

# Hatchery at Preston Farm



Landscape and Visual Appraisal  
December 2020



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## 1.0 Introduction

This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been prepared for the proposed re-development of the farmyard at Preston Farm, near Shoreham in Kent as Hatchery which will provide flexible workspaces in a rural setting.

Preston Farm occupies a prominent position in the Upper Darent Valley, as the valley broadens towards the Wealden Greensand ridge to the south. The current Farm landholding extends to a total area of around 16 hectares (40 acres). The planning application area for Hatchery encompasses the farmyard, the immediate setting to the farm and the access to the A225, but excludes the Farmhouse and Dairy House and the wider farmland (see Figure 1).

The Farm is located on the eastern banks of the River Darent, with most of the Farm on the lower slopes to the Kent Downs. The Farm estate also includes a substantial area of water meadow, located between the main river and a secondary watercourse.

The whole of the Farm lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a national landscape designation which recognises the special character and scenic beauty of the landscape. The Farm also lies within the Green Belt.

This LVA considers the whole Farm and its setting in the Darent Valley, but has been prepared principally as part of the proposals for the renovation and regeneration of the farmyard as Hatchery. The purpose of the combined LVA is to:

- assess the contribution of the Farm to the landscape character and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs AONB;
- assess options and inform a landscape led approach to Hatchery and create a setting which contributes to the landscape character and scenic beauty of the AONB;
- explore opportunities to strengthen the links between the use of the buildings to the surrounding landscape through enhanced amenity, use of the land, recreation and well being and enhanced biodiversity;
- explore opportunities to contribute to the ecological enhancement of the valley corridor;
- identify opportunities to restore and enhance the landscape character and setting to the Farm as part of the upper Darent Valley;
- provide an evaluation of the effects of the proposals on landscape character, visual amenity and openness;
- provide an assessment of the current land use and condition of the whole Farm to inform a long term land use and land management strategy for the land within the current tenure.

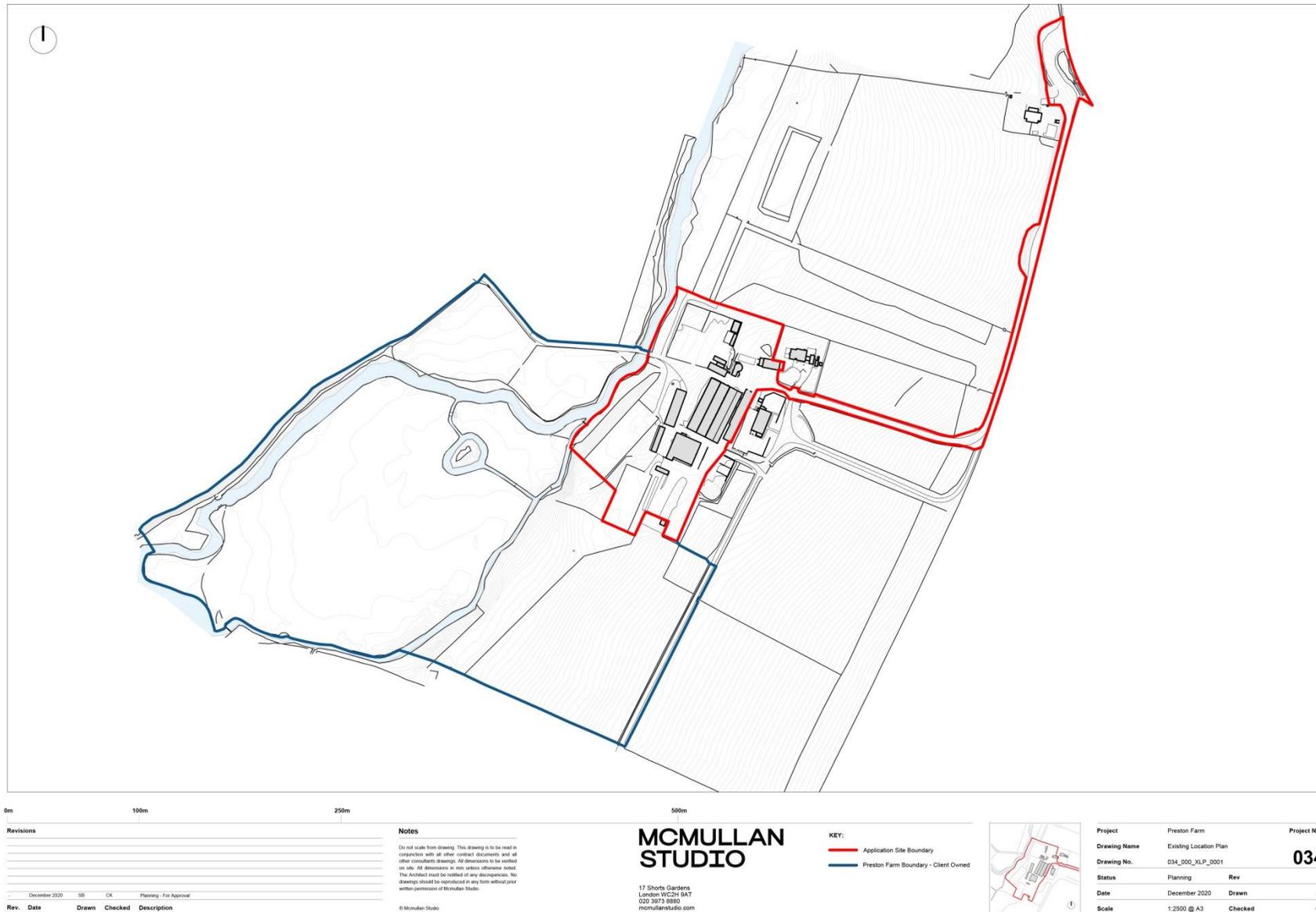


Figure 1: Site Location Plan

The overriding aim of this LVA is to inform the development of a landscape led approach for the design, operation and management of Hatchery as part of the Farm, which respects, restores and enhances the landscape attributes which define the Darent Valley and this part of the Kent Downs AONB.

A Farm Management Strategy has also been prepared for Preston Farm. This Strategy considers the whole Farm estate. The Strategy does not form part of the planning application for Hatchery as it addresses land beyond the area of the application, but is important in that it describes the overall land management context and initiatives being undertaken across the Farm within which Hatchery will be set. Drawings and a description of proposals being carried out across the Farm are included in this LVA (see Section 7).

This Appraisal is set out as follows:

Section 2 provides an overview of the national and local landscape and land use policy context to the Farm;

Section 3 provides an overview of the current published Landscape Character Assessments covering the Farm and surrounding areas;

Section 4 provides an overview and key elements of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan of relevance to this appraisal;

Section 5 describes the land use, landscape character and condition of the landscape of the planning application area and the wider Farm;

Section 6 provides a visual appraisal of the Hatchery site and the wider Farm in the Darent Valley landscape;

Section 7 describes the wider Farm Management Strategy and describes a set of Design Principles informed by analysis of the findings of the landscape and visual appraisals described in this LVA and the wider Farm strategy;

Section 8 describes Hatchery and the proposals for the regeneration of the Farmyard buildings and the opportunities and potential effects of the scheme;

Section 9 describes the landscape strategy and masterplan for Hatchery;

Section 10 provides an appraisal of the effects of Hatchery on local landscape character and visual amenity;

Section 11 provides overall conclusions to the LVA.

## 2.0 Landscape Planning Context

The whole of the Farm lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Green Belt. National policies are described in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF February 2019) and at a local level in the Sevenoaks District Core Strategy (Adopted February 2011). Full policies are set out in the other supporting documents to this application. The sections below describe the principal policies of relevance to this LVA.

### 2.1 National and local planning policy

#### 2.1.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019

##### ***Green Belt***

Section 13 of the NPPF addresses the protection of Green Belt land. Green Belt is primarily a spatial designation for which the primary aim is *to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence* (Paragraph 133). Green Belt is not a designation related to landscape condition or quality.

This Appraisal does not address whether any changes to the built form on the site represents appropriate development or exceptional circumstances. These matters are addressed in the supporting planning statements to this application. From a landscape perspective the principal consideration is that any re-development or change of use to the existing built form should *not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt* (Paragraph 145 (g)).

##### ***Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)***

AONB is a national landscape designation applied to landscapes of *landscape and scenic beauty*. Paragraph 172 of the NPPF states:

*Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.*

The emphasis of policy is on the protection, conservation and enhancement of these assets. From a landscape perspective there is a requirement to demonstrate that any proposals would not be detrimental to this aim. This Appraisal has been prepared, in part, to address the requirement for an assessment of any *detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated*, as required by Paragraph 172(c) of the NPPF.

### 2.1.2 Sevenoaks District Core Strategy (February 2011)

The spatial vision for the District emphasises the importance of conserving and enhancing its distinct character and nationally designated landscapes:

*The high quality natural built and historic environment will be conserved and enhanced, especially in those parts of the District designated to protect their distinct character. New development throughout the District will be of a high quality incorporating designs that respond to the distinctive local character of areas of high environmental quality [..]. The Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are of national importance and the distinctive character of their landscapes will be conserved and enhanced.*

Policy LO8 of the Core Strategy provides the principal policy governing the protection of the countryside and development in rural areas;

*Policy LO8 The Countryside and the Rural Economy.*

*The extent of the Green Belt will be maintained. The countryside will be conserved and the distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape and its biodiversity will be protected and enhanced where possible. The distinctive character of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their settings, will be conserved and enhanced.*

*Particular regard will be given to the condition and sensitivity of the landscape character and securing the recommended landscape actions in the proposed SPD to ensure that all development conserves and enhances local landscape character and that appropriate mitigation is provided where damage to local character cannot be avoided.*

*Development that supports the maintenance and diversification of the rural economy, including development for agriculture, forestry, small scale business development and rural tourism projects, and the vitality of local communities will be supported provided it is compatible with policies for protecting the Green Belt, the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty conserves and enhances the value and character of the District's woodland and the landscape character of other rural parts of the District and that it takes account of infrastructure requirements.*

This policy is underpinned by two Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs):

The Sevenoaks District Countryside Assessment (2011) provides a more in depth assessment of the character and condition of the countryside in an approach consistent with the Landscape Assessment of Kent (see below). To a large degree this Assessment is superseded by the Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment (January 2017 – see section 3 below).

The Development in the Green Belt SPD (February 2015) focusses on built development and re-iterates the requirement set out in the NPPF that this should not impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Although Green Belt is not a landscape designation the SPD does include guidance on landscape setting to any development which is proposed in the Green Belt:

*The landscape is very important to the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt. All applications for development in the Green Belt will be required to demonstrate how they protect the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt, through the form and design of buildings and all external areas, landscape works and planting. Further information on the landscape character of the area in which the proposed development is located can be found in the Sevenoaks District Countryside Character Assessment SPD.*

*Consideration must be given to the best way of integrating a new building with its immediate surroundings and landscape.*

*Existing trees, shelterbelts and other biodiversity features (e.g. ponds, unimproved grassland, etc) should be retained, and where appropriate enhanced.*

*Wherever possible, native trees should be used for new planted areas, rather than fast growing conifer hedges. Any new planting should be first agreed with the Council. Any areas proposed for new planting should take account of any plans for future development.*

*Sustainable drainage systems should be included as part of on site green infrastructure to reduce the risk of surface water flooding. Any systems should have appropriate management arrangements. Planting assists in water retention and amelioration of any flooding.*

*Waste material and redundant machinery should be removed, as should obsolete buildings except where those constructed in the local style and are worth retaining.*

*Consideration should be given to how hard-surfaced areas will link together and where resurfacing is needed, materials that are in-keeping with the surrounding area should be used. Non-porous surfaces that aggravate water run-off should be avoided where feasible.*

Policy SP1 further underlines high quality design which responds to local character:

*Policy SP 1*

*Design of New Development and Conservation*

*All new development should be designed to a high quality and should respond to the distinctive local character of the area in which it is situated. Account should be taken of guidance adopted by the Council in the form of Kent Design, local Character Area Assessments, Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans, Village Design Statements and Parish Plans. In rural areas account should be taken of guidance in the Countryside Assessment and AONB Management Plans.[..] The District's heritage assets and their settings, including listed buildings, conservation areas, archaeological remains, ancient monuments, historic parks and gardens, historic buildings, landscapes and outstanding views will be protected and enhanced.*

This LVA will consider the site and proposed development within the context of relevant sources of guidance as set out in Policy SP1.

**2.1.3 Sevenoaks Allocations and Development Management Plan (DMP) (adopted February 2015)**

*Policy EN1 - Design Principles*

*Proposals which would create high quality design and meet the following criteria will be permitted:*

- a) the form of the proposed development would respond to the scale, height, materials and site coverage of the area;*
- b) the layout of the proposed development would respect the topography and character of the site and the surrounding area and sensitively incorporate natural features such as trees, hedges and ponds within the site;*
- c) the proposal would not result in the loss of buildings, open spaces or green infrastructure that would have an unacceptable impact on the character of the area; [..]*
- e) the proposal would incorporate, within the design opportunities for increasing biodiversity potential, where possible, and retaining and enhancing Green Infrastructure features including sustainable drainage systems. Proposals that affect a site's existing biodiversity and Green Infrastructure should be designed in a way that avoids or mitigates any potential harm; [..]*

Preston Farm is located in a designated Area of Archaeological Potential. Policy EN4 refers to the protection of heritage assets: *where the application is located within, or would affect, an area or suspected area of archaeological importance an archaeological assessment must be provided to ensure that provision is made for the preservation of important archaeological remains/findings.*

Policy EN5 underlines the national importance assigned to AONBs:

*Policy EN5 - Landscape*

*The Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their settings will be given the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. Proposals within the AONB will be permitted where the form, scale, materials and design would conserve and enhance the character of the landscape and have regard to the relevant Management Plan and associated guidance. [...]*

Other policy of relevance to this LVA include GI 1 Green Infrastructure and New Development, which refers to the provision of additional GI: *Proposals will be permitted where opportunities for provision of additional Green Infrastructure have been fully considered and would be provided where justified by the character of the area or the need for open space. [...] Additional green infrastructure and habitat restoration and/or re-creation, should be provided in accordance with the appropriate guidance contained in the Kent Design Guide and the Sevenoaks Countryside Assessment SPD and should take account of the guidance within the AONB Management Plans and associated guidance where appropriate.*

#### **2.1.4 Kent Downs AONB Management Plan (2014-2019)**

The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan is adopted by all planning authorities with land within the AONB. The Management Plan is one of the key documents which has informed the proposals at Preston Farm and is discussed in section 4.

#### **2.1.5 Sevenoaks Countryside Assessment 2011 Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

The Sevenoaks Countryside Assessment 2011 forms one of the SPDs which inform the current Local Plan. The Countryside Assessment was originally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 2004 (Sevenoaks District Countryside Assessment, Jacobs Babbie, 2004). It was subsequently adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to form part of the Local Development Framework (LDF). The Assessment is now largely superseded by the Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment (LUC, January 2017), which is discussed in section 3.

## 2.1.6 Pre Application Consultation

A pre-application public consultation website ([www.prestonfarmshoreham.co.uk](http://www.prestonfarmshoreham.co.uk)) was launched towards the end of June 2020, outlining the proposals for Hatchery. The initial consultation phase closed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020. There were 34 responses in all, mainly from individuals who live or work locally. Responses also included submissions from the Kent Downs AONB Unit and Darent Valley Landscape Partnership.

