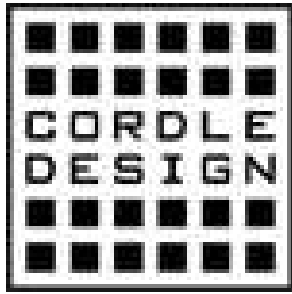


# Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment



Land at Yew Tree Farm  
Ascott-Under-Wychwood



# **Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment**

**February 2021**

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## **Executive Summary**

*The proposed development site is visually enclosed both by local topography and permanent, established hedgerows and trees. As a result, the visual envelope for unconstrained or uninterrupted views towards the site is confined to a very small area in the immediate proximity of the site itself, almost all of which is within the built up area of Ascott under Wychwood.*

*Most of the surrounding land is private and inaccessible and therefore has lower sensitivity in comparison with the PRoW network, dwellings and places where substantially more people go for recreational reasons. However, there is an adjacent bridleway and a footpath that passes very close to the site, and these receive moderate visual effects as they approach it. Given the current, dilapidated appearance of the site, the visual effects associated with redevelopment are not adverse and a range of beneficial visual and landscape effects are predicted.*

*The well-wooded floodplain prevents any public views of the site from within the valley-bottom, riparian landscape. The Oxfordshire Way regional trail is the principal public recreational route through this landscape and this does not receive any visual effects.*

*The recorded images demonstrate that the magnitude of change in all cases is minor, other than in very close proximity to the proposed development, where the site begins to occupy a very substantial proportion of the available view, notably from the eastern end of High Street as it joins Mill Lane.*

*Overall, the visual effects associated with the proposed development are very broadly beneficial due to the proposed removal of the existing, obsolete cow shed, specifically its substantial visual mass, which is not in keeping with the character of the adjacent settlement, including the recently consented residential development proposed for the adjoining Dutch Barns site. The proposed development's adherence to local design guidance in terms of scale, pattern and materials choices will be beneficial from a visual perspective and also in its contribution to the preservation of the settlement's distinctive character, informed in the locality of the site by the redevelopment of the rest of Yew Tree Farm. In turn, this is consistent with the designation of Ascott-Under-Wychwood in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan as a 'Village' capable of accommodating some housing growth.*

*The predicted landscape effects associated with the proposed development have been assessed against a wide range of landscape receptors including the effects upon the national landscape designation and the landscape character in the locale. In addition, a range of landscape elements that are of noted value within the landscape character assessment and which contribute to the distinctive character of the AONB, the site and its environs, are also considered.*

*Due to the derelict condition of the existing cowshed, together with the dominant scale of its roof and the inappropriate use of materials within the construction, there is a range of beneficial landscape effects associated with its re-development. This includes the proposal for an additional public open space at a key juncture on the PRoW network together with the introduction of new commemorative planting dedicated to the Ascott Martyrs, a historical influence with very immediate local significance. This is a response to the*

*community engagement undertaken by the applicant and reflects an iterative design process.*

*The proposed development is similar in scale and extent to the buildings that will be demolished, but much reduced in terms of bulk, and the developed footprint upon the site will not be increased. There is no encroachment associated with the development, which is upon previously developed land and within the built form of this linear village settlement, and it does not set any precedents that could be considered to have an adverse effect upon the wider policy aims of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).*

*This LVIA finds that there are no predicted significant adverse landscape or visual impacts arising from the proposed development. This assessment takes into account the sensitivity of the landscape and its high aesthetic value. The development demonstrates a high degree of design quality and appropriate consideration for the local vernacular, settlement pattern, character and design guidance.*

*Mitigation has been addressed "in design" in order to achieve a range of beneficial landscape and visual outcomes. As a result of this no additional mitigation is required.*

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# 1.0 Introduction

*This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been carried out on behalf of Bloombridge LLP and relates to the proposed small-scale housing development on the site of a former cow shed at Yew Tree Farm in Ascott-Under-Wychwood.*

*The site is located on the eastern edge of the village of Ascott-Under-Wychwood, at the eastern end of High Street. At this point the road staggers slightly to the north and changes name to Mill Lane, leaving the village in the direction of Ascott Mill. The proposed development site is approximately 0.46 Ha of ‘previously developed’ area on the south side of Mill Lane.*

*This assessment has been carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3)<sup>1</sup>.*

*The scope of this study is to:*

- ◆ Undertake field work to establish the veracity of landscape context of the site and its relationship to the relevant published landscape character assessments.*
- ◆ Identify the landscape resources and visual & landscape receptors against which the visual & character impact of the proposed development can be assessed.*
- ◆ Establish a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) for the proposed development site.*
- ◆ Identify and record a range of typical and representative viewpoints looking towards the site, against which the visual impact of the proposed development can be assessed.*
- ◆ Assess the impact of the development proposals upon the viewpoints and upon the recognised landscape character of the site and the surrounding countryside.*

*The AONB Management Plan, together with its supporting documents, is considered and its policy directions are examined where they pertain to landscape directly, but also where ecological, economic, leisure or other directives are likely to lead indirectly to landscape change.*

*Landscape Impacts and Visual Impacts are assessed separately in accordance with the good practice set out in Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3).<sup>1</sup>*

*The changes to the landscape that would result from the proposed development are assessed against the baseline landscape character in the locale. The landscape baseline is established from a combination of desk study and practical survey work. The desk study examines the histo-cultural background to the landscape setting and the policy context that describes the site and its setting.*

<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2013)  
Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

*Changes to the visual appearance of the site that would result from the proposed development are assessed against the visual baseline. The visual baseline is established by identifying a set of viewpoints from various points in the landscape surrounding the site.*

*Preliminary survey work was carried out over a period between August 2016 and February 2019. The winter survey work was carried out between December 2018 and February 2019, with a refresh undertaken in November 2020.*

*The methodology employs the suggested qualitative terminology set out in GLVIA3. The full methodology for the landscape and visual impact assessment is contained in Appendix 3.*

## **2.0 Description of the site**

*The site is located on the eastern edge of the village of Ascott-Under-Wychwood, a large Cotswold village located within the Evenlode Valley on the southern bank of the River Evenlode.*

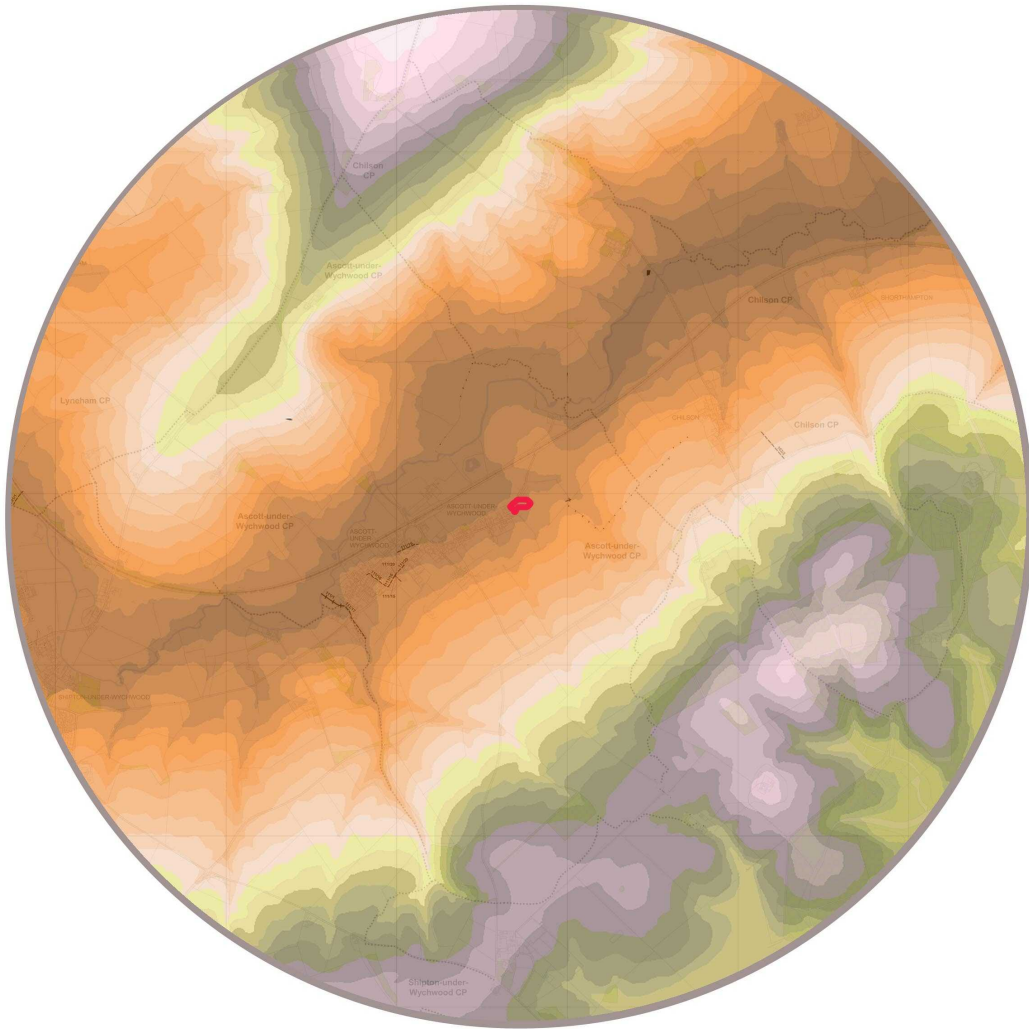
*The site for the proposed development occupies an area of 0.46 Ha and is only in occasional use. Access onto the cowshed site is via a wide vehicle gate onto Mill Lane. There is currently no public access onto the site.*

