green infrastructure.

5.6.23 Further considerations of mitigation and design have subsequently been developed, these later stages adopting the strategic proposals but evolving them in response to other environmental considerations, such as drainage and biodiversity.

5.6.24 The fundamental mitigation in respect of landscape and visual matters, is that defined at a strategic level. This has set the acceptable parameters for the proposed development in a manner whereby it can be assimilated as far as possible into the landscape context, rather than being imposed upon it.



- 5.6.25 The following sections elaborate on these details (refer to Figure 5.8, Landscape and Visual Strategy and Figure 5.9, Illustrative Landscape Masterplan)..

Development Envelope

- 5.6.26 The development envelope is effectively the spatial parameter within which the residential development should fit. Accounting for landscape character, various restrictions have been placed on the development envelope so as to avoid or reduce landscape and visual effects.
- 5.6.27 The development envelope is located on the northern and western parts of the site, adjacent to the existing developed edge of Spencers Wood. Existing development therefore provides the context and backdrop to the proposed residential development, with a strong green boundary then created to the south and east, between the built form and the wider countryside beyond.
- 5.6.28 The parts of the site for the proposed primary school and local centre sit adjacent to the central part of the residential development envelope, bounded to the north, east and south by POS areas and substantial green corridors.
- 5.6.29 The development envelope for the employment areas is located in the southern part of the site, with context provided by the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate to the south and the Heron Industrial Estate to the north-west.

Existing Green Infrastructure

- 5.6.30 Existing green infrastructure, in the form of field boundary hedgerows and hedgerow trees on all of the field boundaries within the site, would be retained and enhanced, becoming an integral part of the extensive landscaped public open spaces and SANG within the proposed development.

Internal Layout and Proposed Open Space

- 5.6.31 In summary, the proposed development comprises:
- Retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing boundary hedgerows, trees and other vegetation;



- Residential, educational, retail, industrial/commercial and community development predominantly in the northern and western parts of the site adjacent to the existing settlement edge, with extensive POS areas within the development envelope and along the southern and eastern sides of the site;
- Tree-lined primary access roads from the B3349 Basingstoke Road incorporating cycle and pedestrian routes;
- Extensive areas of public open space within and between the different areas of built form and within a substantial green corridor on the eastern side of the southern part of the site, including recreational routes, a trim trail, equipped and naturalised areas for play, community orchards, and SuDS basins and swales.
- Approx. 8.13ha of SANG on the southern side of the northern part of the site with recreational routes, biodiversity areas, and SuDS ponds and swales;
- New planting, in places reflecting the positions and alignments of historic field boundary hedgerows, used to divide the site into development clusters, and also to provide visual separation between the proposed development and adjacent residential areas and Basingstoke Road;
- Extensive new woodland and copse planting (within the POS and SANG) along the boundary between the site and the adjacent farmland. The planting would be positioned to maintain long-distance views from more open sections of Basingstoke Road and from locations within the site towards the River Loddon and the wider landscape;
- Potential for connections between proposed pedestrian/cycle routes within the site and the BOAT to the north of the site; and
- Outward-facing dwellings adjacent to POS areas to provide passive surveillance of the POS areas.

Detailed Landscape Design

5.6.32 All proposed landscape mitigation will be subject to a high-quality detailed landscape scheme that will ensure that the functions of the landscape components are delivered. This will also reflect positively on the design quality of the proposed



development as a whole, in line with: Policies CP1, CP3 and CP8 of the 2010 Wokingham Core Strategy; Policy CC03 of the 2014 Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan; and emerging Policies SS13, C8, NE2, NE3, NE4, NE5 and NE6 of the emerging 2020 Wokingham Local Plan Update.

- 5.6.33 At the detailed design stage, the selection of species for trees, woodland and hedgerows will refer to native species as well as those present in the context of the local landscape character, wherever appropriate and in the context of the need for the long-term resilience of planting. Planting stock of local provenance will be used where feasible.
- 5.6.34 These mitigation measures are considered integral to the proposed development and have been developed as part of an iterative assessment process. Therefore, mitigation measures are considered in the balance of judgements when determining the magnitude of impacts and scale of effects.

Summary

- 5.6.35 Early-stage landscape and visual analysis of the site and its environs has led to the development of a landscape-led masterplan for the site, in line with local planning policy and the guidance in the published Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment:
- The development envelope has been restricted to the northern and western parts of the site, adjacent to existing development in Spencers Wood and along the B3349 Basingstoke Road – see **Figure 5.8, Landscape and Visual Strategy**. This approach means that outer edge of the majority of new built form would be aligned with existing development in the main part of Spencers Wood and along Basingstoke Road as far as the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate to the south.
 - The remainder of the site, predominantly to the east and south-east of the development envelope would form a strong green buffer (POS and SANG) to separate the proposed development from the adjoining countryside/farmland. Further green corridors (including new recreational routes) would flow north and west into the development envelope and connecting to the existing settlement edge;



- Existing boundary vegetation would be retained and enhanced, and new planting added between the development envelope and the adjoining existing development. This would divide the site into development clusters, and also to provide an appropriate level of visual separation between the proposed development and adjacent residential areas and Basingstoke Road.
- Existing planting between the site and surrounding countryside to the east and south would also be enhanced and reinforced to provide strong visual separation between the proposed development and the adjoining countryside.

5.6.36 This approach has allowed the creation of a high-quality residential development that fits comfortably within the site and its environs, respecting the existing landscape that surrounds the site, and limiting visibility of the proposed development from the surrounding area.

Additional Mitigation

Demolition and Construction

5.6.37 A Code of Construction Practice (CoCP) included within a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be developed prior to construction. The content of this document will aim to promote good Site management and ensure that environmental commitments are adhered to.

5.6.38 Measures that could be incorporated into the CoCP to avoid or reduce landscape and visual effects during construction include:

- Site clearance and, where removal of vegetation is required, this be undertaken on a phased basis to limit the duration of impacts associated with losses of vegetation;
- Maximising the retention of existing trees and vegetation in the design where possible, specifically this includes, but is not limited to, the hedgerow network across the site and along its boundaries (and associated hedgerow trees);
- Protection of all retained existing vegetation for the duration of the construction period (including accommodation works and site demobilisation) to ensure no vegetation is lost due to poor site management or construction operations;



- Replacement of any trees intended to be retained which may be lost unintentionally as a consequence of construction works;
- A phased programme of planting and early implementation of planting and other landscape measures where there is no conflict with construction activities or other requirements of the proposed development;
- Appropriate maintenance of planting and seeding works and implementation of management measures, to continue through the construction period as landscape works are completed;
- Strict adherence to the site boundaries of construction and storage compounds and construction access roads, including the use of well-maintained hoardings and fencing; and
- Designing construction lighting to avoid unnecessary intrusion onto adjacent buildings and other land uses.