Initial broad conclusions from this first phase of consultation indicate that most respondents (85%) support a proposal to redevelop Preston Farm. 97% of respondents support the provision of some form of workspace. A small proportion raised concerns over issues of traffic and site access and protection of the landscape and wildlife.

The formal pre application response from Sevenoaks District Council (letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020) includes the following with reference to Landscape and Design.

*the submission of a landscape and visual impact assessment to support any formal planning application and demonstrate how the development would conserve and enhance the AONB identifying the potential impact on key views from public vantage points such as the railway, road and public footpaths on either side of the valley.*

This LVA constitutes the assessment referred to above. The letter also makes reference to the requirement for:

*A comprehensive landscaping scheme should be provided to assist with bedding the site into the landscape. Limiting hard standing will significantly benefit the proposal.*

*Again, how the proposed area of car parking will sit within the site and the landscape will be important to the assessment of the scheme together with an assessment of the overall development.*

The Landscape Masterplan included in this LVA describes proposals, informed by the findings of this LVA.

Comments from the Kent Downs AONB Unit on the pre-application website are *generally supportive of the proposals which are considered to be in line with policy VC4 of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan that supports the retention and development of employment opportunities in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB or reduce the need to travel by car and maintain viable rural communities.*

More detailed comments seek assurances on aspects of design, layout and treatment of historic assets which are addressed later in this document and have informed the design principles set out in Section 7 of this Appraisal.

### 3.0 Landscape Character Context

Preston Farm is located within the following Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), as described in published Landscape Character Assessments:

- LCA 7b Darent Valley – Farningham to Otford in the Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment prepared by LUC for Sevenoaks District Council (January 2017)
- LCA 4A Darent Valley in Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment Update (2017)<sup>1</sup>
- LCA North Darent Valley in the Landscape Assessment of Kent (Kent County Council October 2004)
- National Character Area (NCA) 119 North Downs

Of these assessments, the Sevenoaks Assessment and AONB Landscape Character Assessment update are perhaps of most relevance as these are the most recent and the most detailed.

#### 3.1 Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment (January 2017)

The document describes key characteristics of the Darent Valley LCA (Character Area 7b Farningham-Otford) as follows:

##### *Key Characteristics*

- *Chalk river valley containing the vegetated meandering course of the River Darent.*
- *Small scale irregular fields adjacent to the river become larger and more rectangular on slopes bound by hedges and post and wire fences.*
- *Wet pasture on the valley floor with arable fields on slopes. Lavender fields are distinctive.*
- *Small scale copses of broadleaved woodland between fields, with riparian trees and vegetation along the river.*
- *Important heritage features including Lullingstone and Eynsford Castles and a Roman Villa.*
- *Historic, vernacular mill villages along the river and isolated Farmsteads with some modern linear development along roads.*
- *Narrow winding hedge-lined lanes contrast with the wide A-road and railway following the valley floor.*
- *Enclosure is provided by small isolated woodlands and riparian vegetation with some long views funnelled down the valley.*
- *Strong artistic associations with early 19th century painter Samuel Palmer.*

The key sensitivities/attributes of the LCA of particular relevance to this Appraisal are:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/landscape-management/landscape-character/darent-valley/>

- *Small-medium scale field pattern with some parliamentary enclosures and area of wet pasture on the valley floor.*
- *Valued semi-natural riparian woodland and freshwater wetland habitats along the river corridor.*
- *Distinctive and locally traditional land uses such as hop and lavender growing which introduce additional colour and texture into the landscape.*
- *Attractive and highly regarded views from adjacent landscapes across the Darent Valley.*

Local Landscape Objectives for the LCA include the following:

- *Conserve the parliamentary enclosure field pattern and locally distinctive land uses including wet pasture and lavender growing.*
- *Conserve, restore and enhance the ecological resource of the river valley including wetlands, streams, ditches and woodlands.*
- *Integrate the transport corridors into the wider landscape, linking the linear features of the river, rail and road routes.*
- *Hedgerow enclosure to fields and the local road network should be conserved and reinstated where it is lost.*
- *Increase the recreational value of the landscape by promoting access to the Darent Valley Path and introducing circular routes*

### **3.2 Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment Update – Darent Valley 4A (draft)**

A Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment was prepared in 1995. An update to the LCA began in 2017 and is ongoing. Preston Farm is within an area defined as 4A Darent Valley, which is in the western part of the AONB and follows the course of the Darent from Westerham to Farningham. Consultation on the present draft LCA for Darent Valley 4A closed in September 2020.

The land at Preston Farm reflects many of the identified key characteristics of Character Area 4A, which are defined as:

- *Underlying cretaceous chalk geology, with Greensand in the river valley in the south of the LCA.*
- *Overlying clay-with-flints from weathered chalk, and some alluvial deposits of sand, gravel and clay alongside river.*
- *Spring-fed River Darent starts flowing east through LCA then turns north. Valley floor generally wide and flat, with convex valley sides getting steeper towards the top. Dramatic chalk scarps above Westerham and Chevening, and east of Otford.*
- *Blocks of woodland on valley sides, and parkland, riverside and hedgerow trees, create a well-treed landscape.*
- *Mosaic of land uses, including arable farmland, pasture, woodland and parkland.*
- *Field patterns variable, but generally largest and most regular in shape at base of valley sides. Most fields divided by low hedgerows.*

- *Semi-natural habitats include woodland (yew/ whitebeam/ oak/ ash/ beech and oak/ beech/ chestnut coppice), chalk grassland, parkland, wood pasture, veteran trees and riparian habitats. Long history of settlement going back to Roman times. Rich archaeology including Roman villa, medieval castle and Bishop's Palace and several country estates.*
- *A series of nucleated riverside villages with concentrations of attractive historic buildings including houses, churches, bridges and fords. Materials include brick, flint, ragstone and weatherboarding.*
- *Network of older roads and lanes along valley floors and up valley sides. M25 follows valley side in north of LCA, and valley floor in south.*
- *Historic villages, parklands, bridges and archaeological sites give the landscape a strong sense of time-depth.*
- *Strong cultural associations with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century painter Samuel Palmer.*
- *Woodland, grassland, arable crops, trees and distinctive lavender fields create a diverse and colourful landscape mosaic.*
- *Spectacular views across the valley from valley sides, with the Greensand Ridge forming the backdrop to the south. Sweeping chalk scarps frame views from within the valley.*

Preston Farm is within a sub area defined as the Shoreham Local landscape Character Area (formerly North Darent):

*At Sevenoaks, as the River Darent turns north, it passes from a flat arable flood plain, where a string of new lakes indicates the presence of former gravel quarries, into the seclusion of the rural, northern valley. Here the character derives from the cohesion between the steep wood-topped scarps, the lower, intensively farmed scarp foot with its strong pattern of hedges and shaws (thick strips of mature broadleaf trees and small blocks of once-coppiced woodland), and the thick belts of trees along the river, road and railway in the valley bottom. The wide curve of the valley is a dominant element and features in the long views. Although the river is largely hidden from view, thin Lombardy poplars along the banks indicate its line, and create a focal point.*

The *loss of some historical landscape features such as water meadows and field boundaries* is noted. Also noted are ongoing issues or detracting elements in the landscape identified in the 1995 Assessment. These include the River Darent, where there are opportunities to improve ecological value, address the loss of water meadows and the anticipated loss over time of mature riparian trees. The Assessment also identifies land management issues, notably *a lack of co-ordinated management of habitats*, which is now being addressed by the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership. Other schemes are focusing on initiatives for the reversion of riverside arable land and the restoration of chalk grassland and lost field boundaries and other *valued characteristics of the landscape*.

Management recommendations include an aspirational landscape strategy which encourages a landscape led approach:

*The River Darent is a thriving, healthy watercourse which is accessible in sustainable ways and appreciated. Local people and visitors are welcomed to nationally-significant archaeological sites and attractive villages within an intact historic landscape setting. Historic villages retain their special character and the impacts of traffic are reduced.*

*Habitats such as chalk grassland, woodland, rivers, streams and wetlands benefit from active and co-ordinated management at the landscape scale, and support a variety of species as well as sustainable recreation. Historic parkland and woodpasture is managed and enhanced for future generations to enjoy. Landscape patterns are strengthened, with a distinction between valley-floor pastures, regular-shaped larger fields on the lower valley sides, and chalk grassland and woodland on the scarp itself. Motorways and other infrastructure are integrated into the landscape and their impact is reduced through careful management and the application of technology. The suburbanising effects of development on the landscape are reduced.*

Specific landscape management recommendations in the LCA have informed the design and management principles associated with the future whole Preston Farm management strategy and also proposals for Hatchery including:

- Protect distinctive character of villages through use of locally distinctive materials and careful design;
- Protect surviving pockets of rural/historic landscape such as irregular riverside pasture;
- Manage River Darent and riparian habitats, including river restoration and enhancement of water quality;
- Manage woodlands, shaws and trees outside woodlands to achieve a diversity of age and species, to include locally characteristic species;
- Look to extend active woodland management (such as coppicing);
- Co-ordinate habitat management;
- Manage farmland, particularly hedgerow management and planting of hedgerow trees on lower slopes;
- Promote grassland wildlife habitats and relate land management to underlying geology.

Recommendations also include plans to:

- Restore field boundaries where these have been lost;
- Develop plans to restore water meadows and create additional floodplain and riparian habitats to increase the visibility of the river and restore distinctive habitats which are now largely absent;

### **3.3 Landscape Assessment of Kent (October 2004)**

The Landscape Assessment of Kent is now largely superseded by the more recent detailed assessments prepared for Sevenoaks and the AONB. Nonetheless the overall description of the sensitivity and priority actions for North Darent: Darent Valley remain relevant to this Appraisal:

#### ***Landscape Sensitivity***

*The wide curve of the valley is a dominant element in this area, which is has a mixed use and an intermittent tree cover. Visibility is high. The rural landscape has many historic elements. Exceptional mill villages clustered on the river and Farms scattered throughout the valley frequently display vernacular building styles and materials, including flint and brick. Unique features such as a mature beech avenue occur along roads leading up the valley sides. The appeal of the built form and settlement pattern in this area tends to mask the breakdown of the historical landscape features. More recent features such as conifer plantations and embanked transport corridors have introduced the less distinctive elements into the landscape.*

#### ***Landscape Actions***

*This landscape requires the restoration of unifying landscape elements to the lower slopes of the valley. This involves the restoration of a strong field pattern around farms and settlements with well-vegetated boundaries. Ecological value may also be restored by ensuring the sensitive management of these hedgerows, and links to enhanced riparian woodland.*

### **3.4 National Character Area 119 North Downs**

The NCA description of the key characteristics of the North Downs focusses primarily on the chalk downs but recognises the importance of the river valleys as features within the downland landscape:

*The area is cut by the deep valleys of the Stour, Medway, Darent, Wey and Mole. The river valleys cut through the chalk ridge, providing distinctive local landscapes which contrast with the steep scarp slope.*

Statement of Environmental Opportunity 3 (SEO3) focusses on the management of farmland:

*SEO 3: Manage and enhance the productive mixed farming landscape of the North Downs and the mosaic of semi-natural habitats including the internationally important chalk grassland. Promote sustainable agricultural practices to benefit soils, water resources, climate regulation, biodiversity, geodiversity and landscape character while maintaining food provision.*

Actions to meet SEO3 include:

*Working with farmers, land managers and communities to positively shape the agricultural landscape while preserving and enhancing ecological and cultural assets.*

*Restoring and planting new hedgerows to reinforce historic field boundary patterns.*

*Creating wide grassland buffer strips across steeper slopes and alongside hedgerows, rivers and other watercourses, particularly in areas of arable Farmland, to help to prevent soil erosion and nutrient run-off and to enhance the habitat network...*

*Conserving and enhancing traditional orchards of the National Character Area (NCA), seeking new markets for their products and exploring potential for community orchards.*

*Working with landowners to integrate any new and novel crops into the NCA as a result of market or climatic drivers, promoting sustainable management and integrating the crops into the landscape appropriately.*



The Darent Valley and the Downs at Preston Farm

## 4.0 Kent Downs AONB Management Plan (2014-2019)

The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan sets a 20 year vision for the management of the natural beauty of the Downs. The current five year plan is subject to review but an update has yet to be published, so policies, aims and actions for the 2014-2019 plan are referenced here. The plan sets out aims, policies and actions associated with a series of themes which contribute to the natural beauty of the AONB. The definition of natural beauty encompasses human influences on the landscape:

*Natural beauty is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries.<sup>2</sup>*

The protection, conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics and qualities and natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB provides the principle which underpins all aims, policies and actions set out in the plan. Aims seek to improve the understanding of these special characteristics and qualities and to work with all land owners and other stakeholders in achieving them. Policies in the plan of particular relevance to this Appraisal are:

- Promote, manage, restore and create prominent views and viewpoints (Policy LLC2);
- Policy LLC3 seeks to provide guidance to farmers, landowners and others on how best to conserve, enhance and manage the landscape character and special qualities of the AONB.

The Management Plan recognises the importance of sustainable development to the future of the AONB:

*Change reinforces and enhances the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs, its communities and economy.*

In guiding sustainable development the AONB Management Plan requires any proposals to address local character, climate change, tranquillity, setting, design and materials and mitigation. In identifying issues, opportunities and threats associated with development, key themes include:

*To conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the design of new development, redevelopment and restoration is critical.*

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<sup>2</sup> Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB Partnership members – Countryside Agency, CA24, November 2001

*The need to support project-based sustainable development initiatives and exemplars in the AONB and to increase the scale, integration and impact of activity and funding.*

*The character and distinctiveness of villages, Farmsteads and individual buildings are conserved and enhanced by combining the best traditions of the past with the best technologies of the present to create environmentally sustainable and locally enhancing development.*

The Plan also sets out specific policies for the farmed landscape. The Plan recognises both the importance of farming to the defining characteristics of the AONB and also the need for change and diversification in agriculture to maintain a viable industry, but stresses that this must not be at the cost of harm to the AONB. Landscape aim 3 states:

*Farm diversification and development activities conserve and strengthen landscape character and local distinctiveness, and provide benefits to the farm and local economy and rural communities.*

The Plan provides support for initiatives to provide local, high quality and sustainable produce and emphasises the importance of whole farm planning.

### ***Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook***

The Landscape Design Handbook offers *design guidance to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the AONB as a whole, and the distinctiveness of its individual character areas.*

General principles include guidance on Rural Settlement Development relevant to proposals at Preston Farm:

- *Ensure new development respects and complements rural settlement form, pattern, character and its landscape setting, reinforcing local distinctiveness*
- *Use native woodland, shaw, hedgerow planting as appropriate to local character and open space to integrate new development. Use advance planting of native local trees and shrubs*

and on Rural Diversification:

- *Encourage diversification that is principally land based and conserving in nature (or that can support landscape enhancement), seeking to avoid the introduction of potentially intrusive commercial and industrial activities and conflicts with the residents of nearby dwellings.*

- *Encourage diversification related to local produce to enable conservation and restoration of distinctive features such as orchards, hop gardens and cobnut platts and maintenance of local livestock breeds*
- *Respect the scale, shape and pattern of the landscape in introducing new crops and land uses. Conserve typical local field patterns and to conserve and enhance traditional hedgerow, shaw or shelterbelt boundaries wherever possible.*
- *New structure planting should be similar in layout and species to the surrounding countryside linking with existing hedges and woodlands*

General principles also encourage appropriate environmental management, conservation and restoration of hedgerows, rivers, ponds and wetlands, and chalk grassland, and the protection of historic landscape features which contribute to the historic character of the landscape, eg boundary features, *old hedgerows and shaws, old lanes and tracks, old flint and ragstone walls*, and archaeological monuments.