*The existing site itself is comprised of a redundant former livestock shed and a concrete yard. The site is not aesthetically attractive in itself and the buildings are in a poor state of repair and not suitable for re-use. The poor condition of the cowshed and its inappropriately large scale, together with the low cost exterior concrete block work and expansive asbestos roofing, are all detracting factors which make the farm an eyesore. The poor state of repair of the building and the unmanaged appearance of the yard and boundaries give the site the appearance of dereliction. More generally, the rest of Yew Tree Farm has now been developed, or (recently) consented for development, such that the working agricultural character of the village has now changed to a pre-dominance of semi-rural housing and generally non-agricultural employment.*

*The site and the surrounding area are within the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).*



## Site Context



**Figure 1: Topographical Map showing landform of Evenlode Valley with 5m contour interval. The study area is defined by a 3km radius from the site at Yew Tree Farm.**



**Figure 2: The site seen from the end of High Street / start of Mill Lane**

## **Lighting**

*There are currently no light sources emanating from within the site. However, this is partly due to its current redundant status. The site is electrified for lighting and during operation of the farm business there was both static lighting from the permanent buildings and also transient lighting and noise from farm machinery and vehicles working within the site.*

## **Access**

*There is no current statutory or permissive public access onto the site, although it is divided into two parts by Mill Lane. A public bridleway (No. 111/10) passes close by on the southern boundary and a public footpath (No. 111/11) runs along the field boundary to the west that extends south as far as the B4437 main road.*

*Mill Lane is a single track road (STR) that carries very little traffic due to the fact that High Street (with which it is continuous) and Mill Lane form an extended cul-de-sac with no through traffic. The site is situated at the eastern end of the settlement boundary. Beyond this point Mill Lane only serves a few addresses associated with the converted Ascott Mill. Therefore, Mill Lane serves primarily as a walking route for local people exercising dogs.*

*Adjacent to the site is a PRoW that divides in two directions. Footpath 111/10 heads south up the gently sloping valley side towards the B4437 main road. The other route is bridleway number 111/11, which heads diagonally across the arable field adjacent to the site and takes a convoluted route along various field boundaries until it reaches Pudlicote Lane on its approach to the village of Chilson from the south. It is possible to walk or ride all the way to Charlbury via this largely traffic free route.*

## 3.0 Landscape Policy Context

The site is located within the local authority administrative area of West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and is subject to the West Oxfordshire Local Plan, which was adopted in September 2018. There is also a range of landscape character assessments that are addressed in this LVIA.

There is a high density of archaeological Ancient Monuments (SAMs and uSAMs) and Listed Buildings designations within and around the village of Ascott-under-Wychwood, which is not unusual for a settlement with such a long history of habitation. In respect of the proposed development, the archaeological and historic environments have been dealt with in a separate report.

### Landscape Character Assessments

The site and the surrounding countryside are within the **National Character Area (NCA) 107 – The Cotswolds**

Ascott-under-Wychwood is located in the north-east of this NCA which covers a very large area extending from Banbury to beyond the far side of Bath. Much of the National Character Area comprises the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The key characteristics of this national character area that pertain to the site are:

- ◆ Open and expansive scarp and high wold dipping gently to the south-east, directed by river valleys;
- ◆ Arable farming dominates the high wold and dip slope while permanent pasture prevails on the steep slopes of the scarp and river valleys with pockets of internationally important limestone grassland;
- ◆ Drystone walls define the pattern of fields of the high wold and dip slope. On the deeper soils and river valleys, hedgerows form the main field boundaries.
- ◆ The majority of the principal rivers flow south-eastwards forming the headwaters of the River Thames;
- ◆ Locally quarried limestone brings a harmony to the built environment of scattered villages and drystone walls, giving the area a strong sense of unity for which the Cotswolds is renowned.

National Character Areas do not offer a sufficiently finely grained degree of detail to establish the important landscape characteristics of any specific local site within the area that they define. These broad areas of landscape classification are therefore explored in more detail within a tiered structure of landscape character assessments which are more specific to the landscape context of Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds AONB.

The site and the settlement of Ascott-under-Wychwood are covered by a range of landscape character assessments. These include:

- ◆ The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) (2004).
- ◆ The West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (WOLA) - Lower Evenlode Valley (2004)  
The WOLA study places the site and the area immediately surrounding it within Landscape Character Area 6 – The Lower Evenlode Valley.
- ◆ The Cotswold AONB Landscape Assessment (2014) - 16B Lower Evenlode Valley  
which acknowledges and draws upon the WOLA.

In addition to the landscape character assessments, a supplementary planning document (SPD) on design has been published with guidance upon the selection of appropriate materials and design details to ensure that the very distinctive character of local buildings and settlement patterns is adhered to within any new development within the character area. This is known as the West Oxfordshire Design Guide, 2016.

This section therefore reviews the appropriate sections of each of the landscape assessments in order to obtain a full landscape baseline against which to assess any landscape changes, adverse or beneficial, that may be brought about by the proposed development.

The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study identifies twenty-four separate landscape types within the county, made up of individual landscape description units with a similar pattern of geology, topography, land use and settlements. The different types are given names that reflect their characteristic land cover.

The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) divides the parish of Ascott-Under-Wychwood into five landscape character types: Farmland Plateau; Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides; Settled Ancient Pastures; River Meadowlands and Wooded Farmland.

The site is located within the Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides landscape character type. This is a relatively large, linear landscape type, occupying around 5.5% of the rural county.

The landscape character of the locale is described as follows:

*“The landscape has small fields with both semi-improved grassland and arable farming, particularly around the western part of the river near Ascott-Under-Wychwood. There is also some unimproved neutral grassland. Fields are enclosed by hawthorn hedges with scattered ash and willows, and they are generally in good condition but tend to be much lower, gappier and with fewer trees in areas dominated by arable farming. The most prominent landscape feature is the continuous, dense corridor of willows, often pollarded, ash, alder and hawthorn bordering the river. Trees are generally sparser in the more intensively managed arable areas. There are a few poplar plantations next to the river and a little ancient semi-natural woodland close to Wychwood Forest.”*

The OWLS has a much more ecological and biodiversity focus than a more specific landscape character analysis. It is therefore appropriate that the later LCA is used as the principal reference resource for the landscape baseline assessment. However, the OWLS offers useful guidance and makes recommendations for the improvement of the local landscape character.

Priority habitats identified as opportunity areas by the OWLS study include acid grassland, lowland calcareous grassland and lowland meadow (neutral grassland).