Operation

- 5.6.39 Mitigation measures for landscape and visual matters have been incorporated into the proposed development as an integrated part of the design process. It is anticipated that all proposed landscape mitigation measures will be in place at completion, however, it should be noted that at the early stages many of the proposed landscape mitigation measures will perform their intended landscape function in the longer term and will require a comprehensive programme of establishment maintenance and longer-term landscape management to achieve this.

Enhancements

- 5.6.40 Enhancements can be achieved through the adoption of a landscape management plan for the proposed development which sets out a series of appropriate aims and objectives.
- 5.6.41 As enhancement measures these would need to address those retained elements and features of the landscape and ensure these are improved in terms of extent and condition, and with reference to guidelines set out in landscape character documents.



- 5.6.42 Together these will improve the quality of the retained landscape elements in terms of its development (both visually and physically), its content (wildlife and habitat creation) and its diversity (opportunities for creation of additional landscape elements, such as ditches, water bodies, or new tree groups).
- 5.6.43 The duration of the management plan may vary covering 5, 10 or 15 years, and the management approaches would vary dependent upon the aims and objectives.

5.7 Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects

Overview of Landscape Effects

- 5.7.1 Landscape sensitivity is a term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements on the value related to a landscape (i.e. the receptor) with the susceptibility of the landscape to the specific type of change proposed. Receptors can include specific landscape elements or features or may be judged at a wider scale and include landscape character parcels, types or areas.
- 5.7.2 As advocated in GLVIA3, professional judgement is used to balance analysis of value and susceptibility in order to determine sensitivity. Each of these aspects of the analysis will vary subject to the scale and detail of the assessment.
- 5.7.3 The landscape character of the study area is documented at national and district levels. The findings of these studies represent a thorough and generally consistent analysis of landscape character, and this has been supported by an analysis of the local landscape character of the site in the context of the settlement.
- 5.7.4 This assessment of landscape effects focuses on the areas of landscape character which are defined by the 2019 Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment as LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay (direct and indirect effects) and LCA A2: Loddon River Valley (indirect effects).
- 5.7.5 As previously noted in the baseline, this presents guidance at an appropriate scale and detail and also represents the most recent baseline position on landscape character for the area.



- 5.7.6 The assessment is then also applied at a more refined level to consider additional judgements based on the landscape character of 'the site and its immediate context'.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 5.7.7 In order to inform judgements on value and susceptibility the following section refers to the baseline information (Section 3) and additional consideration of the local character in relation to the site and its local landscape context. These judgements are then carried through to the analysis of landscape sensitivity.

Landscape value

- 5.7.8 In LVIA, landscape value is the value attached to a potentially affected landscape. It is relative in relation to the different stakeholders and different parts of society that use or experience a landscape.
- 5.7.9 Landscape value is not solely indicated by the presence of formal designations and a range of factors influence landscape value.
- 5.7.10 The GLVIA3 sets out a range of factors that can help in the identification of landscape value¹¹ and these concepts have been expanded in the later LI TGN 02/21¹².
- 5.7.11 Whilst these have become commonly accepted, it is important to place them in the relevant context that the GLVIA3 is guidance and that its principles have to be adopted into a formal methodology by practitioners. The criteria for determining landscape value as set out in the methodology accord with those presented in the GLVIA3 and LI TGN 02/21.
- 5.7.12 Landscape value will vary in response to the specific landscape that is being considered, even where a landscape is included in the boundaries of a formal designation.

¹¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013), *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition* – Box 5.1, Page 84

¹² Landscape Institute (2021), *Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations*.



5.7.13 This section determines the value of the defined LCAs (and local landscape context) relevant to the site and study area. The considerations and professional judgements used in determining value are summarised in the following tables (with reference to GLVIA3, page 84, Box 5.1 and to LI TGN 02/21).

Table 5.13: Appraisal of Landscape Value	
Considerations	LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay and LCA A2: Loddon River Valley
Formal landscape or landscape related designations	No such adopted designations within the site or its immediate environs. Field 4 of the site is proposed in the emerging Local Plan Update to form part of the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VLA, with parts of Fields 2, 3 and 5 being within the VLA buffer. However, the Local Plan Update is considered to still be some way from formal adoption, and this proposed designation therefore carries limited weight at the current time. Swallowfield Park RPG (Grade II) lies approx. 675m to the south-east of the site. There would be some limited visibility of the proposed development from restricted sections in the western/south-western part of the RPG, adjacent to the village of Swallowfield. Indirect perceptual/experiential effects on the RPG are likely to be relatively limited.
Natural and cultural heritage interests (i.e. ecological, geological or heritage matters)	No specific natural or cultural heritage interests within the site. The Site comprises actively managed arable farmland and is therefore of limited ecological value. Trees and hedgerows within the site are intended to be retained where possible and are of a range of quality. Any areas of Ancient Woodland within the wider surrounding landscape would not be affected by the proposed development.
Landscape condition of individual elements or overall structure	The published LCA description (for LCA J3 which contains the site) does not provide an overall summary of landscape condition. The field pattern, remnants of historic parkland, woodlands and hedgerow network are considered to be in good condition, but major transport corridors are said to introduce noise and movement where not well-screened. The importance of maintaining and enhancing the pattern of hedgerows and trees is highlighted. Individual landscape elements within the site, notably many of the hedgerows and trees, are also in good condition, albeit the hedgerows are tightly managed.
Landscape associations	No well-known specific associations with notable people,



Table 5.13: Appraisal of Landscape Value

Considerations	LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay and LCA A2: Loddon River Valley
	events or the arts.
Distinctiveness and sense of place	The local landscape is not noted for being distinctive, and the site is not considered to be atypical of the local area.
Recreational opportunities in the landscape context	No formal access to the site, with no indications of informal access. There are BOATS to the north (SHIN33) and east (SHIN22) of the site (within the existing settlement of Spencers Wood), with a footpath (SHIN22A/SWAL18) extending south then south-west from the latter BOAT, passing to the south-east of the site. The promoted Blackwater Valley Path extends as far as Swallowfield, and there may be some limited visibility of the proposed development from restricted sections to the south-east of Swallowfield.
Perceptual aspects (in respect of scenic/visual quality)	The Site and its environs are of moderate scenic quality, with no specific identified high value views.
Perceptual aspects (in respect of wildness and tranquillity)	The majority of the local landscape is clearly managed for agriculture, and there is little sense of remoteness and tranquillity. Tranquillity mapping undertaken by CPRE ¹³ indicates that the site is of moderate tranquillity, with marginally greater tranquillity within Swallowfield Park.
Landscape function	The local landscape does not provide a particular function in relation to nearby settlements, and does not provide the setting for any statutory/national or non-statutory/local landscape designations. Parts of the site lie within the Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape Area, as identified in the emerging Local Plan Update. The proposed designation currently carries only limited weight as the Local Plan Update is not yet adopted.