The Guide includes specific recommendations for the Darent Valley Westerham to Farningham Character Area, in which Preston Farm is located. Key characteristics are defined as:

- *Steep, often wooded scarp top and greensand ridge*
- *Strong hedgerow patterns on valley sides.*
- *River within tree-lined corridor.*
- *Riverside trees and pasture.*
- *Flint and brick and weather boarded buildings.*
- *Much of the floodplain is arable farmland.*
- *Motorway.*

Overall landscape character objectives for this area include:

- *to maintain and improve where necessary the existing hedge network, in particular on the scarp foot and on the northern downland "prairies".*
- *to enhance the river corridor by conserving and extending the variety of tree and grassland habitats.*
- *to protect and enhance unimproved chalk grassland.*

Characteristics of the local North Darent Character Area are described as:

- *Steep wood-topped scarps, with fragmented areas of chalk grassland on upper valley sides.*

- *Lower intensively farmed scarp foot with strong pattern of hedges and shaws (which are sometimes overgrown).*
- *Thick belts of trees along the river, road and railway in the valley bottom.*
- *Ordered pattern of hedgerows in the north.*
- *Open arable fields around Eynsford. M25 cuts through western edge of area, isolating small sections of AONB.*
- *Unenclosed wood-pastures of Lullingstone Park*

Design Guidelines for the North Darent include:

- *Conserve and restore hedgerows on lower slopes, thick belts of trees along the river valley bottom*
- *Ensure any new land uses [...] conserve and enhance the strong pattern of hedgerows and shaws.*
- *Seek the sympathetic use of local materials – brick, tile and flint.*
- *Conserve, enhance and seek to connect chalk grassland*

## 5.0 The Landscape of Preston Farm

### 5.1 Preston Farm today

Preston Farm occupies an important and prominent location in the upper Darent Valley. The Farm sits on the lower valley slopes between the River Darent to the west and with the railway and A225 transport corridor forming the Farm's eastern boundary. The Farm lies approximately 1 kilometre north of the village of Shoreham. Shoreham is an historic village with a predominantly linear character. Figure 2 shows the current landscape of Preston Farm. This plan shows the key landscape features and landscape pattern and identifies some key elements on landscape condition (for instance gaps in hedges).



View west across Preston Farm towards the farmhouse and yard

The Farm currently hosts two principal land uses. The majority of the Farm buildings are given over to livery stables. The paddocks to the east of the river corridor and the two smaller, drier paddocks within the river valley are grazed by horses. An arboricultural business (Down to Earth Trees Ltd) occupies a yard with offices based in the former oast house in the northern part of the yard.

There are two residential properties on the farm. The original farmhouse occupies an elevated position east of the main yard. Dairy House is located to the north of the farmhouse adjacent to the main yard access.

The Farm landscape retains a relatively open character with views north and south along the river valley and across the Farm. The paddocks are enclosed by hedges comprising mainly hawthorn, elder and ash which are trimmed. These hedges vary somewhat in quality with some dense and others with large gaps largely filled with bramble. Some of the paddocks have been sub divided with post and rail and temporary fencing for grazing management.

A belt of woodland trees has been planted along the eastern boundary as part of the wider Farm Management Strategy (see Section 5.4 and 7 below).

The River Darent flows along the farm western boundary. The section of the Darent which flows through the Farm includes a secondary channel, which with the main river encloses a large area of open wet meadow. There are some shallow excavations within this area of grassland, thought to be the result of low level gravel extraction. There is sporadic riverside scrub and woodland. The historic mapping shows this to have been more extensive in the past. There are also two smaller paddocks on the western side of the landholding bordered by hedges. Restoration of the wetlands is currently being carried out in association with Kent Wildlife Trust (see Section 7).

The land falls east to west across the Farm from a high point at approximately 68.5 m AOD on the eastern boundary to the wetland meadows in the Darent Valley at 47.2 m AOD. The land beyond the Farm boundary rises more steeply to the east and west to high points on the chalk downland at 160 to 180 m AOD. There are wide sweeping views across the Farm towards the Downs on the western side of the valley from the higher areas on the eastern fringes of the Farm.



**PRESTON FARM  
LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:  
EXISTING FARM**

Figure 2

## 5.2 Soils and Geology

The UK Soilscape mapping records two soil types on the Farm.

The majority of the soils across the Farm on the lower slopes of the river valley are described as:

Agricultural Land Grade 2: Very Good

*Free draining lime-rich loamey soils.* Described as *freely draining* with *lime-rich* fertility. The characteristic semi natural habitat of these lower downland slopes are described as *herb rich chalk and limestone pastures; lime rich deciduous woodlands.*

The wet meadow and pasture (to the west of the drainage channel) within the river valley are described as:

Agricultural Land Grade 4: Poor

*Loamey and clayey floodplain soils with high groundwater.* The soils are described as *naturally wet* with *moderate* fertility. The characteristic semi natural habitats are described as *wet flood meadows and pasture with wet carr woodlands.*

## 5.3 Heritage

The Farm dates back to the early 19th century.

The 1871-1890 historic mapping shows a relatively open character to the Farm with four larger, relatively regular shaped fields to the north and south of the farmyard (see Figure 3). The layout of the Farm and buildings shows a fairly typical 'loose courtyard' arrangement of the Farm buildings, which was characteristic of farms in the Darent Valley during the later nineteenth century<sup>3</sup>. The mapping suggests a tree lined approach to the Farm with a large block of trees, possibly an orchard, immediately to the south of the Farmyard.

The 1900 mapping shows the location of the tree belt which now forms the southern boundary to the Farm. The mapping also shows a more substantial belt of woodland along the river diversion channel than exists today. This tree belt/orchard does not appear on this mapping but is shown on the later mapping. The tree lined approach to the Farm is not shown on later mapping. The mapping and aerial photographs show that the more traditional layout to the Farm buildings remained until after the Second World War.

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<sup>3</sup> Kent Downs AONB Farmsteads Design Guidance



Figure 3: Historic Mapping and aerial photographs

The Farm is within an Area of Archaeological Potential. A desk based archaeological survey<sup>4</sup> concluded that *the area to be developed is within an area of high potential for all periods except for low for the Modern period*. Of the buildings to be demolished, the report concludes that neither the barn nor the oast, which no longer has a cowl and has been converted, is of any significance. The report concludes overall that *the current modern buildings are likely to have disturbed any potential archaeology although the level of disturbance is unclear. The development proposals for foundations and associated services will have a high impact on any potential archaeological remains. The need for, scale, scope and nature of any further assessment and/or archaeological works should be agreed through consultation with the statutory authorities but it is anticipated that that an evaluation will be required to ascertain the nature of any archaeological deposits*.

#### 5.4 Trees and hedgerows

Mature tree cover is limited across the Farm. The arboricultural impact assessment<sup>5</sup> carried out in November 2020 identifies two distinct tree character groups:

- 1. The first character group includes the larger, mature trees found growing adjacent to the Site. The majority of the trees in this character group are in a good condition and contribute to the amenity of the local area.*
- 2. The second character group includes the small, younger trees found growing across the Site. The majority of the trees in this character group are in a good condition but due to their size, are of limited amenity value in the context of the local area.*

There is a single mature horse chestnut immediately east of the Farm (category B). This is one of a former pair of trees which framed views of the Farm (the second tree was felled due to poor condition). There are a number of mature willow and alder along the river valley, with a few more substantial blocks of riparian scrub, in particular along the northern bank of the main river.

The assessment concludes that *the trees within the survey area vary considerably in terms of quality and contribution to the amenity value within the local area. A total of two groups of trees will be removed to enable the proposed development. The trees are young and easily replaced*. Surveyed hedgerows are concluded to be Category C.

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<sup>4</sup> Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment in Advance of the Proposed Development of Land at Preston Farm, Shoreham, Kent (Swale & Thames Survey Company, September 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Preston Farm, Shoreham, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement. A Report for Hatchery November 2020 (Greenspace Ecological Solutions)



The River Darent at Preston Farm



Tree planting and horse grazing on the eastern slopes and view to the Cross



Preston Farmhouse



The farmyard set into the hillside

Tree planting was carried out in the winter of 2019/2020 along the eastern fringes of the Farm in association with the Woodland Trust, with a mix of native woodland species. Grassland within these plots was left unmown and has developed a sward with many species characteristic of chalk grassland, including small colonies of Pyramidal orchids.

The yard used by Down to Earth is enclosed by a more recently planted native species hedge and chain link fencing.

## 5.5 Ecology and biodiversity

The Farm is located within the Central North Downs Biodiversity Opportunity Area (Kent Nature Partnership). The BOA Statement summarises the ecology of the area as:

*1 Important chalk grassland sites on the scarp on the North Downs and on the sides of the Darent Gap.*

*2 Nationally important woodland and wood pasture, as well as many small ancient woodlands, and veteran trees in a variety of habitats across the landscape.*

*3 The River Darent and its floodplain form an important landscape element.*

*4 Key species include otter, crayfish, adder, dark green fritillary, chalk hill blue, early gentian, Deptford pink and juniper.*

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal<sup>6</sup> of the Farm was carried out in May 2019. On site habitats identified were:

- *Semi-improved grassland*
- *Intact hedgerows*
- *Buildings*
- *Hardstanding*

The survey concluded, in summary, that the proposals would not impact on nearby designated wildlife sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), areas of Ancient Woodland or NERC Act (2006) Habitats of Principal Importance. The survey assessed existing buildings for bat roosts and bat roost potential. A confirmed bat roost and other areas with potential to support bat roosts were identified. Further bat emergence surveys confirmed these findings. The survey indicates that the proposals would have an impact on bats using the site. However, it concludes that with

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<sup>6</sup> Preston Farm, Shoreham Kent. Preliminary Ecological Appraisal A Report for Mr D. Bedford June 2019 (Greenspace Ecological Solutions)  
www.

appropriate mitigation as set out in the required licence to be approved by Natural England *the FCS [Favourable Conservation Status] of bats will be maintained, and the proposed development will remain compliant with current legislation and planning policies which serve to protect bats.* The impact of the proposed development upon foraging or commuting bats is anticipated to be negligible. *Suitable nesting habitat for breeding birds exists throughout the site. Works to these areas should therefore be conducted outside the core breeding period for birds of Late February – August inclusive.*



View across the wetlands in summer 2020, prior to management in winter 2020

## 5.6 Access and Rights of Way

The Farm is accessed via a long, part surfaced access road which runs along the western side of the railway line to the A225 immediately west of the railway overbridge. The Farm access from the A225 is very broad and includes a small area of mounding. The access road splits with one route serving the Dairy House and farmyard and the second serving the Farmhouse.

The A225 and railway corridors are dominant features in the valley. The railway line is located at the top of an embankment immediately east of the Farm boundary. Traffic noise, in particular, detracts from rural character and tranquillity. The road and rail corridor represents a barrier to east west movement across the valley. The Farm access from the A225 is on a sharp bend close to the point where the road passes under the railway line. The current access splay comprises a large area of mixed macadam and hardcore surfacing. There is an artificial bund on the roadside.

There is a public right of way (Footpath SR19) which runs north to south through the Farm and follows the main Farm access for a short section. A second, short stretch of footpath (SR726) runs parallel with SR19 along the southern side of the hedge on the main Farm access opposite the Farmhouse (leaving and rejoining SR19 at either end of this section of the hedgeline).

The Darent Valley Path runs north to south along the valley on the western side of the river. Although it does not run through the central area of Farm buildings there are views towards the Farm from the path as described later in this LVA. There is also an extensive public rights of way network running through the valley and onto the surrounding downland (see Viewpoints Plan Figure 4).

## **5.7 Boundaries and neighbouring land**

The majority of the northern boundary associated with the current land ownership is open, defined by post and wire fencing. The eastern boundary is defined by chain link fencing associated with the railway and the partially wooded railway embankment. The eastern section of the southern boundary is defined by an offsite tree belt. This tree belt is covered by a Tree Preservation Order<sup>7</sup>. Within the river valley the boundary is defined by the channel diversion and a short section of the main river. The western site boundary is more varied with part defined by the scrub on the western side of the main river, a short section of hedge to the paddocks and the north western section by the secondary access track and poplar plantation associated with Lullingstone Pumping Station.

The agricultural land to the north of the Farm includes grazing with the lavender fields associated with Castle Farm further north. To the south the land is under arable crops. There are also hops and vineyards within the river valley together with sheep and cattle grazing. The land rises steeply to the east of the A225 to the mixed grassland and scrub slopes of the chalk downs at Preston Hill.

## **5.8 Farm buildings and hard standing**

Preston Farmhouse is currently unoccupied and undergoing renovation. The present owners reside in the Dairy House, a more recent addition to the Farm, whilst renovation is carried out.

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<sup>7</sup> Sevenoaks District Council 50/002/TPO



The farmyard and Dutch Barn from the bridge over the River Darent



The Down to Earth Yard

The farmyard and livery buildings comprise a combination of older buildings with more recent additions, including a large, open sided black Dutch barn. A large, modern enclosed barn sits within the former courtyard to the Farm. This barn comprises an older building and recent additions. It is evident that a larger Farm building which enclosed the southern side of the courtyard has been removed. The yard is surfaced mainly with concrete which is generally in poor condition. The farmyard now has a more enclosed character with very limited outward views. Much of the historic *loose courtyard* character and layout, described in Section 5.3, has been lost over time. Built form now dominates the central parts of the yard, which tends to restrict outward views.

Land uses associated with the livery yard now extend beyond the main farmyard, in particular to the south and west. A large number of livery vehicles are parked on an open surfaced area to the south of the Farmyard. There are two large maneges with black rubberised surfacing to the south and south west of the farmyard. These are enclosed by post and rail fencing with some low level floodlighting.

There has been substantial regrading of the landform in order to create the flat areas for the maneges and level areas for building and parking. There is a substantial level change between the main Farmhouse and the yard.

## 5.9 Landscape Character: Overview

Whilst the Farm retains the scale of a small to medium sized farm with a relatively tight cluster of traditional and modern agricultural buildings, much of the original historic *loose courtyard* arrangement layout of buildings around a central yard has been lost. The current livery uses have also spread beyond the yard area with the areas of parking and maneges to the south. The grazing and livery business, whilst not a traditional agricultural use, is not untypical of agricultural land uses within the Darent Valley. The landform around the farmyard has also been subject to regrading and levelling. The maneges are set on flat platforms with earth pushed back around each facility. There is also an artificially steep slope between the farm and the river's edge, created in order to provide a level landform for the expansion of the farm and livery facilities.

The Down to Earth Yard lies to the north of the main farmyard. The yard is enclosed by chain link fencing. Uses within the yard are largely functional comprising parking and storage of vehicles and materials on concrete hardstanding.

The field pattern to the wider Farm is fairly regular, with fields bordered mainly by neatly trimmed hedges. Historically, tree cover across the Farm appears to have been limited, although there was a small area of trees, possibly an orchard, south of the farmyard. The existing hedges are in variable condition, mostly intact but with some larger gaps. The recent woodland tree planting along the eastern boundary is intended to enhance levels of tree cover and habitat on the Farm. Works to restore and enhance the wetlands will enhance the natural character and habitat value of the River Darent Corridor through the Farm (see Section 7).