Wood pasture, parkland and veteran trees are also notable features of the landscape typology. However, locally there is no wood pasture or parkland within the vicinity of the site such that it would receive landscape or visual effects. The river valley has a high concentration of veteran trees, but similarly, these are too remote from the proposed development site to receive any adverse effects.

The OWLS study also identifies ancient and/or species rich hedgerow as a priority habitat and opportunity area.

Although the location is given different index numbers and references, all of the landscape character assessments categorise the area around the proposed re-development site as the Lower Evenlode Valley local character area.

Whilst the overarching Landscape Character Assessments provide useful background and context, they devote relatively little detailed attention to each of the specific character areas. The reason for this is that the studies are not fine-grained enough to illuminate all of the local variations within the landscape. One of the landscape elements that is absent from the landscape character assessment is the wooded shaw or ditch-side woodland belt. Trees in fields (remnants of past field enlargements) are also not mentioned in any of the assessments, despite being much more common here than in the wider arable landscape as a whole.

There is no Neighbourhood Plan or finer level assessment in place at Ascott-under-Wychwood. Therefore, in addition to considering the landscape impact upon the overarching landscape character as identified by the landscape character assessments, this study also examines the potential impact upon the individual landscape elements that comprise the local sense of place.

## **Landscape Policy & Management**

The Cotswolds AONB is managed by the Cotswolds Conservation Board based at Northleach in Gloucestershire and is tasked with the protection and improvement of the Cotswolds landscape.

A new management plan (2018-2023) has recently come into effect which is a multi-faceted over-arching policy document addressing a wide variety of different areas of landscape influence from business and tourism to transport, infrastructure and development.

## 4.0 Landscape Baseline

Based upon the current landscape character assessments for the region, the following landscape elements make up the characteristic landscape setting of Ascott-under-Wychwood and its immediate environs. Some of the landscape elements are derived from overarching policy documents such as the AONB management plan, whilst others are described in the landscape character assessments themselves. In addition, a few of the elements describe the site and its surroundings at a very fine-scaled, local level which is more specific and fine grained than the general, overall descriptions of landscape qualities and landscape elements contained within the landscape character assessments.

### AONB

The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a multifaceted designation and covers an enormous area compared with the development site. The AONB designation raises a variety of different issues from protection of the landscape to the need for appropriate sustainable development. It is not possible to say that any development will be positive in respect of all of the various considerations, interests and sensitivities that are embodied within the AONB.

#### **Special Qualities (of the AONB)**

Chapter 2 of the AONB Management Plan outlines the 13 Special Qualities of the Cotswolds AONB landscape. Of these qualities, most are absent from the proposed re-development site and its environs and the site has no interaction with them. However, five of the special qualities are present or have immediate local relevance:

- ◆ distinctive dry stone walls
- ◆ distinctive settlements, developed in the Cotswolds vernacular, high architectural quality and integrity
- ◆ the tranquillity of the area, away from major sources of inappropriate noise, development, visual clutter and pollution
- ◆ an accessible landscape for quiet recreation for both rural and urban users, with numerous walking and riding routes, including the Cotswolds Way National Trail
- ◆ a vibrant heritage of cultural associations

#### **Sustainability and Quality of Life**

The AONB is faced with particular challenges with respect to sustainability. The AONB area is a net consumer of energy that is generated in the surrounding area. Large scale solar and wind power generation projects are considered to be a significantly adverse imposition upon the landscape of the AONB. Soils are mostly too poor for the high yield, high energy crops associated with biomass energy generation, and although parts of the floodplain may be suitable for willow coppice, the scale of landscape change required to make enough fuel matter available would be as significant as for solar power generation.

Within Ascott-under-Wychwood, solar panels on roofs and ground mounted installations have been permitted and these are visually quite prominent in views towards High Street from the south.

The management plan makes it clear that for Quality of Life to be maintained and promoted within the AONB it is important that sustainability extends to the shared services and amenities upon which thriving communities depend. This, in turn, requires a sufficiently sustaining demand.

### **Encroachment and Precedent**

This is a factor where the site may have an influence at the widest scale of the AONB. These are not landscape or visual considerations since the influence of lines of sight or limits of landscape influence are constrained by topography and different categorisations of landscape character. However, at the largest possible scale, the proposed re-development may influence the AONB in terms of any precedent that it sets in terms of the degree to which it conforms to and complements the AONB Management Plan objectives. Of concern is the extent to which this opens up the possibility for it to demonstrate a precedent in relation to later development proposals elsewhere both in terms of sites and aesthetic considerations.

### **Accessibility and Equality**

Countryside access is almost everywhere still confined to PRoWs defined by ancient rights of access along routes that have almost lost their purpose or origins. The AONB LCA is open about the possibilities of change arising from the CRoW Act. However, over the intervening years it is fair to say, although admittedly anecdotally, few of the hoped for benefits or feared transgressions have materialised and the countryside continues to be preclusive of wider access pretty much as before. This is a pity in areas that depend, at least partially (but also often increasingly), upon tourism for their vivacity. Recreational users of the countryside are more or less confined to linear access routes with little opportunity to explore or wander. Under these conditions, circular routes can be difficult to achieve and going back the way you came is one of the duller aspects of walking in the countryside.

The perimeter fields and boundaries around Ascott-Under-Wychwood demonstrate a very strong demand for improved access and improved access rights. This is indicated by a plethora of informal access ways, snickets and trails that permeate the field boundaries close to the village.

### **Sense of Place / Genius Loci**

There is a strong and characteristic identity to the perimeter of the existing historic settlement of Ascott-Under-Wychwood. The field pattern around to edge of the settlement becomes more sub-divided into smaller enclosures, paddocks, gardens and yards. There is a very great increase in the amount and size of hedgerows and a much greater frequency of hedgerow trees. The appearance of the settlement from a distance is particularly well wooded and appears in contrast to the surrounding landscape where mature trees are observed in dense woodland blocks or copses or else stand alone as veteran standards on now eroded field boundaries.

The settlement is divided into distinct areas with their own specific landscape character. In the centre, the built form encompasses a green, shop and village school. Outside of the linear development of built form that makes up High Street there is a second area that is comprised from the rear gardens, paddocks and small enclosures that occupy the perimeter land to the village that in earlier times would have been occupied by an agricultural strip system. This fine grained and complex pattern of ownership has simplified over time and the strips have agglomerated into a pattern of small fields that have become gardens and paddocks. Further out from the centre of the settlement, the landscape character changes to a larger scale agrarian landscape which is dominated by large fields and arable production.

## **Historic Landscape Character**

Historic landscape character takes account of the historical dimensions of the landscape as a whole. These are the ways in which the landscape has been modified and shaped by the inhabitants over time. Land uses, crops, drainage, shelter and settlement patterns are all human factors that derive from the underlying geology, landform and resources of the natural landscape. These patterns change over time in accordance with influences such as culture and technology, as well as abundance and scarcity.

The Lower Evenlode Valley has a pattern of well-nucleated larger villages with few hamlets, with remote individual farmsteads distributed between the villages. There is a long established pattern of arable cultivation on the middle and upper valley sides, with pasture and coppice woodland management in the valley bottom enclosures that are prone to waterlogging and frequent inundation.

The original medieval village was a linear settlement with an agricultural strip system. As set out in the West Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016, the present day form of the village still exhibits a strong east-west linearity despite pre-modern and modern changes to land ownership and patterns of land use that have filled in behind the original frontages of the village streets. The outline of the strip system is still evident and some of the perimeter boundaries to it remain although the internal divisions have been replaced with larger grazing paddocks. It is the origins of the strip system that has given rise to the belt of small scale pastures, paddocks and enclosures that surround the centre of the village. The low-intensity, subsistence nature of these small pastures close to the village has allowed a strong network of large hedgerows, orchards and mature and veteran trees to remain. This hinterland, set behind the main streets and residences of the village, is a strong contributor to the pattern of the settlement and contains and contributes much of the greenery and accommodates most of the large trees that make Ascott-Under-Wychwood appear so well wooded and enclosed by vegetation from the surrounding landscape.