5.7.14 Overall, LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay is considered to be of medium value.

5.7.15 For LCA A2: Loddon River Valley, landscape character is also considered to be of medium value.

¹³ [Tranquillity Map: England – CPRE](#)



- 5.7.16 On balance, the site in its local landscape context, landscape value is considered to be low to medium.

Landscape susceptibility

- 5.7.17 In LVIA, landscape susceptibility is the ability of a landscape to accommodate change without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation.
- 5.7.18 Different types of development can affect landscapes in different ways and consequently landscape susceptibility is specific to the type of development proposed (i.e. mixed use).
- 5.7.19 This section determines the susceptibility with the considerations and professional judgements used summarised in the following table.

Table 5.14: Appraisal of Landscape Susceptibility	
Considerations	LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay and LCA A2: Loddon River Valley
Scale of enclosure	The site is located on gently west-to-east sloping ground. The topography continues to rise to the west, and falls towards the River Loddon to the east/south-east. Existing development and tree cover within Spencers Wood to the north and west combines with field boundary trees and a strong hedgerow network, woodland blocks, and riverine trees along the Loddon to create a greater sense of enclosure than might otherwise be expected. Longer distance views towards the site are however possible from land to the east, south-east and south, with the site being seen in the context of the existing settlement edge. In views from the north and west, visibility of the site is heavily restricted by topography and existing development.
Nature of land use	The site is currently used for arable agriculture, and agriculture is also the main land use within the surrounding area. Woodland cover is also generally strong, with woodland blocks linked by a generally intact hedgerow network. There is a solar farm to the south-east, and 'horsey-culture' is also prominent in some views. There is existing residential development to the north and west of the site, with industrial/commercial development also present to the south and south-west.
Nature of existing elements and features	The site contains existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees on its boundaries, as well as drainage ditches. These would all be retained, becoming integral parts of the proposed public open spaces within the proposed development.



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- 5.7.20 Overall, LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay is considered to be of medium susceptibility to development of the type proposed.
- 5.7.21 For LCA A2: Loddon River Valley, landscape character is also considered to be of medium susceptibility to development of the type proposed.
- 5.7.22 With the physical and visual containment and the presence of the existing settlement edge (with reference to both residential and commercial built form), the site in its local landscape context is considered to be of low to medium susceptibility.

Overall Landscape sensitivity

- 5.7.23 The following conclusions on sensitivity are based on the detailed description and justification presented in the previous sections, balancing the professional judgements on value and susceptibility.
- 5.7.24 In drawing together judgements on landscape value and susceptibility in respect of landscape sensitivity, higher levels of landscape sensitivity will occur where landscape value and landscape susceptibility are toward the upper end of the scale.
- 5.7.25 Lower levels of sensitivity will occur where value and susceptibility are toward the lower end of the scale.
- 5.7.26 More central levels of sensitivity will occur where one component is toward the higher end of the scale whilst one is toward the lower.
- 5.7.27 Higher levels of sensitivity are more likely to occur where both value and susceptibility are judged to be higher.
- 5.7.28 It is important to note that there are graduations within the process which are not clear cut, and professional judgment is used to balance these and determine an overall judgement on sensitivity.



Table 5.15: Determining Landscape Sensitivity

Landscape character	Value	Susceptibility	Judgement on sensitivity
LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay	Medium	Medium	Medium
LCA A2: Loddon River Valley	Medium	Medium	Medium
Site and its local landscape context	Low to medium	Low to medium	Low to medium

5.7.29 Following a review of the nature of impacts on physical landscape resources, the conclusions on landscape sensitivity are then taken forward to address the impact and effect on landscape character.

Impacts at Construction

5.7.30 The initial construction activities on the site are likely to comprise the introduction of infrastructure and enabling works, including:

- Demolition works (where required), to include any properties and agricultural buildings which require clearance, and also any vegetation clearance along field boundaries where necessary;
- Highway works, for access into the site;
- Temporary access and haul routes, Site compounds and car parking;
- Utilities works including diversions, upgrades and new provision;
- Soil stripping and storage, Site re-grading and the creation of practical development platforms;
- The creation of Site roads with associated service provision;



- The early implementation of the structural landscape scheme (where appropriate); and
 - Ongoing and emerging built form in subsequent phases.
- 5.7.31 During the enabling works, arisings will include topsoil and subsoil which is likely to be stored and recycled within the site.
- 5.7.32 Construction is likely to generate a variety of vehicle movements including on site machinery such as a general plant, forklifts, cranes and lifting equipment. Off-site movements are likely to include light and heavy haulage, commercial vehicles, and site staff vehicles. Site hoarding, temporary signage and porta-cabins are likely to be erected. Construction hazard lighting will also be visible and there also likely to be the aural intrusion of vehicle reversing alarms.
- 5.7.33 Construction work will progress in several sub-phases with the focus of building work shifting throughout the site. The result of this will be that the baseline conditions will evolve during the construction stages to include the completed built elements of the proposed development and implemented landscape scheme.
- 5.7.34 During construction there will be several changes across the site. The landscape of the site will change from the current agricultural areas to that of a construction site whilst the proposed development is being implemented. The nature of these impacts will be temporary (although the consequences permanent) and in the longer term will be replaced by the implemented masterplan for the proposed development. Some parts of the site are proposed for green infrastructure and ecological mitigation and these areas would be subject to less disturbance from construction activity, although a change in character will occur from agricultural to various areas of public open space, ecological habitats and green infrastructure.