This Appraisal has considered the Farm within the context of published Landscape Character Assessments, with particular reference to the more recent, local and detailed LCAs, to assess its overall contribution to landscape character. The Farm does reflect key characteristics of the Darent Valley Farningham to Otford Character Area identified in the Sevenoaks LCA, principally *the vegetated meandering course of the River Darent; small scale irregular fields adjacent to the river become larger and more rectangular on slopes bound by hedges and post and wire fences; wet pasture on the valley floor; enclosure provided by [...] riparian vegetation.*

The land is under horse grazing so does not reflect the character of *arable fields on slopes*. Lavender is farmed to the north. There are relatively few trees and copses on the Farm, although planting of new woodlands has recently been carried out. There remain groups of *riparian trees and vegetation along the river.*

There are *long views funnelled down the valley*, as described in more detail in the visual assessment below (see Section 6).

Similarly, the Farm has features and qualities which contribute to the character of the 4A Darent Valley Character Area described in the draft Kent Downs AONB LCA update. These include primarily the underlying chalk geology, the location within the generally wide, flat valley floor, variable field pattern, low field boundary hedgerows, variety of semi-natural habitats reflected by the chalk grassland and riparian habitats on the Farm, the historic character of the Farmhouse and the sweeping views across the valley. At the same time the Farm itself is less typical of other identified characteristics which are seen in the surrounding area, including the diversity of land uses and crops, such as hops and lavender, and presently lacks *the diverse and colourful landscape mosaic* highlighted in the LCA. The eastern part of the southern boundary is bordered by an (off site) woodland shaw, and the riverbank features a belt of riparian trees. However, the woodland blocks, coppiced woodland areas and hedgerow trees characteristic of this LCA are largely absent, and the Farm cannot be said at present to reflect strongly the *well-treed landscape* of this LCA.

At a more local level (Shoreham Local LCA), the Farm landscape has elements which contribute to overall character to a degree, but whose contribution is compromised by sub optimal condition, offering scope for positive enhancement. Field boundary hedgerows and the woodland shaw at the southern boundary of the Farm landholding are typical of the LCA, but some hedgerows have notable gaps which reduces their contribution to the *strong pattern of hedgerows and shaws*. The railway corridor also features significant gaps in the noted *thick belts of trees* along its length, although these are off site. Recent measures to diminish the visibility and audibility of the railway corridor include planting by the Farm owners of a new woodland strip along the Farm's eastern boundary, adjacent to the railway. The course of the Darent is marked by bankside trees and poplars, but again, gaps in the tree cover compromise its contribution. The artificial landform between the farmyard and the river detracts from the character and ecology of this part of the river valley. The trees do nevertheless provide a *focal point* which indicates the line of the river. The Farm landscape and route of the PRoW through the site offer extensive views which illustrate the *wide curve of the valley*.

## 6.0 Preston Farm Baseline Visual Appraisal

The Farm occupies a location at the heart of the upper Darent Valley. The land rises to the west and east of the Farm to the chalk downland above the River Darent. There are also views along the valley from the north and south.

The Farm is potentially visible from extensive areas of chalk downland to the west and east. In order to assess the visibility of the Farm in local views and the contribution the Farm makes to the character and appearance of these views all public rights of way and other accessible land have been visited. This visual appraisal includes a series of representative views which show the Farm in views from the surrounding area. Figure 4 shows the location of the representative views to the Farm. Summer and winter photographs from key viewpoints are included in Appendix A to this LVA.

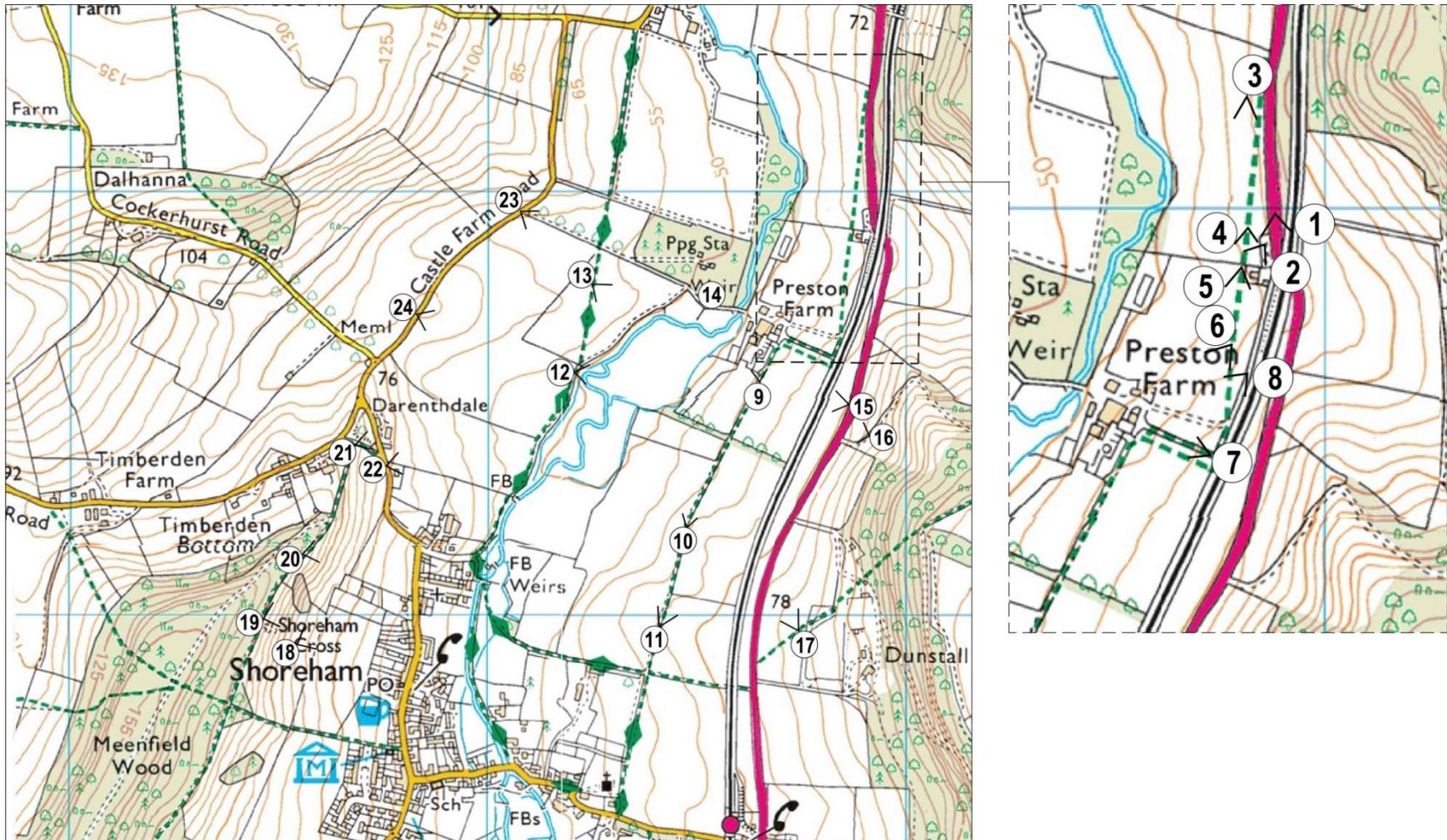
All photographs have been taken with a 33 mm digital lens in accordance with best practice for the preparation of visual appraisals. In a number of cases these have been combined to create panoramas to show the Farm in the wider context of the valley landscape.

### ***Views from the north***

The land rises gently to the north of the Farm towards a very shallow ridge to the east of Castle Farm. There are views towards the Farm principally from the A225 and Footpath SR19.

Viewpoints 1 and 2 show two views towards the Farm from the A225 and from the access from the A225. Viewpoints 3, 4, 5 and 6 show a series of views towards the Farm from Footpath SR19.

The Farm sits within the landscape. It is of a scale which does not dominate the view, unlike some larger farms with a number of associated modern agricultural buildings in the valley. The colours of the buildings are predominantly recessive; the one exception being the oasthouse. The oast no longer has a cowl and has already been converted, and is considered to be of low heritage significance. The Dairy House and the white coloured former oasthouse are the most prominent of the Farm buildings in these views, although the Dutch Barn is more prominent in views nearer the Farm (see Viewpoint 5). The Thames Water car parking on the west side of the river is screened in the longer distance views but is visible in these near views. The woodland on the Farm's southern boundary provides a wooded backdrop to these views, in particular in summer. The roadside vegetation provides some additional screening as does the hedge around the Down to Earth yard in the summer months, but overall there is limited variation in the visibility of the built elements of the Farm in the summer and winter views from the north.



**PRESTON FARM  
VIEWPOINT PLAN**

Figure 4

In many respects these views are typical of *long views funnelled down the valley* described in the Sevenoaks LCA and Kent Down AONB LCA. Whilst there are detracting elements such as the car parking, overall the Farm contributes to the rural character of these views; it is a feature typical of the working agricultural landscape of the Darent Valley.

There are distant views of the fields adjacent to the railway line from footpaths along the western valley slope above Lullingstone Park and Castle (SD194 and SD 203, approximately 2.5-3km to the north). Fields on the Farm form a very small part of these views, but the Farmyard itself (built form and land adjacent to the river) is entirely screened behind intervening woodland, in summer and in winter.

### ***Views from the east***

There are near views across the Farm from Footpath SR19 as it runs through the Farm. Viewpoint 7 shows the view to the Farmhouse from the footpath at the head of the track to the Farm. The Dairy House lies to the north of the Farm. The Farm buildings largely sit below the level of the Farm so are not prominent in this view. The livery vehicles to the south of the farmyard are prominent in winter views and detract from the setting of the Farmhouse.

Viewpoint 8 shows a similar view from the Farm access track (not a public right of way).

Immediately to the east of the Farm lies the embankment to the railway and the A225. There are glimpsed, transient views for road and rail users. There is a lay by on the A225 immediately east of the Farm (see Viewpoint 15). There are partial views through the trees on the roadside and railway embankment towards the Farm which sits on the lower slopes of the valley. The Farm buildings are more prominent in these views from the higher ground, although these views are more closed in summer. The railway security fencing is particularly intrusive in these views.

There is currently limited public access to the higher land to the east around Preston Hill. Viewpoint 16 shows a view from the lower slopes of the hill. As in Viewpoint 15 the Farm buildings are visible but the recessive colours mean that the buildings are not overly prominent in these views.

### ***Views from the south***

Footpath SR19 runs directly south from the Farm towards the village of Shoreham. The Farm is visible, in varying degrees, in near and middle distance views from the footpath (see Viewpoints 9, 10 and 11) as far as a shallow ridge just to the north of Shoreham. The Farm is not visible from Footpath SR18 which runs east west across the valley immediately north of Shoreham.

In near views on the approaches to the Farm the Farm buildings and livery vehicles are prominent features. The buildings are set well below the skyline and some of the larger elements eg the Dutch Barn are largely hidden. The livery vehicles are particularly prominent in these near views from the footpath (Viewpoint 9 in the winter view). The untrimmed hedge largely screens these elements in the summer view.

Further south the tree belt on the southern boundary provides partial screening of the Farm buildings and vehicles which can still be glimpsed through the trees (Viewpoint 10).

At the southernmost viewpoint (Viewpoint 11), the Farm is only just discernible. One of the lighter coloured barn ends can be seen in winter views.

The Farm is largely screened by the tree belt beyond the southern boundary in these longer distance views in summer.

Similar to the views from the north, the views are typical of the long views down the valley, but these are more open and expansive views, in particular the longer distance views. The livery vehicles in particular detract from the setting to the Farm in the nearer views (Viewpoint 9).

There are no views from the higher land to the south east above Otford and Shoreham (see Viewpoint 17 which shows the view from Footpath SR22 near Dunstall Priory).

### ***Views from the west***

The Darent Valley Path follows the valley floor to the west of the river. There is fairly dense woodland cover along much of the valley. There is a view towards the Farm, immediately to the west (Viewpoint 13). The Dutch Barn is the main building visible in this view. Further north the plantation woodland around the Pumping Station prevents near and longer distance views from the north western valley sides towards the Farm. In summer this view is more of a glimpsed view of part of the barn.

Built form in the farmyard can be seen glimpsed from Castle Farm Road at the point where the access track to the Pumping Station joins the lane (Viewpoint 23), but is screened in views from a short section of road further south (Viewpoint 24).

The Farm is visible in views from the rights of way and accessible land in the vicinity of the War Memorial (The Cross) above Shoreham Village (see Viewpoints 18, 19 and 20) to the south west. These are classic downland views over the Darent River Valley. These views demonstrate the important location of the Farm at the heart of this section of the river valley. Preston Farm contributes to the rural character and the scenic beauty of these views which combine the farmland and village of Shoreham in the river valley with the wooded hills and grassland on the downs. The livery parking, containers and maneges are visible in these views and, although distant, detract from the setting to the farmyard.

The Farm is less prominent in the views from the Cross in summer due to the effects of the riverside woodland. The buildings and livery vehicles are still prominent in the summer views further north, in particular from Viewpoint 20.

There are larger more open arable fields to the south of Preston Farm. Preston Farm itself has a more wooded character in these views.

On the lower slopes of the hills above Shoreham and further north and south along the higher ground views to the Farm are largely lost due to the density of woodland cover.

### ***Visual Appraisal: Overview***

The Farm occupies a central location in the upper Darent Valley. The land rises on the western and eastern sides of the valley. Despite this the Farm and its setting in the valley is only really perceived from the open high ground above Shoreham village on the south western side of the valley, in the vicinity of the Cross (War Memorial). Much of the higher downland on both the eastern and western valley sides is crowned by woodland. Tree belts, woodlands (including the Pumping Station plantation) and hedges on the lower slopes also limit more open views across the valley.

Preston Hill overlooks the Farm but there is currently limited public access to this land, although the land has been accessible in the past and opportunities to re-open parts of the land to public access are being explored by the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership.

Although the layout of the original farmyard has changed substantially, it retains the scale of a medium scale farm set within the valley, in particular in longer distance views, from which the massing of the buildings is more apparent than the Farm layout. The more obtrusive elements associated with the livery business, in particular the vehicles, containers and the maneges are apparent even in these longer distance views, especially in winter.

The riverside woodland restricts open views across the river valley from the Darent Valley Path. The Farm can only be seen from locations immediately west of the land (Viewpoint 13).

The Farm is an important feature in the longer distance views along the valley, in particular from footpath SR19 north and south of the Farm and in views from the A225 to the north. The Farm contributes to the character and appearance of these views, a typical, medium sized Farmstead within the valley.

## 7.0 Farm Management Strategy and Design Principles

### 7.1 Whole Farm Management Strategy

The Hatchery proposals sit within a wider Farm Management Strategy for Preston Farm, based around a site-wide vision for the Farm landscape:

*To create and maintain a healthy, attractive and sustainable landscape setting for Preston Farm which restores and enhances the working farm landscape, and the features and qualities which contribute to landscape character and to the natural scenic beauty of the AONB, which embraces and nurtures biodiversity, existing and new habitats and their connectivity with the wider landscape through establishment of an integrated green infrastructure, and which offers an inspirational living and working environment with benefits for health and well being, for the rural economy and local community<sup>8</sup>.*

This Strategy addressed the whole Farm and as such does not form part of the planning application for Hatchery. It is, however, an essential part of the approach being adopted across the whole Farm within which Hatchery is set.