Cultural associations are important contributors to the historic landscape, and these can be observed within both the built form of the settlement and the wider landscape. The Ascott Martyrs were a group of local women, imprisoned in 1873 for protesting in support of their striking husbands who were agricultural labourers. The memory of their community solidarity and sacrifice is commemorated by the Ascott Martyrs Educational Trust.



## **Tranquillity**

Road noise is a constant background presence during the active times of day, but this is mostly a general whisper or hum and distinct, individual engine noises are seldom heard. In places this background noise is masked by agricultural machinery and sounds emanating from farms which is more in keeping with the expected experience of the countryside.

Noise from high flying civilian aircraft is not out of the ordinary. No military aircraft were observed or heard during the study periods despite the relatively local presence of RAF bases.

Visual tranquillity is marred by the observation of very fast moving traffic and high speed trains. The visual openness of the landscape means that these visual disturbances can be glimpsed over long distances and the busy transport routes are often observed separated from their sound which fails to carry the distance to the receptor.

At closer proximity, the high-speed (non-stopping) trains that pass through Ascott-Under-Wychwood impose a sudden and loud (although brief) aural disturbance, which can be alarming when unexpected and close by.

The areas adjacent to the main arterial roads are almost devoid of tranquillity during the daytime due to the almost uninterrupted flow of fast moving traffic. Noise from the main roads carries to most, if not all, points in the valley during the peak traffic hours.

Despite intrusive elements such as the observation of fast moving transport and the white phone mast, and incongruous elements such as some of the coniferous forestry blocks and the larger agricultural buildings with their dubious planted screens, it is possible to experience serenity within the Evenlode Valley. Due to its large open, expansive scale within which these landscape elements are accommodated and diminished, the adverse landscape effects are to some extent dispelled.

## **PRoW (Public Rights of Way) Network**

The PRoW network around Ascott-under-Wychwood has been fragmented by the imposition upon the landscape of the more modern transport network, which means that some sections and extensions have become unusable due to the very high degree of hazard to which users would become exposed. Some footpaths have fallen completely out of use due to the fact that it is impossible to make a safe circular route using them. The quality of individual sections of the paths and routes is highly variable and appears to vary across land management boundaries. This means that whilst some sections are broad, firm and well-maintained, others are uneven, slippery and poorly marked. Of course, the accessibility of any route is limited by the least accessible of its component sections, and this can be very frustrating when a route initially sets out well only to dwindle into impassable undergrowth.

There is a high level of informal access along the field boundaries around the perimeter of Ascott-under-Wychwood. These routes are sought primarily by dog walkers from the village itself. It is not clear to what extent these desire lines are tolerated or proscribed by the relevant land owners, but there are no prohibition signs and in places the routes are more

heavily trodden and established than the official adopted footpaths that have been made unattractive or dangerous by the fast moving roads that they connect to.

The PRoW and roadway network is the primary means by which the countryside of the Lower Evenlode Valley can be observed as there is very little public or open access land which affords long distance views. Therefore a high quality, accessible network of safe and efficient routes that provide interest and variety is an essential component of any forward looking tourism and sustainable transport strategies.

## **Oxfordshire Way**

The Oxfordshire Way is an important regional trail that passes along the opposite bank of the River Evenlode from Ascott-under-Wychwood. The section adjacent to the village follows the course of the riverbank before diverging from it to cross flood meadows on the northern side of the river. The section opposite the village is the least accessible due to the slippery gley surface material and uneven field boundaries. It reaches London Lane through woodland where the path is narrow and overgrown. This intimate character has a very natural feel, but the overall accessibility is poor. The section towards Pudlicote Lane, away from the river is higher and drier, but here the way-marking is variable and not good overall.

## **Accessibility**

The Cotswold Hills became the first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which is a clear acknowledgement of the area's importance to in terms of its aesthetic quality and distinctiveness. Tourism has been a long-term component in the local economy and it continues to grow in terms of its contribution to the livelihood of the region.

Accessibility concerns both the physical provision that is made to enable people with a wide range of needs to access the countryside, and also the interpretation and resources that are on offer to make that physical access a more rewarding experience in terms of the appreciation and understanding that can be gained.

## **Hedgerows**

Hedgerows are an important landscape feature of this part of the Cotswold Hills, where the distinctive pale limestone field boundaries are mostly absent. Within the Lower Evenlode Valley, Cotswold stone is used primarily as a building material for houses, farms and barns, and also for some smaller enclosures such as pens and sties close to the edges of settlements. However, the characteristic stone is less abundant in this area due to the geomorphology of the alluvial soils and larger, more remote fields have been enclosed using mixed deciduous hedgerows of local provenance. Modern agricultural pressures have led to changes in the field and hedgerow patterns such that the more free-draining and productive valley side fields have coalesced to form much larger fields more suited to mechanical farming. However, in the valley bottom and close to the settlement edges, smaller, and often wetter fields have been retained as pastures, and these remain small and well enclosed.

The quality of the hedgerows is highly variable and the approaches to their management is legible across different farms. To gain the most light for crops and exclude the most weeds and pests, some hedgerows are very weak and in places could only be described as remnant.

However, on other farms there are substantial hedgerows with trees and evidence of very recent work to re-establish damaged sections.

The long mature hedgerow which separates the proposed new public open space from the adjacent property on High Street is an ancient hedgerow line. The boundaries immediately surrounding the proposed development are well established but less mature, and contain a lesser variety of species.

## **Hedgerow Trees**

Trees are an important feature of the Cotswold Landscape. Within the landscape character assessments, veteran trees are a notable feature of the landscape type and site survey in the locale identifies many ancient boundary trees that are now trees within fields.

The trees in the landscape surrounding the site are predominantly native to the locale. The adjacent Yew Tree Farm is so named for the presence of a notable tree.

Non-site native trees, conifers and exotic species are most commonly found in association with the settlement and the settlement boundary, although there are examples of mature conifers in the wider landscape such as Corsican Pine at the northern end of Pudlicote Lane.

Willow, Poplars, Dogwoods and Alder are commonplace within the river valley floodplain and these are consistent with permanent availability of water and a high water table coupled with periodic flooding.

The site itself has no trees of particular landscape value. The large poplars within the eastern boundary provide a visual screening function to sight lines from the bridleway that crosses the adjacent field, but they may become a nuisance as they become over-sized both in terms of shade cast and by the noise of their rippling leaves which is considerable in very large trees of some species within this genus.

There is evidence of very recent new hedgerow tree planting. This is extensive along both sides of Pudlicote Lane but is also observed elsewhere in the landscape to a lesser extent. These reparations are a stated objective of the landscape management guidance and evince a positive attitude towards more sustainable countryside management.

Elsewhere, Field Maple (*Acer campestre*) has been planted as a part of hedgerow restocking.

## **Trees in Fields**

Trees in fields are a remnant characteristic within the locale but a striking one. This once common landscape element has been in decline everywhere due to modern intensive agricultural processes, economic pressure on yields and larger, less manoeuvrable farm machinery. Where smaller scale field patterns have persisted and where land is less prone to improvement, these features are still evident to some degree although within pasturelands poaching is also a common malpractice. Most trees in fields are remnants of ancient field boundaries and subdivisions, although some mark subterranean features or obstacles.

Trees in fields often have a unique spreading open crowned characteristic due to the fact that they have little competition, access to abundant nutrients and receive sunlight from

dawn until dusk. These trees are the picture book trees that children draw and that feature in the idealised illustrations of tree guides and identification keys. In fact, these open grown trees represent less than 1% of trees in the landscape, since the majority of trees are contained within woodlands, forests and copses, belts or shaws.

These features are hard to restore because their re-establishment runs contrary to the economic pressure upon agriculture and also because the degree of aftercare to ensure the successful establishment and protection of an individual isolated tree in a remote location is not cost effective. Therefore, new tree plantings are generally over-stocked with the intention (seldom delivered) to thin back in favour of a smaller groups or individuals.