Effects on Landscape Character during Construction

- 5.7.35 The main effect on landscape character during the construction phase is likely to be the gradual transformation of the site from a predominantly open agricultural landscape to the active development site over a series of phases.
- 5.7.36 This currently largely open, agricultural landscape will emerge as an active construction site, but will include substantial areas of green infrastructure that will



form a 'green edge' to the proposed development along the western and northern edges of the site.

- 5.7.37 Vegetation resources on Site consist of some mature trees and vegetation, hedgerow boundaries and hedgerow trees. The proposed development will seek to retain these resources wherever possible and enhance it where it is retained.
- 5.7.38 Throughout the construction phase, good practice shall ensure that on-site works do not give rise to direct or indirect effects upon off-site water features.
- 5.7.39 With regards to the 'LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay and LCA A2: Loddon River Valley, construction will impact on only a discreet part of the wider LCAs and several impacts such as the perception of movement and disturbance will not be perceptible from the wider landscape.
- 5.7.40 Consequently, the effect during construction in respect of landscape character is the transition and change over time to the emerging settlement edge, extending further to the south and south-east Spencers Wood. At a local level, this pattern would be consistent with the settlement edge further to the south and east.
- 5.7.41 The overall assessment of effects on landscape character during construction is set out in the following table.

Table 5.16: Assessment of Landscape Effects During Construction				
Landscape character	Sensitivity	Magnitude of impact		Significance of effect
LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay	Medium	Construction	Negligible to low	Negligible to minor adverse
LCA A2: Loddon River Valley	Medium	Construction	Negligible to low	Negligible to minor adverse
Site and its local landscape context	Low to medium	Construction	High	Moderate to major adverse



Effects on Visual Amenity at Construction

- 5.7.42 During construction works, there are likely to be effects on the visual amenity of the local area. The extent to which the construction phase would affect visual amenity is likely to change regularly, depending on the nature and location of the works.
- 5.7.43 Construction activities would be visible from the majority of areas identified within the visual envelope.
- 5.7.44 All visual effects during construction would be temporary and local in scale. There are likely to be some specific changes in views in close proximity to the site. From longer distances views of construction activities are likely to be more limited and partially screened.
- 5.7.45 A detailed analysis has been completed for the construction phase for each of the representative viewpoints and is set out in the following table.

Table 5.17: Summary Assessment of Visual Effects During Construction				
Ref.	Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Construction	
			Magnitude	Significance
1	View looking east/south-east from B3349 Basingstoke Road adjacent to the site. <i>The view is also partially representative of views obtained by nearby residential occupiers.</i>	Medium for road users High for residential occupiers	Medium to high	Moderate to major adverse
2	View looking south-east from Footpath SHIN23 between Spencers Wood and Highlands.	High	Low	Moderate adverse
3	View looking south-southwest from the POS/play area at the south-eastern end of Blackwater Close <i>The view is also partially representative of views obtained by nearby residential occupiers (including Blackwater Close and Barracks Lane) and by users of BOAT SHIN33.</i>	Medium for POS/play area users Medium for road users High for residential occupiers High for PRow users	High	Major adverse
4	View looking south-west from the B3349 Hyde End Road to the north of the site. <i>The view is also partially</i>	Medium for road users High for residential	Residential occupiers: Medium to	Residential occupiers: Major adverse



Table 5.17: Summary Assessment of Visual Effects During Construction

Ref.	Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Construction	
			Magnitude	Significance
	<i>representative of views obtained by nearby residential occupiers.</i>	occupiers	high Road users: Low	Road users: Minor to moderate adverse
5	View looking west from Footpath SHIN22A to the south of Sussex Lane.	High	Medium	Moderate to major adverse
6	View looking north-west from the junction of Footpaths SHIN22A/ SWAL18 to the south-east of the site.	High	Medium	Moderate to major adverse
7	View looking west/north-west from Footpath SWAL18 to the south-east of the site.	High	High	Major adverse
8	View looking north/north-west from Footpath SWAL18 to the south-east of the site.	High	High	Major adverse
9	View looking north-northwest from Footpath SWAL18 at its junction with the B3349 Basingstoke Road to the south of the site.	High for PRow users Medium for road users	Medium	PRow users: Moderate to major adverse Road users: Moderate adverse
10	View looking north from Footpath SWAL19 to the south of the site.	High	Low to medium	Moderate adverse

5.8 Impacts at Operation

Landscape impacts

Impacts on physical landscape resources

- 5.8.1 The following section describes the predicted changes to the physical landscape elements and features on the site that will give rise to the subsequent perceived changes in landscape character.
- 5.8.2 Impacts at completion (Year 1) are concerned with the long-term alteration in the landscape from the current undeveloped context of Site to the future scenario of the proposed development. The built form of the proposed development will be complete and will be a permanent component in the landscape.



- 5.8.3 In the long term after completion (Year 15), impacts will be associated with the influence of mitigation measures on landscape character. This establishes the changes to landscape character as a result of built development but with proposed mitigation measures fully established and performing their intended function. The impacts are considered to be long term and not reversible.
- 5.8.4 It is during the construction phases of the proposed development that most of the physical landscape resources will be altered, including the change in land use, changes to landform, removal of some existing vegetation and implementation of mitigation and movement of construction activity. When completed, the proposed development will give rise to changes in the local landscape character in the longer term as a consequence of built development following the short-term impacts of the construction phase. The mitigation components assessed for this LVIA are set out on the EIA Parameters Plan.
- 5.8.5 Overall, the physical landscape impacts are considered to be direct and will be limited to the extent of the site. There will be no additional direct impacts on the wider landscape context.
- 5.8.6 In the context of the impacts considered above, the following sections set out an assessment of the likely landscape effects on the relevant landscape type and local landscape character.

[Impacts on landscape character](#)

- 5.8.7 Impacts on the local landscape character are defined as those occurring on the site and in the immediate landscape context of the site. In the context of the site and local landscape character, the proposed development will result in the direct loss of part of several agricultural field enclosures to the proposed development, but which includes a strategy for green infrastructure.
- 5.8.8 The site occupies only 0.03% of the land area of NCA129: Thames Basin Heaths. The magnitude of impact on the character of NCA129 is therefore considered to be less than negligible.
- 5.8.9 The site makes up only a small proportion of LCA J3 (approximately 4%), and of the site area, only approximately 40% would be occupied by built form. The LCA also includes the settlements of Spencers Wood and Shinfield, and part of Three



Mile Cross. The implementation of new mixed-use development on the site would introduce elements that are already present in the landscape. Changes to the overall character of the LCA would be limited, with the main effects restricted to the site and its immediate environs. Notable changes would generally be restricted to within the immediate vicinity of the site to the north and west, and to within approximately 500m of the site to the east and south. Effects on LCA J3 beyond this would be much more limited.