The Strategy provides an understanding of the landscape of Preston Farm today and how it has evolved, and sets out recommendations, options and prescriptions for the restoration, enhancement and management of the landholding in the future. Its aim is to create a landscape setting which is sympathetic to landscape character, enhances the natural beauty of the AONB, enriches wildlife habitat and re-establishes Preston Farm as a productive rural landscape.

Key recommendations in the Strategy have informed the proposals for Hatchery in order to ensure the integration of the proposals into the Farm landscape and wider countryside and a co-ordinated design and management approach.

Recommendations include a variety of options for enhancement of the landscape and its contribution to local landscape character, visual amenity and biodiversity. The owners have already consulted widely – for example with the Environment Agency, Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT), Woodland Trust and Darent Valley Landscape Partnership (DVLPP) – on implementation of appropriate conservation, restoration and enhancement measures for the whole Farm landscape.

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<sup>8</sup> Preston Farm Whole Farm Management Strategy (Land Management Services, August 2020)

Conservation and restoration works are already underway including :

### ***Tree planting***

In 2019-2020 a belt of woodland, using a mix of native woodland species, was planted along the eastern fringes of the Farm, with help from volunteers with the Woodland Trust. The woodland will enhance existing woodland cover which is a feature of local landscape character and help provide screening and noise attenuation for the high speed rail line, enhancing tranquillity and views from the local footpath network and more distant views from the western valley slopes. The summer of 2020 saw the emergence of wildflower species such as Pyramidal Orchid in the sections of the tree planting plots left unmown in 2020 and a diverse mixed sward with many species characteristic of chalk grassland.

### ***Hedgerow restoration***

A programme of hedgerow enhancement and planting is already underway, assisted by DVLP and North West Kent Countryside Partnership volunteers, to restore hedgerows in poor condition or reinstate lost hedgerows as part of restoration of the characteristic landscape pattern and wildlife enhancement. The next phase of works is planned for winter 2020/21.

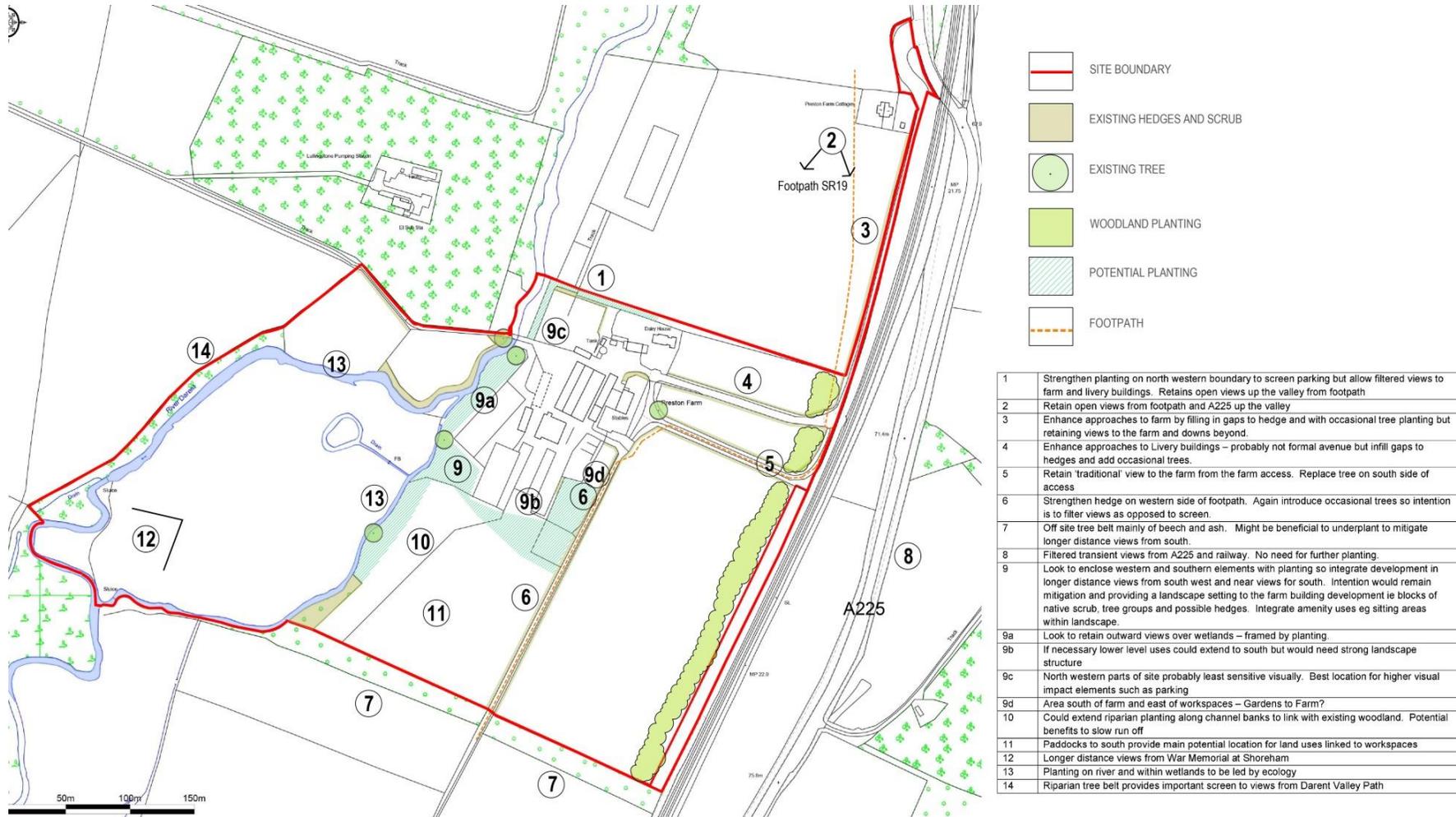
### ***Wetland creation and restoration***

Measures are underway in conjunction with KWT to enhance the wetland and riverside habitats through reinstatement of historic features such as the meadow drains, the creation of an off stream pond in the location of the former gravel workings and the introduction of flow restriction measures in the secondary channel and an otter holt. The proposals focus on hydrology and water management to re-establish and enhance the wetland meadow habitats.

## **7.2 Landscape Analysis**

In addition to the Whole Farm Management Strategy, this LVA forms one of a number of documents which have been prepared, principally in relation to Hatchery. These include:

- Preliminary Ecology Survey (June 2019) and Bat Emergence Survey (October 2019) both prepared by Greenspace Ecological Solutions;
- Arboricultural Survey (Greenspace Ecological Solutions, May 2020);
- Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment in Advance of the Proposed Development of Land at Preston Farm, Shoreham, Kent (Swale & Thames Survey Company, September 2020).



## PRESTON FARM LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Figure 5  
40

This Landscape and Visual Appraisal has identified a number of design considerations and principles which have informed both the whole Farm approach and the creation of the landscape setting to Hatchery. These principles have informed the overall vision for Preston Farm and the landscape proposals for Hatchery, and are drawn from:

- baseline landscape and visual analysis as set out in this LVA;
- consideration of current national and local landscape planning policies and strategies;
- wider strategies and reports associated with the landscape, heritage and biodiversity of the Farm, the wider Darent Valley and Kent Downs AONB;
- pre-planning advice (Sevenoaks District Council Planning Officer) with reference to landscape and design associated with Hatchery proposals;
- recommendations and opportunities defined in the published Landscape Character Assessments;
- public consultation carried out with reference to Hatchery proposals among key statutory consultees and local residents (July 2020).

The findings of the baseline landscape and visual appraisals, the wider more in depth survey of the Farm estate and the related surveys described above have informed an analysis of the whole Farm Landscape (Figure 5). This drawing sets out objectives and priorities for the conservation, restoration and enhancement of the Farm Landscape drawn from the above baseline assessments.

A more focussed assessment of the views to the Farmyard (the location for Hatchery) was also undertaken in order to identify key views both to and from the proposed site location. Figure 6 shows an iteration of this process. This process has informed decisions on the location, number, size and siting of buildings and the overall masterplan layout. Figure 6 shows an earlier iteration of the possible site layout and demonstrates how this has fed into the Design Principles set out below and ultimately the Hatchery Masterplan as described in Sections 8 and 9.

Figure 7 shows the Farm Landscape Management Strategy (described in Section 7.1 above) and demonstrates how Hatchery sits as part of the whole Farm approach. All of these reports and initiatives, together with the findings of this LVA, have informed the design principles set out below.

### **7.3 Landscape Design Principles**

#### ***Landscape Heritage***

- Consider historic farm landscape setting;
- Restore wooded setting to the Farm buildings;
- Re-establish traditional features eg orchard;
- Restore natural landform and landscape setting within and around the farmyard;
- Restore hedges and field pattern - reinforce and enhance historic boundary structures, trees and woodland cover which reflect local landscape character and restore and re-instate hedgerows.

#### ***Landscape Character and Kent Downs AONB***

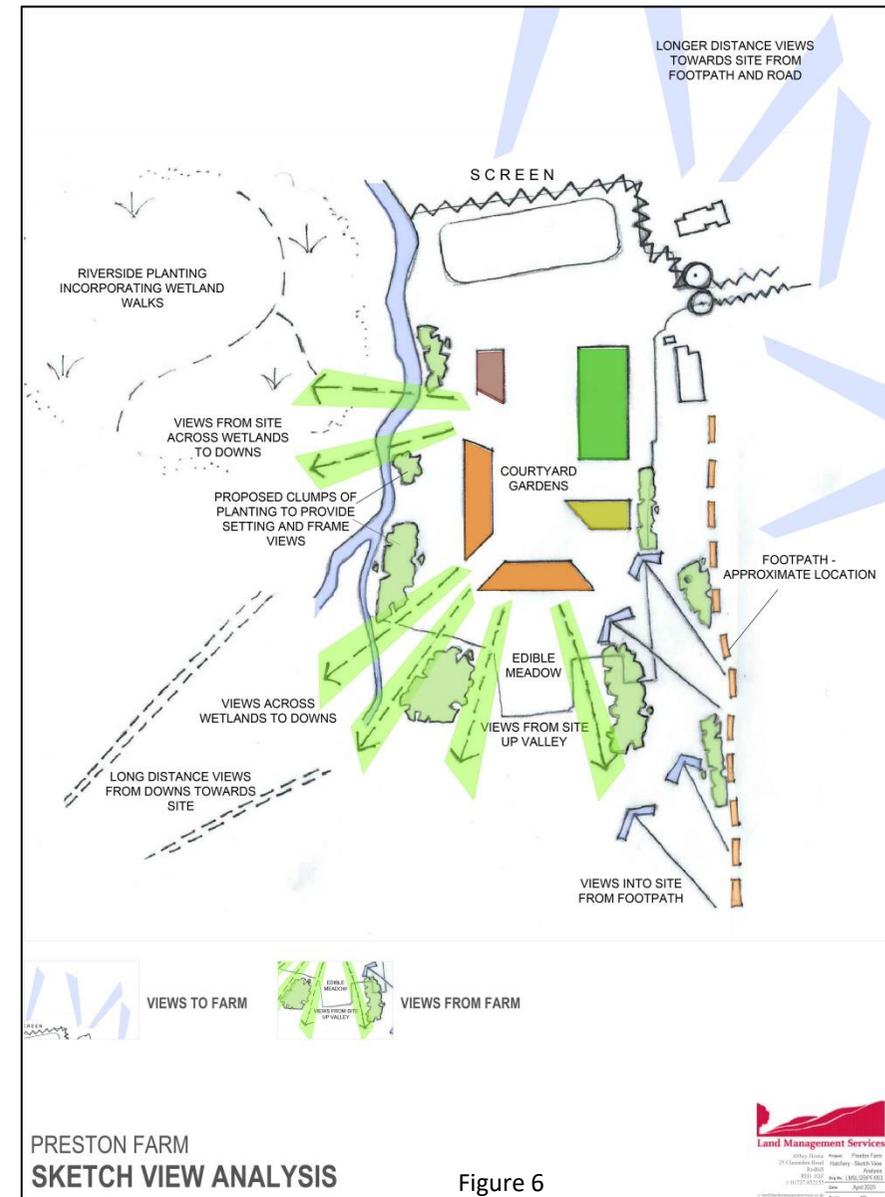
- Combine traditional uses eg meadow/pasture, orchards, cobnuts, hops with more recent additions such as lavender, vineyards;
- Restoration and enhancement of existing landscape features and field pattern, including hedgerows and hedgerow trees, woodland, grassland, wetlands;
- Create landscape features to enhance landscape setting and landscape pattern;
- Re-establish a wooded setting to the Farm;
- Planting to reflect the location of the Farm on the transition from the chalk downland to the river valley. Native species choices to be informed by soils, hydrology, ecology and function;
- Identify opportunities to create small woodlands, copses and shaws but with a management purpose eg hazel coppice in the woodland shaws or short rotation willow coppice in the river valley;
- Reduce the impact on tranquillity associated with the road and rail corridor through planting;
- Continue working with KWT to conserve and enhance the river corridor through habitat creation informed by hydrology and ecology assessments and management of the wetlands and riverside woodland on the diversion channel and consider opportunities to enable public viewing across the wetlands;
- Retain and enhance through hedgerow restoration and tree planting the hedge lined character of the approach to Hatchery and the Farmhouse and the wider landscape pattern of the Farm;
- Improve the Farm access from the A225.

### Visual Amenity

- Retain the overall scale and character of the Farm in longer distance views;
- Retain character of a farmyard set into the hillside below the Farmhouse;
- Conserve and enhance the setting to the Farmhouse;
- Restore the natural landform within and around the farmyard;
- Provide a modern interpretation of a loose courtyard layout adapted to the working needs and operation of Hatchery;
- Current areas of parking for cars and livery vehicles detract from the character and setting of the Farm – improve screening and rural character of any parking associated with Hatchery;
- Outline of the Farm and any proposed re-development in views along the valley and in longer distance views from the Downs would be softened by restoration of a more wooded setting to the Farm;
- Enhance visual amenity (inward and outward views) through positive view management, create and restore prominent viewpoints as appropriate;
- Assess potential benefits for footpath users from enhancements and management of views.

### Sustainability

- Create a productive landscape – eg traditional orchards, food provision, focusing on local, high quality, sustainable produce;



- Enhanced, sustainable landscape management practices to improve and maintain the health and condition of the farmed landscape; management of water and runoff, opportunities for implementation of traditional techniques and skills, eg hedge laying, tree planting working with KWT, Woodland Trust and North West Kent Countryside Partnership (NWKCP) and local groups;
- As Hatchery grows, identify opportunities for closer synergy between workspace uses and wider landscape to benefit rural economy.

### ***Biodiversity***

- Explore opportunities, drawing on survey data and partnership working, for the enhancement of existing habitats, particularly the wetlands and riparian habitats, and habitat connectivity (trees and hedgerows) and the creation of new habitats to improve biodiversity (meadow, trees, orchard, bees);
- Restore physical elements (trees, hedgerows, set in broader corridors) to reinstate or improve characteristic physical and ecological links from valley to scarps;
- Measures to improve wider habitat in line with farm management guidelines and current best practice eg grassland buffer strips, meadow and hedgerow management, ponds and wetlands. Enhance green infrastructure network and habitat connectivity across the whole Farm and integrate with the wider landscape, eg river corridor and wetlands.

### ***Partnerships***

- Work with neighbouring landowners to enhance benefits from a more extensive linked green and biological network;
- Work with specialist local organisations eg Wildlife Trusts, environmental bodies, Government agencies, volunteer groups, to inform landscape proposals and sound, sustainable long term management for optimal landscape quality and condition and delivery of full range of environmental and ecological benefits. The Farm already has established links with the DVLP, KWT, NWKCP and Woodland Trust.