Trees in fields contribute significantly to the landscape character of the Evenlode Valley and together with the hedgerow trees and the field pattern of relatively small fields help to maintain a more traditional farmland aesthetic and diminish the homogenising effects of modern agri-business. Trees in fields are particularly effective at breaking up the geometry of the field pattern when seen from afar in long landscape views and this effect is most notable in summer when the trees are in full leaf and their crowns are entirely opaque.

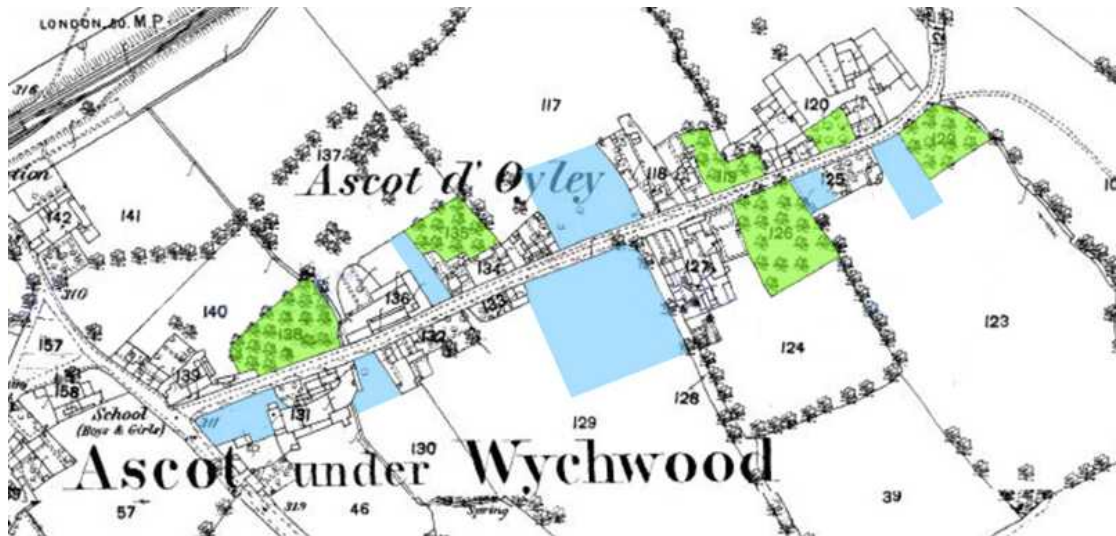
## **Field Pattern**

The field pattern of the landscape surrounding the site is divided between pasturelands and arable croplands. Due to periodic flooding of the flatter land in the valley bottom and the difficulty and increased cost of providing effective agricultural drainage in these areas, there is a concentration of pasture in these areas. Arable crops dominate the middle and upper valley slopes, and here the fields tend to be larger in order to accommodate modern farm machinery and agribusiness scale economics. In these areas, hedgerows tend to be shorter and close-cropped.

## **Settlement Character**

The distinctive linearity of the traditional Anglo-Saxon settlement pattern is evident on both High Street and Shipton Road, and it can still be observed in the overall curtilage of the rear property boundaries, many of which retain the irregular, stepped rectangular geometry of the underlying strip system of land management. Overlaid, are later influences, beginning from the Norman period with preference for broad frontages with the street and then subsequent agricultural re-organisations, which began with the conjoining of adjacent strips to form larger land parcels. Over time, changed uses, attitudes and increased security and affluence have in turn produced a change in preference for larger, detached houses with broader gardens and more space between properties.

By the time of the first Ordnance Survey County Series map of 1881, the strip system of agriculture that gave rise to the original layout of High Street has been almost completely eroded. High Street appears as a gapped settlement with several large open spaces adjoining the road, as well as paddocks, orchards and gardens. The Ordnance Survey series shows how in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries orchards were a key part of the village landscape, and that there were four large ones and several smaller ones on High Street alone. All but one of these persisted until the 1955 OS survey.



**Figure 3 - The first OS County Series map of 1881 shows the settlement pattern of High Street to be linear but spacious and well-gapped. Orchards were a salient feature of the street scene and the local economy.**

*The present day condition of High Street retains the overall linearity of the eleventh century, but is predominantly characterised by larger properties, often the result of the coalescence of adjacent cottages, barns and outbuildings. This is coupled with a (predominantly) later pattern of anterior in fill development and new build, sometimes as re-development of agricultural outbuildings that have been re-purposed to form residential property; with Yew Tree Farm being a typical example. The linear frontage of the High Street, in particular, is now markedly gapped and characterised by broad gardens and deep setbacks, particularly towards the eastern end of the village as properties and land parcels increase in size.*



**Figure 4 - The present day layout of High Street. In fill on the orchards and paddocks with new build and adaptive re-use of redundant farm buildings has drastically reduced the amount of open space that characterised the street until the latter half of the twentieth century. The former orchards (blue/green) are now residential gardens. There are still open spaces (blue) remaining adjacent to the street itself, and there are plenty of residential gardens that abut the road and provide relief from built form.**

Architectural guidance and development control during the post-war period was much more ruderal than it is today, and tended to focus on materials, amount and form rather than appropriate conformity to style, detail and overall sense of place. A number of buildings made from Cotswold Stone exhibit iconoclastic self-expression that, whilst interesting, might struggle now to be permitted. As you proceed towards the eastern end of High Street, there is a marked falling off in the heritage-related attention to detail of the later buildings, producing a mixed character, albeit a pleasant one.



**Figure 5 - On the left, a house on London Lane uses appropriate materials but in a modern style. On the right, high quality stonework is employed in these large residences on High Street, but multi-storey street facing gables, obvious garage doors and large entranceways set them apart from the more subtle, heritage-led re-developments closer to the centre of the village.**

Modern and post-modern aesthetic and practical preferences have blended with a partial observance of traditional building forms and architectural features to suit a range of tastes. To some extent, this is inevitable given the vast changes to building methods and underlying economies. The recent re-development of Corner Farm Barn is a very high quality example of skilful matching of materials and techniques to its adjacent (attached) neighbour.

## **Building Style & Materials**

The widespread use of Cotswold Stone in both vernacular and some more contemporary buildings, both residences and public, gives the village (and the wider AONB) a very distinctive built character that is instantly recognisable.

The West Oxfordshire Design Guide, 2016, produced by the local planning authority sets out the key considerations in determining what styles and materials are considered appropriate to this sensitive local. There is a presumption within the guidance that the quality of design should be outstanding in order to achieve the appropriate unison between traditional forms, styles and materials and modern requirements for building and living sustainably.

## **Landscape Character Baseline - Summary**

Ascott-Under-Wychwood is a large village located on the southern edge of the River Evenlode floodplain on the lower slopes of the broad riparian valley. The village exhibits a linear settlement pattern, which would have been associated with an agricultural strip

system behind the dwellings on the road frontage. This separation of the larger fields from the settlement by a regional of smaller scale subsistence farming is the origin of the continuous lines of small paddocks and enclosed fields that form a continuous line behind the residences on the southern side of High Street.

The Church of the Holy Trinity is Twelfth Century Grade II\* listed building which is also testament to the long establishment and history of the settlement. Shipton Road and High Street form the oldest part of the village from which later extensions have grown outwards, primarily in a westerly direction which has gradually shifted the centre of the village to focus on the village green and later public amenity buildings.

The village is briefly busy with traffic during the commuter rush and around drop off and collection times for the village school, but outside of these short peaks of activity the village roads carry very little traffic. High Street is an extended cul-de-sac and affords no through route which effectively restricts road users here to residents, visitors and service providers.

It appears that there is little noise, nuisance or hazard associated with normal vehicular traffic on High Street.

The Landscape Character baseline study has identified 13 Landscape Receptors that contribute significantly to the landscape character of the site and its environs and it is against these that the Landscape Impacts will be assessed in Chapter 7.

## 5.0 Visual Baseline

The visual survey upon which this report is based has taken place over successive seasons in different years from 2016 to present.

The Visual Impact Assessment is carried out in winter conditions when the landscape is at its most visually permeable due to the absence of leaves from trees and bushes. In this way, the potential visual impact of the proposed development is assessed and considered as a worst case scenario. It should therefore be noted that during the summer months, the site is often screened from view by intervening vegetation within the surrounding landscape, to a much greater extent than is apparent in the winter season reference photographs.