- 5.8.10 For LCA A2, perceptual effects on landscape character arising from the visibility of the proposed development would be experienced across sections of the Loddon and Blackwater valleys extending from the northern edge of Swallowfield in the south, to Hyde End Farm, Moor Copse and Rounds Copse to the north-east. There would also be visibility from the north-west side of the river between Sheep Bridge and the A33 crossing. More limited effects may be experienced along the north-western parts of the Blackwater Valley to the north-west of Salter's Bridge and to the north of Riseley Farm.
- 5.8.11 At Year 1, the magnitude of impact is assessed as medium within LCAs J3 and A2. By Year 15, the proposed structural planting along the southern and eastern boundaries of the site would be established and developing in height and density, reducing the visibility of the built form within the site and softening its appearance. The magnitude of change would reduce to negligible to low.
- 5.8.12 The proposed development would clearly result in a substantial change to the character of the site itself, changing the site from settlement-edge arable farmland to high quality residential and mixed-use development with associated infrastructure and landscaping, including the retention and enhancement of the existing boundary vegetation and the creation of substantial areas of landscaped public open space and the SANG. The magnitude of impact to the character of the site and its local landscape context is assessed as high at Year 1, reducing over time as mitigation becomes established.
- 5.8.13 The proposed development would not result in notable perceptual changes to the character of the Swallowfield Park RPG where the proposed development would be perceptible from only very limited parts of the western areas of the RPG (within LCA A2). The proposed development would be seen as a relatively marginal expansion of the existing development on the edge of Spencers Wood (which is

already visible) on the far side of the valley.

- 5.8.14 Direct effects on the emerging Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VLA would be limited to Field 4, with perceptual effects occurring over the parts of the VLA within the wider Loddon Valley (albeit the core of the VLA area is to the west, and separated from the site).

Significance of Landscape Effects

- 5.8.15 Year 1, effects on LCAs J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay and A2: Loddon River Valley would be **moderate adverse**. By Year 15, the effects would reduce to **negligible to minor**.
- 5.8.16 On balance, at Year 1 completion, changes to the character of the site in its local landscape context would result in a **moderate to major adverse** effect, given that the site does not exist in isolation and that it is influenced in respect of its character by the countryside interface to the south and east, but equally by the presence of, and influence by, the existing settlement edge of Spencers Wood to the west and north. Consequently, it is important to note that the settlement-edge location, the context provided by the existing residential development on two sides of the site, and the limited visibility of the site from within the local landscape together mean that these effects would be notably reduced beyond the immediate environs to the site. The significance of effect would reduce to **moderate adverse** at Year 15.

Table 5.18: Summary of Landscape Effects				
Landscape character	Sensitivity	Magnitude of impact		Significance of effect
LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay	Medium	Year 1	Medium	Moderate adverse
		Year 15	Negligible to low	Negligible to minor adverse
LCA A2: Loddon River Valley	Medium	Year 1	Medium	Moderate adverse
		Year 15	Negligible to low	Negligible to minor adverse



Table 5.18: Summary of Landscape Effects

Landscape character	Sensitivity	Magnitude of impact		Significance of effect
Site and its local landscape context	Low to medium	Year 1	High	Moderate to major adverse
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate adverse

Lighting Effects

- 5.8.17 The proposed development would include street lighting, as well as internal and external lighting associated with the new residential properties and other development. Street lighting would be designed in line with the Institution of Lighting Professionals Guidance Note 01/21: *The Reduction of Obtrusive Light*¹⁴ to provide sufficient levels of lighting to ensure the safety of future residents and visitors to the proposed development, whilst minimising light spill/light pollution.
- 5.8.18 The site itself is not currently illuminated. The B3349 Basingstoke Road is illuminated by streetlights as far south as the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate, and Hyde End Road and the residential streets within Spencers Wood to the north of the site are also all illuminated. Properties adjacent to the site are also likely to have varying levels of external lighting within their gardens. The immediate surroundings to the site are therefore illuminated, and the proposed street lighting within the proposed development would not therefore introduce lighting to an area that might be considered to have 'dark skies'. On balance, night time effects are not considered to be significant.

¹⁴ Institution of Lighting Professionals (2021) Guidance Note 02/21: The Reduction of Obtrusive Light – via [Guidance Note 1 for the reduction of obtrusive light 2021 | Institution of Lighting Professionals \(theilp.org.uk\)](#) [accessed June 2024]



5.9 Visual Impacts

Overview of visual impacts

- 5.9.1 Visual impacts are considered separately to landscape impacts. For landscape impacts it is necessary to understand the combination of direct and indirect impacts on the landscape resources potentially affected by a proposed development and therefore it is possible to provide a description and overview of the key impacts that are likely to affect the study area.
- 5.9.2 However, for visual receptors it is necessary to understand the specific, direct impacts on each view. Consequently, the causes of impact are considered on the basis of individual receptors and are set out in the following sections as an integral part of the assessment of visual effects.

Visual sensitivity

- 5.9.3 The sensitivity of a visual receptor is a function of the value attached to a view balanced with the susceptibility of the visual receptor to changes in a view and/or visual amenity.

Visual Effects

- 5.9.4 The following section summarises the main visual impacts which are likely to be generated by the proposed development. This includes reference to the likely significance of effects on specific visual receptors. A number of representative viewpoints were captured during the fieldwork, and these are presented as a series of panoramic photos and included as **Figure 5.7, Viewpoint Photographs**.
- 5.9.5 A detailed analysis has been completed for each of the representative viewpoints. This includes reference to the sensitivity of the visual receptors and the nature and degree of the likely changes to the view.
- 5.9.6 As with landscape effects, the assessment of visual effects at completion includes reference to construction impacts for completeness and ease of reference (as per Table 6.11).