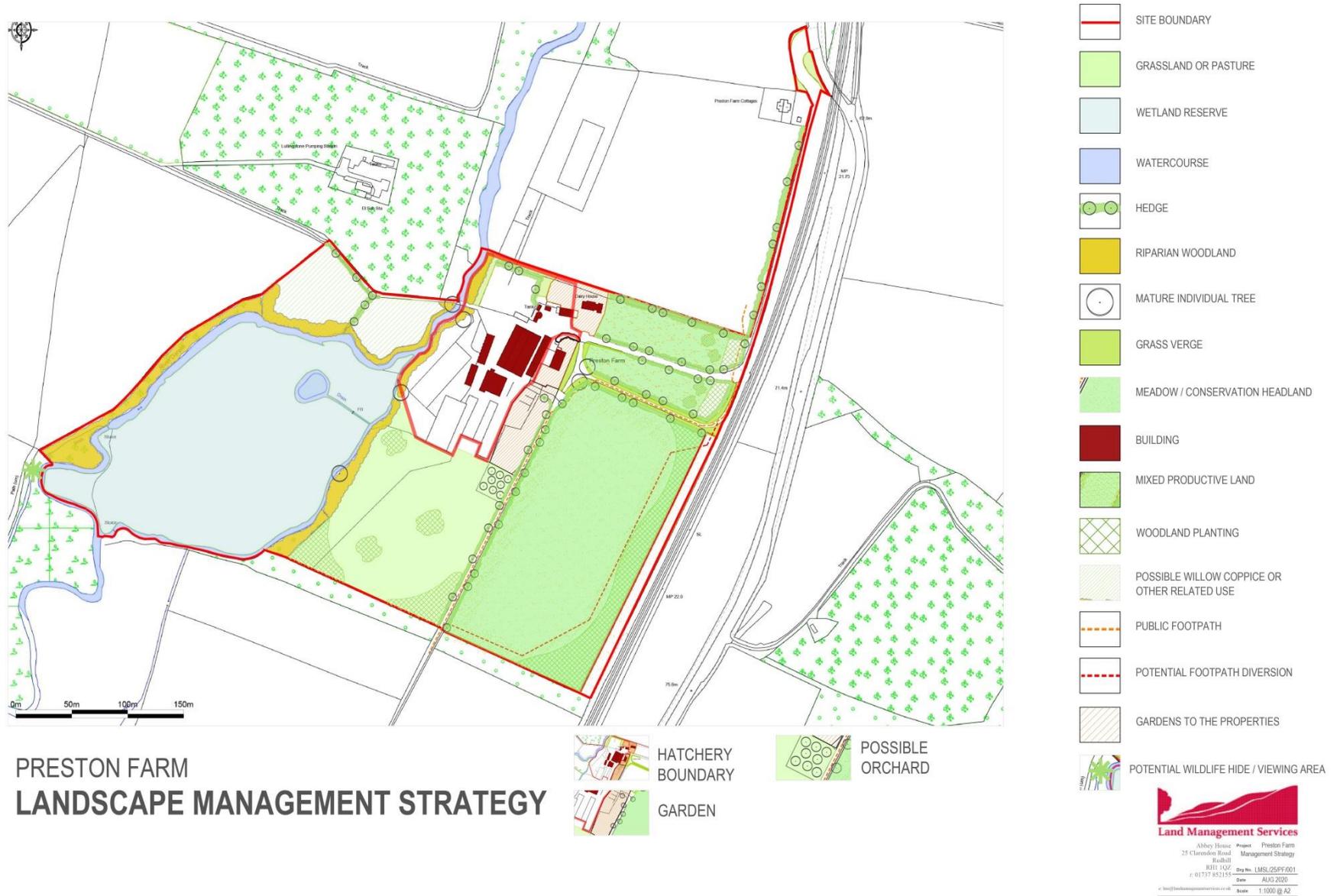


Figure 7

## 8.0 Hatchery

The vision for Hatchery is to provide flexible rural workspaces for local businesses and enterprises in a rural setting. Sustainability and the creation of a working environment which is both sensitive to and benefits from the landscape setting at Preston Farm lies at the heart of the concept and approach. The environment to be created at Hatchery will encourage businesses to benefit from the outdoor spaces for networking, meetings and relaxation. The landscape is key to this vision; a vision which recognises the sensitivity of the nationally important landscape of the Farm and surrounding area and seeks both to conserve and exploit this land for the benefit of Hatchery tenants and visitors. There will be opportunities for businesses with links to the landscape to grow and produce materials and crops on the Farm. There will also, potentially, be times when Hatchery is open to the public to welcome visitors to the site and enable those based in the maker spaces to promote local produce.

The Masterplan (Figure 8) shows the proposed arrangement of buildings, parking and landscape setting to Hatchery. As part of the development of the masterplan a number of issues have been considered and balanced resulting in the proposed layout:

- the opportunities to re-use the existing farm buildings;
- opportunities to re-establish the informal courtyard character which has been eroded over time;
- the landscape setting and views to and from the Farm as described in this LVA;
- site topography and the setting of the buildings into the landscape;
- the need to accommodate visually intrusive elements such as car parking;
- the need to conserve the residential amenity of the two properties on the Farm;
- site constraints such as the Thames Water sewer;
- circulation and anticipated use of internal courtyard and external landscape areas.

Proposals include demolition of a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century agricultural buildings, stable blocks and other existing buildings which the archaeological survey describes as being of no historic or architectural significance and which contribute little to visual amenity and landscape character. The proposals will also involve the removal of the maneges and livery parking and containers which extend south beyond the farmyard.

The proposals include 3 principal buildings:

- Building 1 is a two storey Office building;
- Building 2 is the Site Hub, featuring a range of facilities such as café, outdoor gym and event spaces for Hatchery tenants and visitors;
- Building 3 is a refurbishment of an existing farm building converted to Maker Spaces.

The new building locations are designed to complement the existing building to be refurbished by restoring the traditional “loose courtyard” structure associated with the Farm’s historic layout. The Office Building occupies a location broadly consistent with the location of the existing Dutch barn and a stable block to the south (both to be demolished). The Site Hub will complete the loose courtyard arrangement, partially enclosing the southern end of the site.

The scale of proposed new built form is consistent with existing buildings. The Office Building is a two storey building, but is located in the lowest part of the yard to ensure that all proposed ridgelines will not be higher than that of existing buildings. The creation of this modern interpretation of the loose courtyard layout will re-establish more of an open character to the landscape both within and around the farmyard. A key aspect of the design concept is to exploit the beautiful setting to the Farm. The views to the Downs will be ever present from both the external landscape setting and from inside the buildings.

The architectural design and materials to be used in each building are described and illustrated in the Design and Access Statement. The proposed design, external facades and materials draw on local precedents in architectural style and the traditional appearance of farm buildings. Materials include timber cladding, textured render and corrugated iron sheeting in largely recessive colours to reflect typical farm buildings and to help the proposals blend into the rural landscape. Connections from the internal to external spaces are important, optimising sightlines through the buildings to the internal courtyard areas and surrounding countryside. The Office and Site Hub buildings incorporate larger glass frontages around the entrances and providing access to the café. This increase in the extent of glass (incorporating windows and roof skylights) does have the potential to increase the visibility of buildings in conditions of bright sunlight. The proposed landscape masterplan (section 9) includes judicious planting of trees and shrubs to filter views inward and reduce visibility of glazed surfaces.

The car park is located in the north western part of the site and incorporates the former Down to Earth yard. The car park is to be surfaced with on site recycled aggregate and locally sourced, permeable hoggin material to reflect the rural setting. The parking area will be enclosed to the north, west and east by a dense native species hedge with hedgerow trees. This planting will be broader on the northern boundary in order to provide screening of the car park, in particular in views from the north. Tree planting within the car park will break up the impact of the parking in more distant views.

3D visualisations showing the proposed built form have been prepared for selected viewpoints in this LVA. These 3D visualisations do not show any of the proposed landscape context, but demonstrate the proposed change in extend, layout and scale of built form. These visualisations show the anticipated visibility of the buildings, without landscape treatment and have informed the development to of the landscape proposals described in Section 9.

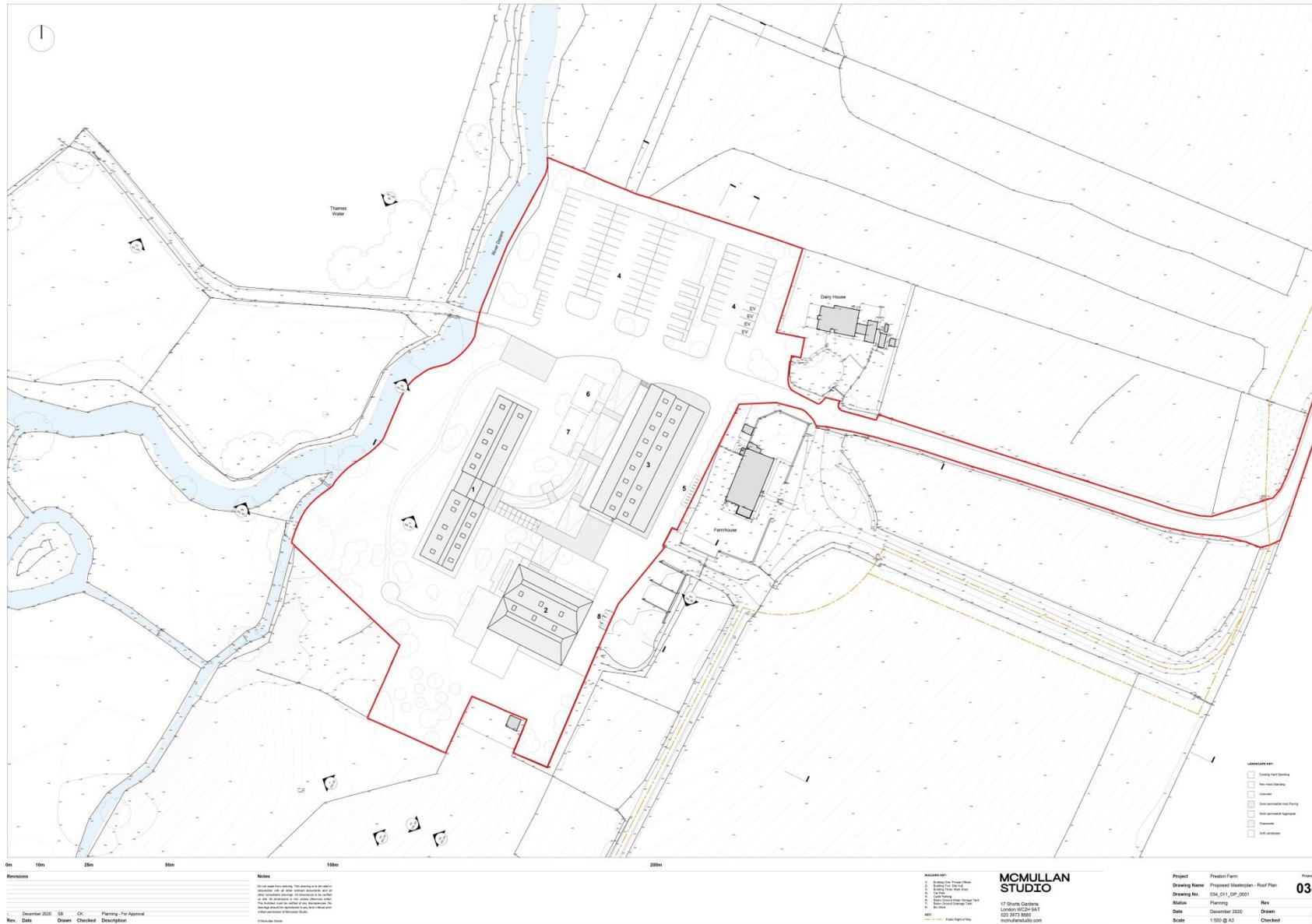


Figure 8: Masterplan



Views from North - Viewpoint 3: Proposed Built Form



Views from East – Viewpoint 7: Proposed Built Form



Views from South – Viewpoint 10 Proposed Built Form



Views from West – Viewpoint 18 Proposed Built Form

## 9.0 Hatchery Landscape Masterplan

The landscape concept to Hatchery combines the traditional and contemporary and is integral to the overall site masterplan. Understanding the landscape sensitivities and the opportunities to conserve, restore and enhance the setting to Hatchery as part of the Darent Valley corridor have informed the whole design process. Hatchery is also an integral part of Preston Farm, as described in the whole Farm Management Strategy.

Two Landscape Masterplan Drawings have been prepared and are included in this LVA. The first demonstrates the overall character and layout of the scheme (Figure 9). The second provides more detail on proposed planting and hard landscape elements (Figure 10).

The landscape setting reflects the landscape and ecology of the river corridor and the transition across the site from the river to the west to the lower slopes of the chalk downland to the east. The proposed landscape draws on the desire to restore the natural landform and ensure that development is set into this landscape. The restoration of characteristic features of the landscape and biodiversity of the river and downland has informed decisions on landscape typologies and planting mixes. A key objective has been to allow the landscape to flow to and from the surrounding countryside. Planting around Hatchery providing the landscape setting draws heavily on the ecology and character of the river valley and downland. The scheme also includes orchards, groves of cobnuts and food growing; a productive landscape. The internal areas incorporate species rich lawns and banks of herbaceous plantings, designed to provide a beautiful setting to Hatchery which is not overly formal, attracts wildlife and also flows into the wider countryside with no obvious boundaries.

Views to and from Hatchery are also key. Planting is designed to frame and break up built facades in the key sensitive views identified in this LVA. The approach is primarily about creating a landscape setting to Hatchery, not to screen but to aid the integration of the proposed buildings as part of the landscape.

The principal landscape setting is provided by native woodland copses, riverside woodland, boundary hedging and hedgerow and parkland trees. These features flow into Hatchery and merge with wildflower meadows, orchards, coppice, food growing and shelter planting of native shrubs and hedges. The car park and northern boundary are enclosed by hedging, which is broadened to a belt of trees and shrubs on the main site boundary. The existing hedge on the northern boundary is in relatively poor condition, so it is likely this will be removed and replaced with new planting.

The proposals will restore the natural landform of the site. Construction of farm buildings and infrastructure has over time, with associated cut and fill or similar operations/earthworks, created a landform with a number of marked changes in level. The landscape proposals will soften the changes

in level and, with the removal of the horse maneges, feature a gentle fall westwards from the office building across an area of meadow planted with clumps of native trees and shrubs. Mown paths will offer attractive informal access across this area for Hatchery tenants and visitors and potential links to the nearby footpath network.

Groups of riparian trees (alder and willow) are planted on the bank of the River Darent with blocks of willow and buckthorn scrub, potentially to be managed as short rotation coppice linked to the wetlands. There are constraints to the planting of this embankment due to the proximity of the Thames Water sewer. Planting on this boundary is intended to aid the integration of the new built form and create a landscape setting which both frames and breaks up the buildings in views from the Darent Valley Path to the west and in the longer distance views from the Cross at Shoreham (War Memorial). The planting will also frame outward views from the office building and the landscape areas around the buildings. These riverside woodland blocks extend to a continuing riverside woodland belt further south (beyond the application red line). This planting will enhance the biodiversity of the river corridor linked to the adjacent farm wetlands.