Visual detractors within the local landscape are large modern farm buildings, together with the jarring coniferous screens that are planted immediately adjacent in lines or narrow blocks in a poor attempt to conceal them. Also notable for their poor consideration of the AONB landscape are the large coniferous forestry blocks that surmount the southern edge of the valley and create a geometric edge to the horizon. Attempts to soften these impositions with broad-leaved edge planting fail in winter when the edge trees lose their leaves. In addition, the retention of single lines of scraggy and mis-shaped wind-damaged conifers within the spaces between the blocks serve no positive landscape function. In contrast, the opposite south-facing slope of the valley contains a variety of well-managed deciduous woodlands and copses that sit well within the landscape.

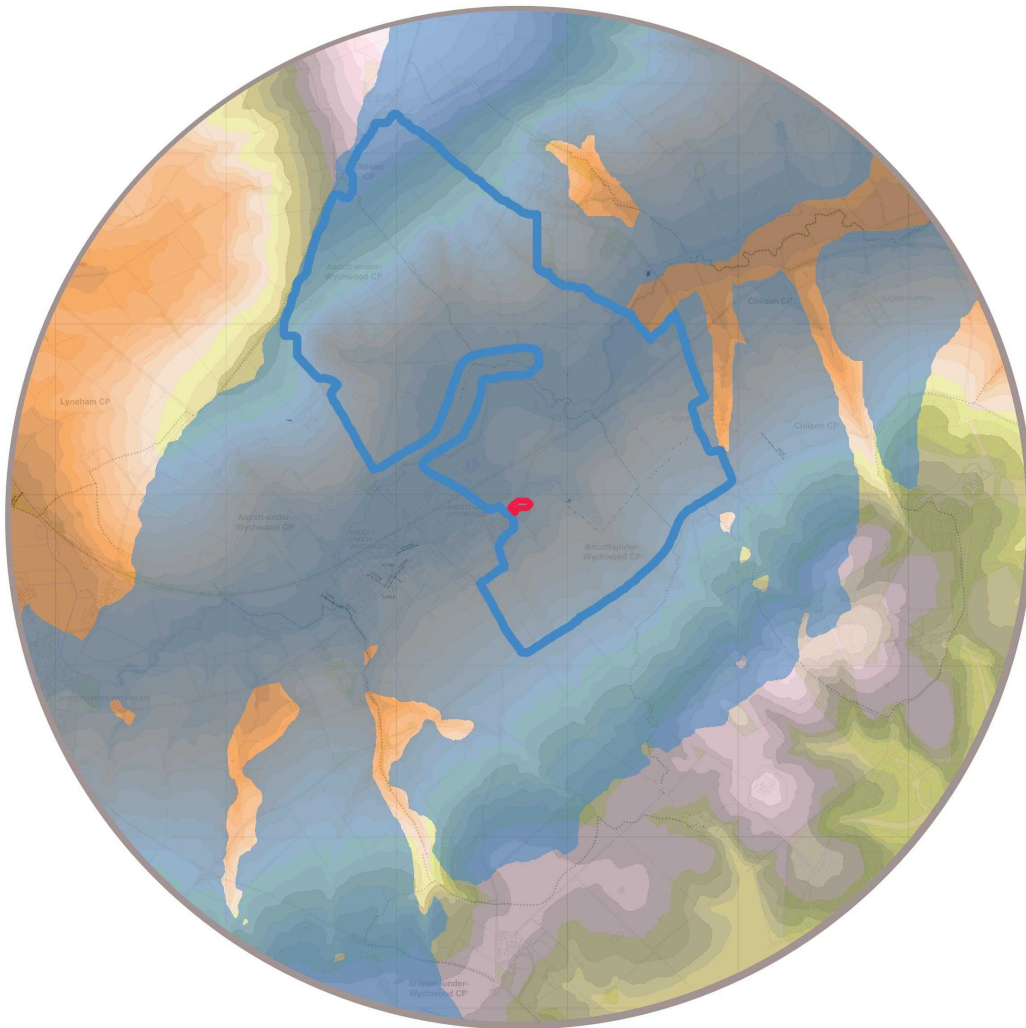
The valley landscape is very open, particularly upon the middle and upper slopes of the valley-side. Expansive views along and across the valley are frequently possible.

Prior to visiting the site, a Zone of Theoretical Visibility Study (ZTV) is generated using computer modelling of 3D contour data. However, in this case, the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) for the site is not particularly instructive given the low-rolling and near planar aspects of the two opposing valley sides. ZTV disregards vegetation cover as an obstacle to visibility and therefore suggests that most places in the valley landscape have an uninterrupted view towards the site which is clearly untrue due to the large amount of established woodland, hedgerows and mature trees that enclose the site.

At Ascott-Under-Wychwood the Evenlode Valley is very broad and consists of an opposing pair of gently undulating valley slopes that descend towards the course of the River Evenlode from either side. The northern side of the valley faces SSE and the southern side of the valley faces NNW. The gentle undulations within the otherwise largely planar slopes are seldom large enough to conceal farmsteads or buildings, and as such the underlying landform of the landscape creates opportunities for wide vistas within and across the valley. If the valley were entirely denuded of trees and built form, then it would be possible to see to everywhere from anywhere else. Due to this openness, the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) is not instructive since it discounts the above ground forms (in this case most notably trees, hedgerows and woodlands) which subdivide and compartmentalise the internal visibility within the landscape. In order to establish a more accurate map of the extent of inter-visibility within the valley landscape, a Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) has been manually surveyed by walking all of the public routes around the village in order to establish where the visual effects of the proposed development will be most pronounced, where they will be diminished and to establish the perimeter visual limit beyond which there will be none at all.



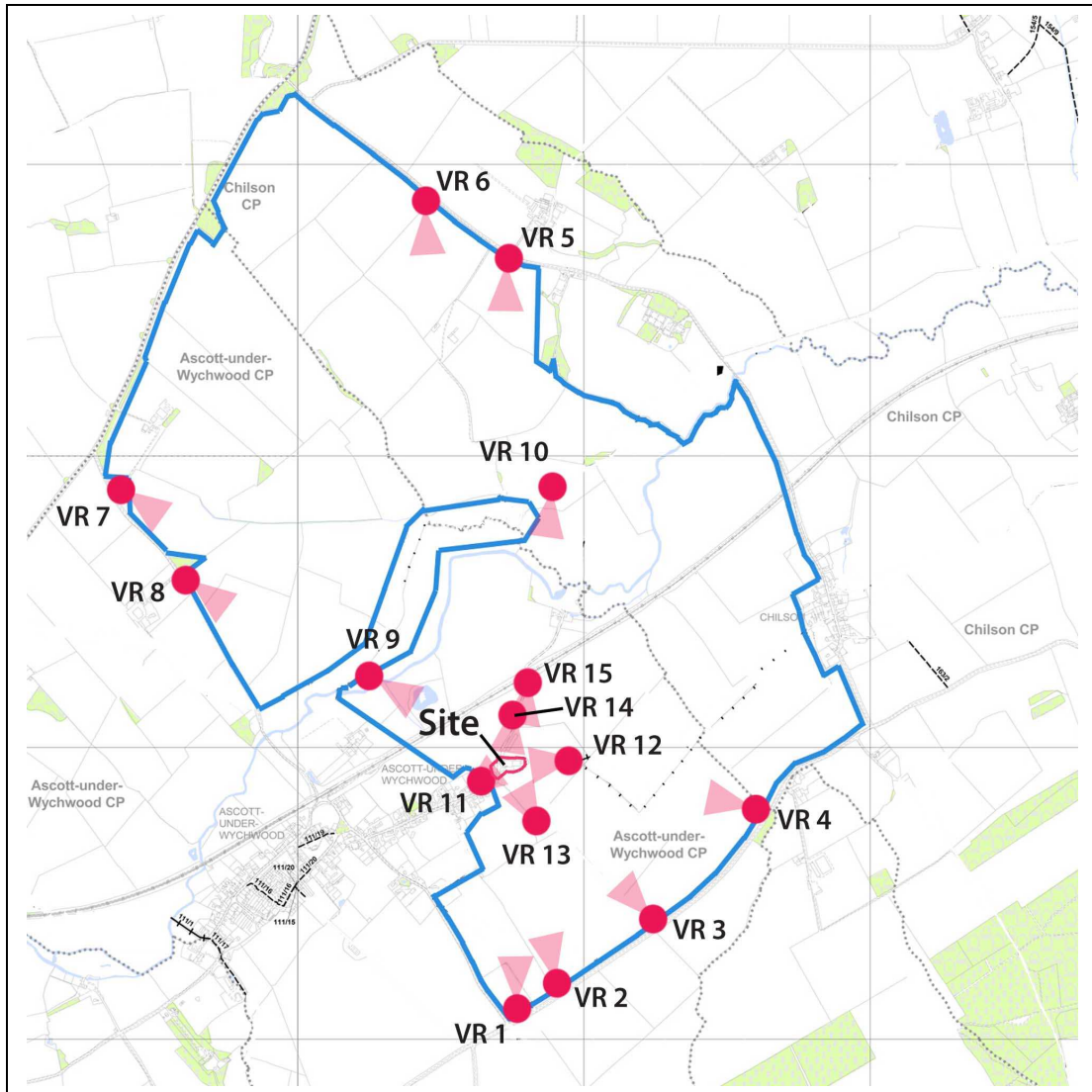
The LVIA methodology gives the greatest weight to publicly obtainable views from publicly accessible locations. These are the areas where susceptibility to change is considered to be greatest. As such, the focus of surveying work has been upon these areas. In some places, the visual limit is unclear because it occurs upon private land somewhere between two publicly accessible points. The ZVI Map therefore represents the visual envelope as a "worst case scenario", although there may be areas of private land within it from which no view of the site is possible.