Table 5.19: Summary of Visual Effects

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Year 1		Year 15	
		Magnitude	Significance	Magnitude	Significance
1. View looking east/south-east from B3349 Basingstoke Road adjacent to the site. <i>The view is also partially representative of views obtained by nearby residential occupiers.</i>	Medium for road users High for residential occupiers	Medium to high	Moderate to major adverse	Medium	Road users: Moderate adverse Residential occupiers: Moderate to major adverse
2. View looking south-east from Footpath SHIN23 between Spencers Wood and Highlands.	High	Low	Moderate adverse	Negligible	Negligible adverse
3. View looking south-southwest from the POS/play area at the south-eastern end of Blackwater Close <i>The view is also partially representative of views obtained by nearby residential occupiers (including Blackwater Close and Barracks Lane) and by users of BOAT SHIN33.</i>	Medium for POS/play area users Medium for road users High for residential occupiers High for PRoW users	High	Major adverse	Medium to high	Road users and POS/play area users: Moderate adverse Residential occupiers and PRoW users: Moderate to major adverse
4. View looking south-west from the B3349 Hyde End Road to the north of the site. <i>The view is also partially representative of views obtained by nearby residential occupiers.</i>	Medium for road users High for residential occupiers	Residential occupiers: Medium to high Road users: Low	Residential occupiers: Major adverse Road users: Minor to moderate adverse	Residential occupiers: Medium Road users: Negligible	Residential occupiers: Moderate to major adverse Road users: Negligible
5. View looking west from Footpath SHIN22A to the south of Sussex Lane.	High	Medium	Moderate to major adverse	Low	Minor to moderate adverse
6. View looking north-west from the	High	Medium	Moderate to major adverse	Low	Minor to moderate



Table 5.19: Summary of Visual Effects					
Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Year 1		Year 15	
		Magnitude	Significance	Magnitude	Significance
junction of Footpaths SHIN22A/ SWAL18 to the south-east of the site.					adverse
7. View looking west/north-west from Footpath SWAL18 to the south-east of the site.	High	High	Major adverse	Medium	Moderate to major adverse
8. View looking north/north-west from Footpath SWAL18 to the south-east of the site.	High	High	Major adverse	Medium	Moderate to major adverse
9. View looking north-northwest from Footpath SWAL18 at its junction with the B3349 Basingstoke Road to the south of the site.	High for PRow users Medium for road users	Medium	PRow users: Moderate to major adverse Road users: Moderate adverse	Low	PRow users: Minor to moderate adverse Road users: Minor adverse
10. View looking north from Footpath SWAL19 to the south of the site.	High	Low to medium	Moderate adverse	Low	Minor to moderate adverse

5.9.7 The development envelope has been restricted to the northern and western parts of the site, adjacent to existing development in Spencers Wood and along the B3349 Basingstoke Road. This approach means that outer edge of the majority of new built form would be aligned with existing development in the main part of Spencers Wood and along Basingstoke Road as far as the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate to the south.

5.9.8 The remainder of the site, predominantly to the east and south-east of the development envelope would form a strong green buffer (POS and SANG) to separate the proposed development from the adjoining countryside/farmland. Further green corridors (including new recreational routes) would flow north and west into the development envelope and connecting to the existing settlement edge.



- 5.9.9 Built form within the proposed development would predominantly be seen in the context of the existing settlement edge in views from the east and south, while existing built form within the settlement boundary of Spencers Wood would combine with topography to restrict visibility from the north and west. As a result, notable adverse effects on visual amenity are predominantly limited to within the immediate vicinity of the site to the north and west, and to within approximately 500m of the site to the south and east.

PRoW Users

- 5.9.10 The local PRoW network is of variable density, but limited in the immediate vicinity of the site and in the River Loddon valley more generally. The proposed development would result in enhancements to public access within the local area through the creation of the SANG, substantial other areas of POS, and new pedestrian/cycle routes within the site.
- 5.9.11 The proposed masterplan for the site, combined with strong levels of existing vegetation in the local area, would mean that effects beyond the immediate vicinity of the site would be limited.
- 5.9.12 Effects on users of Footpath SHIN23 to the north-west of the site, beyond Basingstoke Road, (VP2) would be at worst **moderate adverse** during at Year 1, reducing to **negligible** by Year 15.
- 5.9.13 Effects on users of BOAT SHIN33 between Hyde End Road and the site (VP3) would be **major adverse** at Year 1, reducing to **moderate to major adverse** at Year 15. However, these effects would only be experienced on the section of the route adjacent to the site.
- 5.9.14 Effects on users of BOAT SHIN22, Footpath SHIN22A, and Footpath SWAL18 to the east and south-east of the site (VPs 5, 6 and 9) would be **moderate to major adverse** at Year 1 with Viewpoints 7 and 8 (slightly closer to the site) being **major adverse**. By Year 15, effects would reduce to **moderate adverse (moderate to major adverse** for viewpoints 7 and 8) for sections of the routes further to the east as the planting within the SANG and as mitigation on the site grows and develops, reducing the visibility of built form within the proposed development.



- 5.9.15 Effects on users of Footpath SWAL19 to the south of the site (VP10) would be **moderate adverse** at Year 1, reducing to **minor to moderate adverse** by Year 15.
- 5.9.16 Visibility from other PRowS within the local area (such as Footpaths SWAL13, SWAL14 and SWAL15 near Rowe's Farm (part of the promoted Blackwater Valley Path), and Footpath ARBO20 near Kenny's Farm) are likely to be very limited due to intervening topography, built form and vegetation, or separation distance from the site. Where the proposed development is visible from restricted sections of such routes, effects would be no greater than **negligible**.

Residential Occupiers

- 5.9.17 The occupiers of some residential properties on the southern edge of Spencers Wood and along Basingstoke Road (VPs 1, 3 and 4) would have close and clear views of the proposed development. Views from some properties would be more restricted where there is strong vegetation on the site boundary adjacent to the properties. Views would change from edge-of-settlement open countryside to high quality residential development with extensive areas of POS. The effect on such views would be **moderate to major adverse**.
- 5.9.18 Effects on views from the residential property at Lamb's Farm would be broadly similar, with views changing from farmland to commercial development. However, it should be noted that the property here is already surrounded on three sides by existing commercial development.
- 5.9.19 There may be some visibility of the proposed development from residential properties at Sheepbridge Court Farm and Sheep Bridge, though views towards the site from many of these properties are restricted by trees and hedgerows adjacent to the properties. The proposed development would be seen in the context of the existing settlement-edge development, and effects would be **moderate adverse**.
- 5.9.20 Views from residential properties at Swallowfield Park are restricted by intervening tree cover within Swallowfield Park. Effects, even in the winter months when deciduous vegetation is not in leaf, are unlikely to be greater than **moderate adverse**.