The southern site boundary will not be defined by a hedge or physical boundary but will feature small woodland shaws in the field corners, extending into groups of trees in the paddock to the south and continuation of the meadow grassland to allow a natural flow of the landscape southwards. The creation of a more wooded landscape in the southern part of the site will help to break up near views to Hatchery from Footpath SR19 to the south. Combined with the riverside planting, this will re-create a more wooded setting to the site which is evident in nineteenth century historic mapping and is identified as one of the key characteristics of local landscape character.

Hedgerow restoration (filling in gaps) and occasional hedgerow trees, to be undertaken in association with DVLP, will enhance the approaches to the site. The site access from the A225 is to be re-configured to meet highway safety and visibility requirements. The sketch landscape plan (Figure 11) shows how this access will be enhanced.

Around the buildings, most notably the Site Hub, there are areas for informal meetings and relaxation, meadows, orchards, opportunities for food growing and viewing areas over the wetlands and south along the valley.

The internal courtyard areas will have a slightly more formal appearance, with areas of hard surfacing providing seating, activity, maker and events spaces. Planting with a strong herbaceous and ornamental grass character will incorporate paths surfaced with a semi-permeable aggregate and areas of semi permeable hard paving to mark accent or viewing points. Multi stemmed trees set within the planting beds and species rich lawn areas will break up the built facades. Around the Site Hub will be areas surfaced with semi-permeable aggregate to provide outdoor seating associated with the café.



Figure 9: Landscape Masterplan – Character

A series of Landscape Character Areas for the Hatchery landscape will be created to reflect the respective functions, features and qualities of the different areas of the Farm landscape (see Figure 9):

### ***Promenade***

The Promenade forms the principal pedestrian access into Hatchery and a direct link from the car park across the internal courtyard to the Site Hub. The Promenade will be surfaced with a semi-permeable aggregate. Flat platforms of semi-permeable paving will indicate changes in use, such as accent points for seating, meeting or viewing and provide flat landings to ensure safe DDA compliant access. As the primary route into and out of Hatchery this Character Area is expected to have a livelier atmosphere and offers opportunities for events such as small markets. Set above the Dell it offers views over herbaceous planting and species rich lawns, a sense of arrival and welcome and an appreciation of the overall spatial context of the Hatchery buildings and landscape. An informal avenue of trees will frame the route through the site to the Meeting Point, using species such as whitebeam and walnut for ornamental value, seasonal colour and fruiting.

The Promenade will be wider at the northern end providing a potential location for local markets or for use by tenants in the Maker Space building.

### ***Meeting Point***

The Meeting Point is centrally located at the confluence of the Promenade and access routes to the Office building and Site Hub. This is a transitional space, but a limited volume of furniture will offer informal meeting or resting points. North west of the Meeting Point a planted lens will form a steep downward sloping bank of ornamental grasses and herbaceous planting with multi stemmed trees to provide bursts of seasonal colour and to frame views across The Dell. An informal stepping stone path will offer access to the café outdoor seating area and Look Out.

### ***The Café Look Out***

A place for meeting or simply for relaxation, the key feature of the Look Out area is the view south and west down the Darent Valley towards Shoreham and across to the valley's western slopes and Shoreham Cross. The semi-permeable aggregate surface will be interspersed with blocks of herbaceous planting to soften the feel of the seating area and add colour. An informal path leading off the seating area to the west gives access to a viewing point set within the meadow area south of the Office building, offering far reaching views southward and inviting exploration of the parkland area and riverside meadow. The Look Out will be enclosed by blocks of trees and copses to frame outward views and provide a sense of enclosure from busier areas of the site.

The flat areas around the Café and Look Out will provide potential locations for activities and events.

**Preston Farm: Planting Mixes**

**Parkland and Activity and Food Growing**

Hedge mix (Car Park and Boundaries)	
<i>Acer campestre</i>	Field Maple
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	Dogwood
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn
<i>Rosa canina</i>	Dog rose

Woodland Shrub Planting	
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	Dogwood
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	Spindle
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly
<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	Guelder rose

Woodland ground flora	
Emorsgate EW1 Woodland Mix or similar	

Specimen Trees	
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Gean
<i>Quercus robur</i>	English oak
<i>Tilia x europaea</i>	Common lime
<i>Sorbus aria</i>	Whitebeam

Orchard	
Planted with a mix of traditional heritage varieties of apple, damson, cherry, pear. Small cob nut groves set around perimeters.	

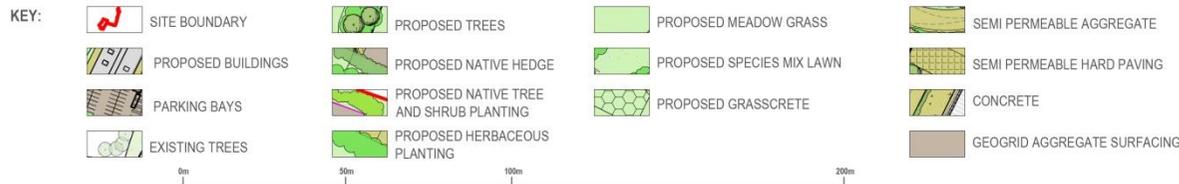
Wildflower grassland	
Emorsgate EM6 Meadow Mix for Chalk and Limestone Soils – or similar	

**Riverside**

Riverside scrub and coppice	
<i>Salix viminalis</i>	Common osier
<i>Salix caprea</i>	Goat willow
<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i>	Buckthorn

Riverside Trees	
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Alder
<i>Salix fragilis</i>	Crack willow
<i>Salix elba</i>	White willow

Wildflower grassland	
Emorsgate EM8 Meadow Mix for Wetlands – or similar	



**The Dell and East Slope Promenade**

Herbaceous Planting	
Pictorial Meadows Seed Mix eg Moody Blues/Tuscan Meadow/Bee Blanket	

Ornamental Grasses	
<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i> (var)	
<i>Pennisetum</i> spp	
<i>Panicum virgatum</i> (var)	
<i>Stipa gigantea</i> (var)	

Multi stemmed shrubs and trees	
<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>	Snowy mespilus
<i>Acer campestre</i>	Field maple
<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	Guelder rose
<i>Malus sylvestris</i>	Crab apple
<i>Hamamelis x intermedia</i> 'Jelena'	Witch hazel
<i>Lonicera x purpusii</i> 'Winter Beauty'	
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i> 'Midwinter Fire'	

Larger fruiting trees	
<i>Juglans</i> spp	Walnut
<i>Malus</i> spp	Apple
<i>Pyrus</i> spp	Pear
<i>Prunus dulcis</i>	Almond

Species rich lawn	
Emorsgate EL1 Flowering Lawn Mix – or similar	

**Promenade and Meeting Point**

Herbaceous Planting	
<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>	
<i>Echinacea purpurea</i> spp	
<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>	
<i>Perovskia</i> eg 'Blue Spire'	
<i>Salvia nemorosa</i>	
<i>Gaura lindheimeri</i>	
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	
<i>Echinops ritro</i> 'Veitch's Blue' or similar	

Ornamental Grasses	
<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i> (var)	
<i>Calamagrostis x acutiflora</i> 'Karl Foerster'	

Promenade Trees	
<i>Sorbus aria</i>	Whitebeam
<i>Juglans</i> spp	Walnut



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Project Preston Farm Hatchery - Landscape Masterplan Planting  
Org No. LMSL/25/PF/009 Rev E  
Date NOV 2020  
Scale 1:1000 @ A3

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LMSL/25/PF/009 Rev B - 26/11/20  
LMSL/25/PF/009 Rev C - 09/12/20  
LMSL/25/PF/009 Rev D - 11/12/20  
LMSL/25/PF/009 Rev E - 15/12/20

Figure 10: Landscape Masterplan Planting

### ***The Dell and East Slopes***

The Dell offers a more tranquil point for rest and quiet relaxation. Formed of a grassy bowl, the nature of planting is partly constrained by the presence of the underground attenuation tanks. Tree planting is located to avoid these features. The area as a whole will feature a diverse mix of planting to provide seasonal interest through flowering and fruiting, including areas of mixed herbaceous and ornamental grasses around the perimeter to provide a sense of intimacy and enclosure from adjacent buildings and access routes. Herbs and edible plants will provide added colour and interest. Trees will include fruit and cobnut species and multi-stemmed specimens of eg *Amelanchier* and Field maple to provide a long season of interest. Species-rich lawns will provide a carpet of low growing wildflowers and encourage bees and other pollinators.

### ***The Riverside***

The riverside is a key element in the beauty and ecology of the Darent Valley landscape, combining riparian trees and wetland meadows. Re-grading the slopes on the western edge of Hatchery will re-establish a more natural landform and allow views from the Office building across the river valley. The creation of mown paths linking the riverside with Hatchery will enable access to the riverside and provide opportunities to engage with nature and observe wildlife. This area is key in offering views outward from Hatchery across the Darent and also in providing the main landscape setting to Hatchery in views east from the Darent Valley Path and from the public footpath network along the western valley slopes towards Shoreham.

### ***Parkland***

This Character Area comprises chiefly meadow and small woodland copses and tree groups and wraps around the south and west of the site. The traditionally managed meadows will offer attractive wildflower displays through spring/summer and an ecologically rich and diverse landscape which provides excellent foraging opportunities and shelter for birds, mammals and insects. This will be an informal area for relaxation, with occasional benches in a rustic style and access provided by mown paths. The parkland will provide a link between the Site Hub and access to the riverside and neighbouring footpath network. Woodland groups can be managed as coppice with tree groups retained to frame views to buildings and showcase traditional woodland management skills. Hedge planting on the northern boundary will provide enclosure and screening of the car park.

### Activity and Food Growing

South of the Site Hub there will be an area of lawn as a location for summer events. There are opportunities around the central area to establish food growing plots, orchards planted with traditional fruit and nut varieties, demonstration planting linked to tenant businesses, eg vines, hops, botanics, or innovative crop production such as hydroponics on building walls, with scope to harvest produce for use in the café. As with all areas in this southern part of the Hatchery landscape, views south will be a key feature. Trees and parkland planting will blend with existing offsite trees to create a space which flows seamlessly out from Hatchery into the wider countryside.

### A225 Access

The main site access from the A225 will be improved in order to meet highways requirements. The current access is in poor condition with unnecessarily large areas of hard standing. The area is frequently used as an unauthorised lay by and fly tipping is common. As part of the highway improvements the existing mound will be levelled and all excess areas of hardstanding broken out. These areas will be re-seeded with a chalk meadow mix with groups of chalkland scrub and trees located beyond the sight lines. A hedge will be re-planted along the western side of the access in order to provide an enhanced access to the Farm and Hatchery and an overall improvement to the verges on this part of the A225.

The Visualisations overleaf show two illustrative views which show the overall scheme. The first shows an elevated view across Hatchery from the south east. The second shows a view south from the Dell.



Figure 11: A225 Site Access



Illustrative elevated view of Hatchery from the south east



Illustrative view south from the Dell towards the Site Hub, framed by the Maker Space and Office buildings

## 10.0 Hatchery: Landscape and Visual Assessment

### 10.1 Landscape Character Appraisal

The proposals for Hatchery have been informed by published landscape character assessments, including national and local assessments and studies conducted by the Kent Downs AONB, together with an understanding of the historical development of the Farm layout and landscape pattern.

The proposals seek to conserve and enhance identified characteristics which contribute to the rural character of the Darent Valley and the scenic beauty of the AONB within the context of a working farm environment. Initiatives which form part of the wider Whole Farm Management Strategy are already in place to address key elements including the creation of woodland, grassland management to improve species diversity, hedgerow restoration and reinstatement, and the creation and enhancement of the wetlands.

The proposals for Hatchery will involve the removal of unsightly elements, principally the livery parking, containers and maneges which extend beyond the main farmyard to the south. The proposed layout largely contains built form within the existing farmyard and will create a modern interpretation of the *loose courtyard* farm layout. The link between use of the buildings and the surrounding landscape is a key part of the Hatchery concept. Opportunities for tenants to make use of the surrounding land, provided this is consistent with the landscape setting and sensitivities described in this LVA, will be encouraged.

A larger area for parking will be created in the northern part of the site. This assessment has concluded that this is the least visually sensitive area. The parking area will be enclosed by dense tree and shrub planting, and planting areas within the car park will help to create more of a rural character. The use of recycled crushed aggregate and hoggin as surfacing both reflects the former agricultural heritage and provides a more appropriate surface treatment for a rural car park.

This section considers the effects of the proposals within the context of identified landscape character areas and the key characteristics which contribute to the character of the Darent Valley landscape and wider AONB and character areas.

### 10.2 Published Landscape Character Assessments

The proposals are considered to be consistent with the enhancement of identified characteristics of this LCA and the stated landscape objectives for the Darent Valley Area 7b, which highlight field pattern and hedgerow restoration, conservation of locally distinctive land uses and wetland management. There is sensitivity with regard to the proximity of Hatchery in order to minimise disturbance to the neighbouring wetlands.

Riverside planting and the re-grading of the landform will aid the integration of Hatchery as part of this landscape. There is a desire to benefit from the views from Hatchery over the wetlands, with informal paths and viewing areas created on the higher ground above the wetlands but with limited direct access. Opportunities to provide managed access will be explored with KWT as part of the wider wetlands strategy.

Woodland blocks set within the parkland area of the Hatchery proposals will enhance the characteristic *small scale copses of broadleaved woodlands between fields*. Landscape pattern and field boundaries will be enhanced by the restoration and reinstatement of unmanaged or lost hedgerows. Food growing areas around the Site Hub and the measures to encourage a productive landscape using traditional local varieties, eg of fruit and nuts, both within the Hatchery landscape and on the wider Farm, will contribute to the establishment and maintenance of crops associated with traditional land uses. The proposals conserve the striking long views funnelled southward down the Darent Valley.

The proposals will seek to restore the natural sloping landform of the valley floor caused by cut and fill or other construction operations associated with 20<sup>th</sup> century development on the Farm, restoring the typical generally wide and flat valley floor rising to convex steeper slopes which form the eastern area of the Farm. The Farm landscape as a whole has few trees, although benefits from woodland belts at the boundaries. Proposed planting of copses and small woodland blocks both as part of the planning application and the wider whole Farm Strategy will help to contribute to the well-treed landscape described in the LCA. The proposed food growing areas and planting of traditional fruit and nut trees, creation of parkland, enhancement of wetland, grassland and woodland and wider diversity of land uses will be consistent with the mosaic of land uses which are a typical feature of this part of the AONB. Enhancements to riparian planting will contribute to the strong tree belts which typically follow the course of the Darent. This will have the added benefit of slowing runoff rate from the neighbouring land. Wider proposals to strengthen and reinstate hedgerows will enhance the typically strong pattern of hedges and shaws, including those along the access road to Hatchery. Importantly, the LCA notes the loss of some historic elements such as water meadows and field boundaries. The proposals at Preston Farm to enhance and restore these features will be material in helping to mitigate these losses, provide succession planting to address the anticipated loss of mature riparian trees and, under the Whole Farm Strategy, provide a co-ordinated approach to habitat management.

At a national level Hatchery and the wider Farm proposals are consistent with recommendations for management of farmland in NCA 119, which focus on the role of active farm management while preserving and enhancing ecological and cultural assets, together with encouragement of initiatives for the conservation and enhancement of traditional orchards and the restoration of hedgerows to reinforce historic field boundary patterns.