**Figure 6 : ZTV / ZVI MAP w Contours**

Because the hedgerows, trees and woodlands are responsible for most of the visual occlusion within this landscape, and because nearly all of the trees and shrubs are deciduous, there is some difference between the summer and winter visual limits and the magnitude of the associated effects.

Therefore, winter images demonstrate the worst case scenario as far as inter-visibility is concerned to the various VR locations, against which the visual effects are measured.



**Figure 7 : ZVI MAP with VR Locations**

The visual survey identified 15 visual response (VR) locations from which the potential visual changes associated with the proposed development can be fairly represented. Photographs of the views from these locations are included within Appendix 2 and are considered to be representative of the views of the site from within the ZVI.

The site for the proposed development is well enclosed by the existing settlement with which it is contiguous, by trees and hedges, and also by the local topography which rises gently around the eastern side of the site to occlude most of the views from within the valley bottom and river corridor. This is partly due to the natural low-rolling character of the riparian land and also partly due to made-up ground associated with the cutting of the railway during the nineteenth century.

As a result of enclosure of the site by the adjacent village and the local topography, the principal public views towards the site are from very close range, predominantly upon the lane and the footpaths and bridleways adjacent to the farm. The remaining public views of the proposed development are very dispersed and intermittent and are limited primarily to locations where the susceptibility of viewers is low. Several of these more distant views are available sequentially from along the verge of the B4437. However, they are not available to

car drivers, because of their lowered vantage point and the thick hedges that line most of the route. Drivers with a higher vantage point may be able to gain a glimpsed view, as well as passengers on coaches and buses. The route is all but impassable to pedestrians and horse riders owing to the lack of pavement and the heavy and fast-moving traffic. Non-motorised transport and pedestrian access to this southern side of the valley is thereby mostly confined to the PRow network. Cyclists may choose to share the road, but it would not make for a leisurely ride and none have been observed during either the summer or winter surveys. However, there are some good routes where bridleways share farm roads or tracks and the footpaths occupy broad field margins. One or two of these are severely reduced in terms of their usefulness owing to the fact that they terminate at their juncture with the B4437, making them unsuitable for any but the most determined of users. One bridleway access has been closed off entirely by the roadside hedge owing to lack of use and management.



**VR1.** This view looks towards the site across the fields adjacent to the south side of the settlement. Receptors here are primarily motorists with a very few pedestrians, primarily dog walkers and more seldom horse riders or cyclists.

VR 1 is from the field margin at the junction of London Lane with the B4437. There is a broad gap in the hedgerow at this point, which permits a line of sight towards the eastern end of the village. The location is heavily oppressed by fast moving traffic. There is no pavement and the verge is soft and overgrown.

From here the white telephone microwave transmitter can clearly be seen.



**VR2** This view is from a field gateway that opens onto the B4447. Receptors here are primarily motorists and particularly motorists and passengers in high vehicles. The verge of the main road is hostile to pedestrians and the road is vary dangerous for cyclists or horse riders.

VR 2 captures the next available view towards the site from along the B4437. The foreground hedgerow with trees seen in VR1 is now out of view to the left of the viewer's field of vision. The viewer is standing at the end of this hedgerow where it joins the hedge that divides the field from the B4437 road corridor. Groups of trees that are in the middle ground of VR1 and seen again in the foreground here.

The white telephone microwave transmitter can clearly be seen, and in front of it the tidy trimmed hedgerows on either side of Mill Lane curve down towards the site. The existing cow shed building cannot be seen.

The natural focus of the view from this location is along the valley to the east and Ascott-Under-Wychwood forms an element within that view rather than being the focus of the view itself.

There are a number of jarring elements within the view. The white phone mast is visible from most places within the valley. The solar panels on the south facing roof slope of one of the properties on High Street are highlighted by their striking silvery white frames.



**VR3.** This view looks along public footpath 111/11 directly towards the site. Receptors here are walkers upon the PRoW. Road users can obtain a glimpse of this view as they pass the opening in the hedgerow that admits the footpath onto the verge of the B4437.

VR 3 is situated where the footpath 111/11 meets the B4437. From this location, the roof of the cow shed is visible as well as most of the walls. There is a hedgerow between the viewer and the building which when cropped and bare in winter does not occlude the view at all, but which would create partial occlusion of the view in summer.

As with VR 2, the main view from this location is along the valley towards the east and the cow shed appears at the very left-hand edge of this scene.



**VR4.** This view to the north-west is available because a farm track provides an opening in the dense roadside hedge that forms a continuous boundary to the verge of the B4437. Receptors here are motorists and passengers in high vehicles. Car drivers and their passengers will only obtain a momentary glimpse through the gateway.

VR 4 is from further to the east along the B4437 looking towards Ascott-Under-Wychwood through an un-gated access track which creates a short gap in the otherwise continuous line of the roadside hedgerow.

This is a public location although it is very hazardous to access by any means other than by a motorised vehicle. The access is not public and there is no lay-by or turning point.



**VR5.** This view looks south across the valley from the tiny hamlet of Pudlicote. Receptors here are local walkers who would need to mount the bank in order to obtain a view. Motorists on Pudlicote Lane do not obtain a view because of the sunken character of the lane and the continuous high hedge alongside.

*This view is not taken from the route of Pudlicote Lane itself which is too deeply sunken and too densely bounded by hedges and trees to obtain any view towards Ascott-Under-Wychwood. The view is taken through a gateway into an adjacent field. It is not strictly a public view as it requires the viewer to step through the gateway and observe the view to the left (south-west).*



**VR6.** This view is obtained through a field gateway further north along Pudlicote Lane. Motorists on the roadway are situated too low to obtain a view. Receptors here are walkers. Although the route is very enclosed and potentially dangerous, there is very little traffic.