- 5.9.21 There would be some visibility of the proposed development from certain properties on the northern edge of Swallowfield. The proposed development would be seen in the context of the existing settlement-edge development, and effects would be **moderate adverse**.
- 5.9.22 The proposed development may be visible from certain residential properties at Rowe's Farm. The proposed development would be seen as a marginal extension of the existing settlement edge, seen at a distance of approximately 2km. Effects would be at worst **minor adverse**.
- 5.9.23 The proposed development may be visible from certain residential properties at Kenny's Farm and White's Farm, seen at a distance of 2.2-2.8km from the site. Views would be restricted by vegetation on the boundaries of these properties, and effects would be at worst **minor adverse**.
- 5.9.24 Where the proposed development may be visible from restricted other properties in the surrounding landscape, it would be seen in the context of the existing settlement edge. Effects would no greater than **negligible**.

Road Users

- 5.9.25 The proposed development would be clearly visible in short-distance views from the section of Basingstoke Road which passes immediately to the west of the site – see VP1. Effects on road users (including pedestrians and cyclists) would be **moderate adverse**, but such effects would predominantly be experienced from a section of the road where there is already existing development on the west/south-west side of the road. Effects would reduce to **moderate adverse** over time as the proposed planting along the site boundary grows and develops, and pedestrians and cyclists would have the opportunity to use one of the new routes within the proposed development instead of travelling along Basingstoke Road itself. The proposed development would also be visible from other sections of Basingstoke Road further to the south, such as in the vicinity of Sheep Bridge (VP9), but effects here would be substantially reduced – **moderate adverse**, reducing over time to **minor to moderate adverse**.
- 5.9.26 There would be some limited visibility of the proposed development from sections of Hyde End Road to the north of the site, with the development seen through gaps between existing built form (VP4). Effects would be at worst **negligible adverse**.



- 5.9.27 There may be limited visibility of the proposed development from restricted sections of some other minor roads to the east, south-east and south:
- to west of Handpost Farm on western edge of Swallowfield;
 - to north-east of Riseley;
 - to east/north-east of Rowe's Farm; and
 - to south-west of White's Farm.
- 5.9.28 Views would typically be glimpsed or transient, often seen through gaps in the intervening (roadside) vegetation, and the proposed development would be seen in the context of the existing settlement edge. Effects would be **minor adverse to negligible**.
- 5.9.29 Aside from these main views, views and visual receptors would tend to see only limited parts of the proposed development at any one time. Also, many views are from more distant locations, which would reduce the magnitude of impact.
- 5.9.30 In respect of mitigation, this is inherent within the masterplan for the proposed development and landscape proposals as part of the mitigation strategy would serve to reduce impacts over time, helping to assimilate built form into the landscape and helping to screen or soften views.

Summary of Visual Effects

- 5.9.31 The restriction of the development envelope to the northern and western parts of the site, adjacent to existing development in Spencers Wood and along the B3349 Basingstoke Road results in the built form being seen in views from the east, south-east and south with existing development to the north, west and south. This combines with the screening effects of existing built form and vegetation, and the creation of substantial areas of POS with extensive structural planting, to limit visibility of the proposed development. Notable effects on local visual amenity would be limited to within the immediate environs to the site (within 50-100m) to the north and west, and to within 100-500m of the site to the east, south-east and south.



5.9.32 Such effects would be experienced by:

- users of BOAT SHIN33 between Hyde End Road and the site;
- users of BOAT SHIN22, Footpath SHIN22A, and Footpath SWAL18 to the east and south-east of the site;
- users of Footpath SWAL19 to the south of the site;
- occupiers of restricted properties on the southern edge of Spencers Wood and along Basingstoke Road; and
- users of Basingstoke Road (including cyclists and pedestrians) to the west and south of the site.

5.9.33 Effects on some of these views would reduce over time as the proposed extensive planting grows and develops.

5.9.34 In longer distance views towards the site there would be very limited visibility of new built form within the proposed development, and where visible it would be seen in the context of the existing develop to the north, west and south.

5.10 Summary

Overview

5.10.1 Pegasus Group has been instructed by Richborough Limited, to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment in relation to proposed residential development on land south of Spencer's Wood, Wokingham (the site).

5.10.2 The LVIA has been prepared to address the potential landscape and visual impacts of an outline application, with all matters reserved except for access, for the construction of a mixed-use development comprising residential, educational and commercial development, together with a local centre and extensive landscaped POS, including a SANG. Access would be from Basingstoke Road.



Background

- 5.10.3 Input on landscape and visual matters has already been provided to the EIA Screening Request (January 2024), and the EIA Scoping process (March 2024). A review of landscape and visual constraints and opportunities has also been undertaken (January 2024), and this has fed into the Development Framework Plan.

Site Context

- 5.10.4 The site comprises a parcel of five fields of agricultural land situated to the south of the main settlement area of Spencers Wood, and east of the B3349 (Basingstoke Road).
- 5.10.5 The boundaries to the site are all aligned to the existing field boundaries. The boundaries are formed:
- To the north by the southern edge of the existing settlement of Spencers Wood, specifically hedgerows and trees on the garden boundaries of residential development on Barracks Lane, Blackwater Close, Magill Close, Beckingham Place, Hyde End Road, and Century Drive;
 - To the east by hedgerows and hedgerow trees of variable condition, with farmland (and to the north-east by residential properties on Sussex Lane) beyond;
 - To the south by hedgerows and hedgerow trees of variable condition, with farmland beyond, as well as the Lamb's Farm Industrial Estate; and
 - To the west by hedgerows and hedgerow trees and then the B3349 Basingstoke Road, with existing residential development and the Heron Industrial Estate (to the south-west) beyond.
- 5.10.6 The surrounding landscape within the valley of the River Loddon is a mix of farmland (arable and pastoral, and of varying scale), existing development (predominantly residential but with some commercial/light industrial), and transport infrastructure (the M4 motorway to the north and the A33 dual carriageway to the west). Tree cover is variable.



- 5.10.7 The site lies outside of any landscape designation, either national/statutory or local/non-statutory. Swallowfield Park, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden (RPG), lies approximately 675m to the south-east of the site, on the south-east side of the River Loddon.
- 5.10.8 Policy NE6 of the emerging Local Plan Update identifies Valued Landscape Areas (VLAs). The proposed Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VLA includes Field 4, while the 50m VLA buffer includes parts of Fields 2, 3 and 5.