### 10.3 Visual amenity

Section 5 provides a baseline visual appraisal of the Farm using a series of representative viewpoints identified to the north, east, south and west of Preston Farm. This analysis is based on 24 separate viewpoints (included as Appendix A). Summer and winter views are included for key views to the Farm. The sections below provide an assessment of the anticipated effects of Hatchery in these views.

This section will consider effects on visual receptors grouped as in section 5.

#### Views from the north

##### Viewpoints 1 and 2

The oast house, Dutch barn and small barn to the right of Dairy House will be demolished. The proposed car parking area will be enclosed by a broad belt of hedge planting with hedgerow trees. In winter views, the proposed Office building (Building 1) would be visible. With the removal of the Victorian barn, it is anticipated that the retained Maker Space building would also be glimpsed. All visible proposed built form would be seen in the context of the remaining Farm buildings, including Dairy House and the Farmhouse. The proposed built form will not be higher than the existing structures. Proposed façade treatments for the Site Hub (2) and Maker Space (3) using recessive colours will blend the proposed built form into the landscape, particularly the existing wooded backdrop to the Farm buildings. The proposed car park will be set into the landscape on the northern boundary with dense planting of trees and shrubs. It is anticipated that parked cars would be glimpsed in the early years as planting establishes but that in time planting will screen views of all parking, including the adjacent site.

Overall, it is concluded that the proposals would not increase the extent of visible built form in these views or result in any material change to the character of the existing views. Removal of the white painted oast house, and long term screening of parked cars are considered to be positive changes which would be beneficial to the character of the view.

##### Viewpoints 3, 4, 5, 6

In viewpoints 3, 4 and 5 the white oast house is the most prominent structure within the existing cluster of Farm buildings (particularly in winter). The viewpoints generally offer an open view of the northern façade to the Farm buildings. Most clearly defined from this northern perspective are the Dairy House and Dutch barn. The visibility of the stable block east of the farmhouse and other existing buildings is limited by their height, which sets them within the landscape backdrop, by topography and by the generally dark or recessive colour of the building material. The proposals would

remove the oast house and Dutch Barn. As in viewpoints 1 and 2, it is anticipated that the proposed Office building (1) and retained Maker Space building (3) would be partially visible (see 3D Visualisation for Viewpoint 3 in Section 8). Taking account of the proposed building heights, materials and proposed planting, it is concluded that the proposals would not increase the visible built form in these views or result in any material change to the character of the existing view. Removal of the oast house would be beneficial to the character of the view. The upper part of the Office building (1) would be visible above the planting and retained Maker Space building. However, since the Dutch barn is already visible in the same approximate location, the proposals are unlikely to change the overall character of the view.

The more open character of the proposed layout of Hatchery is likely to be evident in these views, with the central landscaped parts of the site visible, breaking up the current mass of built form.

Viewpoint 6 offers a more limited view of the Farm buildings. It is anticipated that the Office building (1) would be glimpsed set against the wooded backdrop. Overall the proposals would be seen within the landscape context of the existing view and would not materially change its overall character. The wider Farm proposals to enhance the grassland, remove the fencing associated with horse grazing which is prominent in this viewpoint, and reinstate lost hedgerows would offer additional benefits in enhancing the rural character and tranquillity of the view.

### **Views from the east**

#### **Viewpoints 7 and 8**

The proposals will remove the parked vehicles from the southern end of the site, which are a notable detractor in viewpoint 7, and the livery building immediately to the rear of the Farmhouse, the roof of which is clearly visible in this view. The northern part of the retained Maker Space building (3) would remain visible. There would be an increase in the visible built form in Viewpoint 7 with the Site Hub (2) visible to the left of the Farmhouse and the Office building beyond the Farmhouse (see 3D Visualisation). The volume and extent of built form visible would increase in this view. In the longer term the proposed landscape treatment to the south of the buildings will enhance the character of the view by introducing additional tree and shrub planting, providing a backdrop to the new built form while retaining the long views across the valley.

There are separate proposals (outside the scope of this Appraisal) to remove the telegraph poles and associated infrastructure and bury cables underground, which would remove a further detractor from this view.

Viewpoint 8 is similar to viewpoints 3-5 in terms of the visibility of the Farm buildings (but is not located on a Public Right of Way). The proposals would remove the oast house, allowing a partial view of the Office building 1. Buildings 2 and 3 are unlikely to be visible, although there may be glimpses of the roof of Building 3. There would no material change to the overall character of this view. Use of suitable materials and judicious

planting to soften the northern façade of Building 1 is likely to be an enhancement to the character of the view. Important long views across the valley would be retained.

#### Viewpoints 15 and 16

The proposals will introduce limited change to these views. The Dutch barn and stable block in the southern part of the site would be removed. The roofs of the proposed Office building (1) and the Site Hub (2) would occupy a similar volume and area of the view. Use of recessive materials and colours will help to set the built form into the landscape and the wooded backdrop. Proposed planting of tree clumps in the southern part of the site and around the southern boundary would be likely to offer additional screening of built form. Overall it is concluded that there would be no material change to the character of these views, which already include intrusive railway fencing. In summer the Farm buildings are likely to be entirely screened by the hedgerow in the foreground.

Viewpoint 16 (not a Public Right of Way) would offer a more open view of the Office and Site Hub buildings. However, the Farm forms only a small part of the view and is partially screened, even in winter, by the hedgerow in the middle distance. It is anticipated that the design of the proposed built form, using recessive colours and materials, would set it into the landscape and that it would be seen in the context of the Farm as a whole. The oast house would be removed. The overall character of the view would be unlikely to change.

#### **Views from the south**

##### Viewpoints 9, 10, 11

The proposals will introduce a more substantial change in the near views (in particular in winter) from footpath SR19. Detracting elements (parked vehicles, currently occupying a substantial part of the view, and horse manège) will be removed. The barn (seen to the left of the Farmhouse), the livery building to the rear of the Farmhouse garden, and the stable block partially visible behind the field boundary hedgerow, would also be removed. The existing livery building (to be retained as the Maker Space building (3)), currently prominent because of the use of contrasting colour panels on the south façade, would be refurbished using recessive materials and colours which would help to set it within the landscape. The Site Hub (Building 2) would occupy a part of the view and bring built form nearer to the viewer. However, proposed tree planting in the southern part of the site will enhance the wider rural character of the view and help to filter views of built form. The existing detracting elements (livery parking, containers and manèges) have a marked influence on the overall character and quality of this view. The proposals would enable the removal of these elements, introducing contemporary built form designed to be sympathetic to the character of the surrounding countryside and creating an appropriate landscape setting. The summer viewpoint 9 shows that much of the existing and proposed development would be screened by the hedgerow.

Viewpoints 10 and 11 offer middle distance views toward the site, which occupies a much smaller part of the view than in viewpoint 9. The area occupied by the livery vehicles is the most visible part of the site (winter views only) in viewpoint 10. In viewpoint 11 the most prominent part of the Farm is the livery building with contrasting panels, although this occupies only a very small part of the view. The proposals would remove the livery vehicles and introduce a landscape setting to the southern part of the site which will complement the existing woodland belt enhancing the rural character and tranquillity of these views. The proposed buildings would be glimpsed, but not prominent in these views, resulting in little change to the overall character and quality of these views.

### **Views from the west**

#### Viewpoints 13 and 14

The proposals would introduce a change in the style of the visible built form in viewpoint 13 from the Darent Valley Path. The Dutch barn, which is a prominent feature in the existing winter view, would be demolished. The Office building (1) would be visible and would introduce a change in the style of visible built form. The proposed building would be seen within the context of the wider group of Farm buildings, and the use of appropriate materials and recessive colours is intended help to set the built form into the landscape and reduce the scale of change to the view, although the use of glass will introduce a more reflective element to the building. Riverside planting largely screens the southern part of the site and this will be retained and strengthened as part of the scheme, although it is intended to retain views from the Office building over the wetlands. The result will be a retained glimpsed view of the new building through the trees but this will not affect the overall character and quality of this view.

Viewpoint 14 offers a near view from the track to the west, but is not on a Public Right of Way. The proposals would remove the Dutch barn and adjacent stable block, and introduce a change in the style of built form in this view. The office building (1) would be visible, and potentially also the upper part of the Site Hub (2). The existing view includes notable detractors in the form of the yard and parked vehicles to the left and the parked livery vehicles to the right. These would be removed. The proposed landscape treatments for the western part of the site and riverside tree planting would filter much of the existing open view of built form to enhance the rural nature of the view. The car parking area is unlikely to be visible. Although the view would change, it is considered that the overall effect would be beneficial.

#### Viewpoint 23 and 24

Viewpoint 23 offers a glimpsed view of the Farm, but is dominated by the entrance gates to the pumping station. In viewpoint 24 the Farm is almost entirely screened by summer vegetation in the river valley but there may be glimpses in winter. However, in view of the distance of the viewpoints from the Farm and the proposals for building design and landscape treatments in the western part of the site, it is considered that the effect of the proposals on these transient views would be negligible.

#### Viewpoints 18-22

Viewpoints 18 to 20 are defining views of the Kent Downs AONB. The Farm is visible in these views and forms an important element of the rural view.

Viewpoint 18 allows filtered views of much of the wider Farm estate in winter, but at this distance and elevation, individual elements of built form are barely discernible, with the exception of the Dutch barn and the livery parking and containers which are clearly identifiable although only partially visible. The tree belt to the south of the Farm and existing riparian trees are important elements in filtering views of the existing buildings. The proposals would introduce an element of change to the visible built form (see 3D Visualisation). There would be glimpsed or partial views of all three proposed buildings. The proposed materials and colours will recess the new built form into the landscape, although there will be an increase in the visible glass albeit strongly filtered through existing and proposed vegetation. The changes would affect only a very small part of the view and it is anticipated that there would be no material change to its overall character. In summer the Farm is almost entirely screened.

Viewpoints 19 and 20, from the PRoW above Shoreham Cross, offer more open views of the Farm both in summer and in winter, albeit at some distance. These are highly sensitive views from the downland above Shoreham enjoyed by many local people and visitors. As described in the baseline visual appraisal Preston Farm is a key feature in these views.

Although individual elements are difficult to discern, the detracting influence of parked livery vehicles and containers to the south of the farmyard are evident in the existing views. The proposals would remove these elements and introduce a landscape scheme more in character with the rural nature of the site and wider landscape. The nature of built form would change, with all three proposed buildings visible in this view. The proposed materials and colours, together with proposed planting to the south and western areas of the site are such that it is anticipated that these would blend more effectively into the landscape, in contrast to the existing Farm buildings which, whilst characteristic of a rural landscape, are functional and do not benefit from any landscape setting. The proposed car park would be set into the northern parts of the site. In summer it is anticipated that the existing tree cover, strengthened by the proposed planting, would screen views of the car park. The winter view shows that cars could potentially be glimpsed through the existing trees. The overall effect is anticipated to be at least neutral, likely beneficial.

Viewpoints 21 and 22 offer only glimpses of the Farm, with views much filtered by intervening woodland, trees and other vegetation. It is unlikely that the proposals would introduce any discernible change to these views.

### ***Visual Appraisal: Conclusions***

The existing Farm is characteristic of many medium sized farms in the local area. Located at the heart of the valley, the Farm is visible in views from the surrounding downland and in views north and south along the river valley. The Farm is set into the hillside which tends to reduce the prominence of the built form in views along the valley. The whole of the Farm is visible in views from Shoreham Cross, in particular in winter.

There are few open views of the Farm as a whole, except on the approaches from the PRoW SR19 to the north (3, 4, 5, 7), near views from the south (especially Viewpoint 9) and transient views on the A225 (Viewpoint 1). Partial but distinct views can be gained from the Darent Valley Path (13). More distant views from the west (18-20) offer an appreciation of the Farm's wider landscape context, but individual elements of built form are less obviously discernible.

The proposals would remove elements which detract from existing views (parked cars and livery vehicles, containers and maneges) even from more distant viewpoints. The proposals would also remove structures which are distinct in some views such as the oast house and Dutch barn and partially seen in others. The proposed car parking will be set into the hillside in the northern part of the site. It is anticipated that the car parking will be effectively screened once planting matures in all views from the north, east and south. Car parking may be glimpsed in the longer distance views from Shoreham Cross, but the extent of parking visible would be substantially reduced from the current unrestricted livery parking to the south.

The retained livery building would be refurbished to remove discordant visual elements (coloured panelling). New built form would feature appropriate materials and colours which would help to recess these elements into the landscape, but would incorporate an increase in more reflective elements such as glass. The ridge height of proposed new buildings would remain below that of the existing Farmhouse. The extent of visible built form would increase slightly in some views, principally in near views from Footpath PR19 through the Farm (Viewpoints 7 and 9). The use of recessive materials combined with the planted setting will aid the integration of the buildings into the landscape in these views. In more distant views, including those from the vicinity of the Cross, the benefits of the removal of the detracting elements are considered to outweigh any potential marginal adverse effects from the change to built form.

It is not anticipated that the proposals for Hatchery would materially change the rural character of individual views to the Farm. In the majority of views the proposed built form will appear set into the landscape and there would be no overall change to the extent and scale of visible built form. Where change is anticipated, the sympathetic architectural design and use of materials combined with the enhanced landscape setting will

contribute to the rural character and tranquillity of the view. The more open layout to Hatchery will reduce the massing effects of built form, in particular in the more distant views from the Cross and views south along the river valley. The landscape proposals will restore much of the natural landform and setting, improve visual amenity and set the proposed built form into the landscape.

## 11.0 Conclusions

The ethos and design concepts which underpin Hatchery seek to integrate the scheme as part of the Darent Valley and Kent Downs Landscape. As well as the siting, design and layout of the built form and the landscape setting, these principles extend to how it is anticipated occupants of the Hatchery businesses and maker spaces will benefit from and make use of their environment. Construction will maximise opportunities to recycle materials and ensure the long term sustainable management of Hatchery as a zero carbon development.

This LVA has been prepared to ensure a full assessment of the anticipated effects of the proposed development on the landscape of the Darent Valley and the Kent Downs and the nature of any change to key views and openness. This LVA concludes that there will be limited change to the perception and scale of built development when viewed from the surrounding area. The proposed built and landscape layout will create a more open character, with the removal of built form from the central areas of the farmyard and the creation of a layout which is reminiscent of the former, historic loose courtyard layout. As well as breaking up the scale of built development in views to the site, this will allow views from the central areas to the countryside beyond, enhancing the perception of openness within the site. The proposals will also enable the removal of detracting elements such as the livery parking, containers and maneges, to be replaced with meadows and planting which wrap around Hatchery.

The existing farmyard is a typical feature of rural farms, but does comprise large areas of concrete hardstanding, mostly functional agricultural buildings, areas of parking and the maneges. The proposals will introduce contemporary buildings sympathetic in terms of scale, siting and materials to this sensitive rural location. There will be an increase in reflective materials, principally glass, but planting will break up the impact of this, in particular from the Cross and the views from Footpath SR19. The other more intrusive visual elements, principally car parking, will be located in the northern parts of the site where this can be most effectively screened.

The proposals will not result in major change to the scale and extent of built form on the site. The landscape setting within and around Hatchery will be enhanced to create a landform, planting and land uses which reflect the heritage, ecology and landscape character of the valley and provide opportunities for site users to benefit from this beautiful location, whilst not detracting from the special qualities of the Darent Valley and the Kent Downs AONB.

**Hatchery at Preston Farm  
Landscape and Visual Appraisal  
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