Landscape Character

Baseline

- 5.10.9 The site lies within:
- National Character Area (NCA) 129: Thames Basin Heaths;
 - Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2019:
 - Site: Landscape Character Area (LCA) J3 – Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay, within the Settled and Farmed Clay Landscape Character Type (LCT);
 - Surrounding area where landscape and visual effects may occur: LCA A2: Loddon River Valley, within the River Valley LCT.
- 5.10.10 From the detailed evaluation undertaken for this LVIA, the immediate context to the site shares many of the characteristics identified in the baseline landscape character assessment of LCA J3. Those considered to be of particular relevance include:
- 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.
 - Large arable fields with some pasture, with an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow oaks, interspersed with scattered small woodlands and copses. Horse paddocks feature on the edge of settlements or around large farmsteads e.g. Sheepridge Court.



- Sense of elevation from the ridgeline and good views over surrounding lowlands including to the Loddon valley.

5.10.11 Key issues of relevance to the site include:

- Loss of woodland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Pressure for large-scale residential development affecting landscape character, and resulting in potential amalgamation of separate settlements.
- Pressure for development on the visually prominent slopes of the clay ridge.
- Urbanisation of rural roads.
- Light pollution.

5.10.12 Landscape guidelines of particular relevance include:

- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape, including native hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Use of structural planting on the boundaries of new development to improve integration and visual screening, and create a positive interface between urban and rural.
- Maintain countryside between settlements to avoid coalescence.
- Maintain character of rural roads through appropriate planting and design.
- Minimise light pollution.

5.10.13 The landscape-led approach to the design of the proposed development, guided by this LVIA, are considered to be in alignment with these guidelines.

5.10.14 Overall, the site and the wider surrounding landscape, including the wider LCA J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay, is considered to be of medium sensitivity to development of the type proposed. In the vicinity of the site, the LCA A2: Loddon River Valley is considered to be of similar medium sensitivity, though elsewhere (particularly within the Swallowfield Park RPG) the LCA may be of higher sensitivity.



- 5.10.15 Being a local/non-statutory designation, the sensitivity of the emerging Spencers Wood Southern Ridge VLA would be at most medium.

Effects on Landscape Character

- 5.10.16 The proposed development would result in:
- a negligible effect on NCA129: Thames Basin Heaths;
 - a moderate adverse effect during construction and at Year 1 on LCAs J3: Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay and A2: Loddon River Valley. By Year 15, the effects would be negligible to minor adverse in the vicinity of the site;
 - a moderate to major adverse effect on the character of the site in its local landscape context at Year 1, reducing to moderate adverse at Year 15;

Visual Amenity

Baseline

- 5.10.17 Based on the ZTV and informed by subsequent site survey and observations from the field work, the visual envelope for the site and the proposed development is broadly defined as follows:
- To the north, the visual envelope is restricted by existing development and boundary vegetation along the majority of the northern site boundary. There may be occasional restricted views of the built form within the proposed development from properties on the settlement edge, and from certain locations where gaps between the built form align.
 - To the north-east, there are narrow bands of theoretical visibility to the south of Shinfield, out to approximately 3-3.5km
 - To the east, the visual envelope extends as far as the woodlands at Moor Copse and Rounds Copse, with a more limited band of visibility as far as the western side of Arborfield Green, and a further restricted area to the west of the woodlands at Farley Hill.
 - To the south-east, there would visibility across much of the Loddon Valley,



with some limited visibility from some western parts of the Swallowfield Park RPG. There would also be a band of visibility extending to Rowe's Farm and along the south side of The Broadwater as far as the edge of the Bramshill Plantation.

- To the south, the visual envelope extends as far as the River Loddon, with a further area of visibility around Handpost farm and Goddard's Farm.
- To the south-west, the visual envelope extends approximately 750m out to Loddon Court Farm.
- To the west and north-west, the visual envelope is restricted by existing built form on the B3349 Basingstoke Road, with limited areas of visibility to the east of the woodlands at White House Farm, and to the east and north-east of Highlands.

Effects on Visual Amenity

5.10.18 The restriction of the development envelope to the northern and western parts of the site, adjacent to existing development in Spencers Wood and along the B3349 Basingstoke Road results in the built form being seen in views from the east, south-east and south with existing development to the north, west and south. This combines with the screening effects of existing built form and vegetation, and the creation of substantial areas of POS with extensive structural planting, to limit visibility of the proposed development. Notable effects on local visual amenity would be limited to within the immediate environs to the site (within 50-100m) to the north and west, and to within 100-500m of the site to the east, south-east and south.

5.10.19 Such effects would be experienced by:

- users of BOAT SHIN33 between Hyde End Road and the site;
- users of BOAT SHIN22, Footpath SHIN22A, and Footpath SWAL18 to the east and south-east of the site;
- users of Footpath SWAL19 to the south of the site;
- occupiers of restricted properties on the southern edge of Spencers Wood



and along Basingstoke Road; and

- users of Basingstoke Road (including cyclists and pedestrians) to the west and south of the site.

5.10.20 Effects on some of these views would reduce over time as the proposed extensive planting grows and develops.

5.10.21 In longer distance views towards the site there would be very limited visibility of new built form within the proposed development, and where visible it would be seen in the context of the existing develop to the north, west and south.

Conclusion

5.10.22 Overall, the proposed development would result in limited effects on landscape character and visual amenity, restricted to the site and its immediate environs. The proposed development would be seen in the context of the existing settlement edge of Spencers Wood, with existing development to the north, west and south of the site. The proposed development would not result in the expansion of Spencers Wood into the base of the Loddon valley, or the convergence of settlements.

5.10.23 A range of landscape and visual receptors have been assessed and impacts have been identified for both landscape character and for visual receptors. This is part of an iterative process whereby potential impacts have informed the design of the proposed development and the associated landscape strategy. Mitigation has therefore been made integral to the proposed development, including limiting the development envelope to the northern and western parts of the site.

5.10.24 The residual impacts identified through this process highlight that the greatest effects would relate to the site and to a very localised area immediately adjacent to the site. The effect on potential receptor groups in the wider landscape context, including users of the wider PRow network, would be generally very limited. Topography, existing development, and the existing tree cover and hedgerows within the site and the surrounding landscape would limit visibility of the proposed development. Boundary vegetation and the proposed extensive new planting would also help to soften the appearance of new built form where it is visible.



5.10.25 Overall, the design of the proposed development, the context provided by the existing settlement edge of Spencers Wood, and the combined screening effects of topography, existing vegetation and built form mean that effects on landscape character and local visual amenity would be very limited in scale. Therefore, on balance, the proposed development is considered acceptable in landscape and visual terms.