*VR 6 is taken from a gateway further to the north along Pudlicote Lane than VR5. Similarly, the gateway itself provides the elevation required to obtain the view, and any view from the roadway itself is occluded by the bank and hedge at the side of the road.*

*In this location, a great deal of effort has been recently expended to improve the thickness, height and integrity of the roadside hedgerows. The cut line of the hedges has been raised by approximately one metre and new trees have been planted within the hedgerows at regular intervals on both sides of the lane.*

*VR 5 and VR 6 represent the only public views of the proposed development site from the entire length of Pudlicote Lane. However, a large family of similar private views will be obtained from the upper reaches of the valley side across the adjacent arable farmland.*

*There is an extensive belt of attractive, well-managed deciduous woodland that shrouds the top of the valley side and encloses the A361 Road as it descends along the northern valley ridge towards Shipton-under-Wychwood. By the time the viewer has emerged from behind*

*the dense woodland, the topography no longer permits any view into the Evenlode Valley. As a result there are no views of the site from anywhere along the entire length of the A361.*

*In order to return to Ascott-Under-Wychwood the viewer descends London Lane towards the level-crossing in the centre of the village. This route is busier with local traffic than Pudlicote Lane but much less busy than the main routes along the valley sides, the A361 and the B4437 to the north and south respectively. There is no pavement and all users including pedestrians must share the main carriageway of the lane.*

*The views from this northern portion of London Lane are glimpsed views that only become available intermittently when gaps in the distant woodland and nearer hedgerows and trees come into alignment.*



**VR7.** This view looks south-east from the close to the northern end of London Lane, close to the A361. Receptors here are primarily recreational walkers, some pedestrians and southbound motorists.

*VR 7 is from close to the entrance drive to Ascott Hill Farm.*



**VR8.** This filtered view is one of a sequence available from London Lane as it approaches Ascott Under Wychwood from the north. As the viewer descends the valley side more and more hedgerow and groups of trees combine to occlude views from further south. Receptors here are motorists as well as walkers and pedestrians although the route is not popular and there is no pavement.

*VR 8 appears through a foreground line of mature oak trees that stand in line across an arable field and demarcate a former field boundary.*

*As the viewer descends the valley side, the treescape of the valley floor occludes almost all of the internal vistas within the valley bottom. Returning into the centre of the village via London Lane offers no further views.*



**VR9.** This view is from the Oxfordshire Way at its closest point of approach to the proposed re-development site. Receptors here are recreational walkers that have high sensitivity to change.

*The Oxfordshire Way is a popular regional trail that passes through the river corridor on the north side of the River Evenlode. However, even in winter when the trees and shrubs are bare, the density of vegetation within the river corridor occludes all views towards the site.*



**VR10.** This view looks towards the eastern end of the village from the Oxfordshire Way. Receptors here are recreational walkers on the regional trail who have a high level of sensitivity to change.

*VR 10 is recorded further to the east along the Oxfordshire Way, looking towards Ascott-under-Wychwood from the north.*



**VR11.** This view represents a small family of views from close to the end of High Street. There is no pavement and walkers tend to meander across the road itself. Receptors here are recreational walkers, horse riders, cyclists and also residents travelling by car and their passengers. It is a no-through route and most non-resident traffic will be associated with deliveries and services.

*VR 11 shows a view from close to the eastern end of High Street, in front of the Grade II listed Yew Tree Farmhouse.*



**VR12.** This view is from Bridleway 111/10 as it approaches Ascott-under-Wychwood from the direction of Chilson to the east. It is a popular and heavily used route. Receptors here are recreational walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

*VR 12 shows the view from the Bridleway 111/10 as it diagonally crosses the small arable field that surrounds the site on the northern, eastern and southern sides.*



**VR13.** This view is from footpath 111/11 and is representative of the views from this part of the PRoW network which is only well used up until this point. Receptors here are primarily recreational walkers.

*VR 13 shows the view from the footpath that runs along the mature hedgerow boundary to the south-west of the site. There is an informal network of walks used by dog owners that sets out along the settlement edge from here, but these routes have no views towards the site due to the very established hedgerow boundary seen at the left-hand side of the image.*



**VR14.** This view is from Mill Lane, adjacent to the site. Receptors here are recreational walkers and residents accessing the very few properties associated with Ascott Mill. The route is open to motorised traffic but it is an elongated cul-de-sac used only for access and services.

*VR 14 shows the view from Mill Lane looking towards the site at close proximity. The large cow shed roof can be seen through the trees in mid-winter although when the trees are in leaf it is almost completely occluded.*





**VR15.** This view is from Mill Lane, the cul-de-sac that leads to Ascott Mill and the dwellings associated with it. Receptors here are recreational walkers as well as a small number of residents who use the route for access.

VR 15 shows the view from Mill Lane as the ground rises to cross over the railway line. This is a limited local vantage point from which the large roof of the cow shed at Yew Tree Farm can be seen clearly. The horizontal grey expanse of the cowshed roof is one of the more dominant features in the landscape with only the cluster of village houses at the right hand side of the view comprising (together) a stronger element of built form.

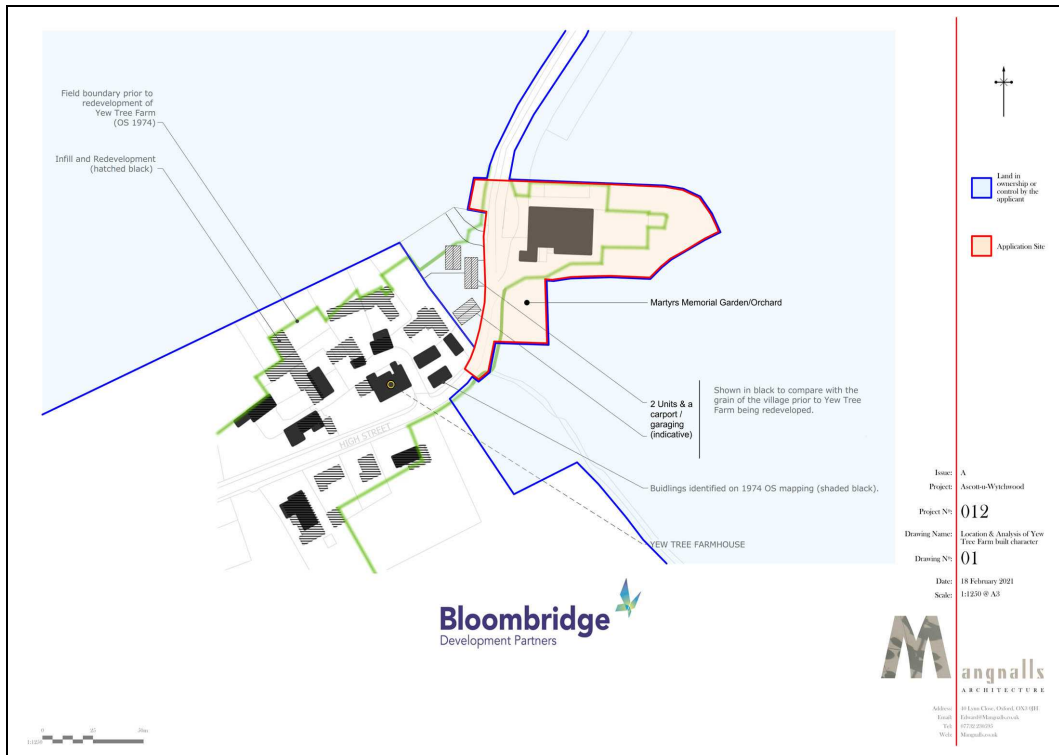
## Visual Baseline - Summary

*The potential visual effects associated with the site are very limited. The gently undulating valley sides are deeply furrowed with dips and gullies that create quite a complex low rolling landscape to the lower parts of the valley slopes. Whilst the valley floor is essentially flat and the upper valley slopes are broadly planar, the lower slopes are much more varied and convoluted than they appear from a distance.*

*In the case of the land at Yew Tree Farm, views from the north side of the River Evenlode are partially obscured by a large low bank or hill which is contoured differently from the other undulations in the valley bottom and may represent spoil from the railway cutting.*

*The plateau of the river corridor is well wooded with a mixture of mature and veteran trees and dense copses and coppices of water-loving tree species such as poplars and willows.*

# 6.0 Description of the Proposed Development



**Figure 8 : Existing Plan of built form at the eastern end of High Street. Buildings shown in black are as mapped by OS in 1974. The hatched and grey buildings have been re-developed for residential use or built as infill since 1974.**



**Figure 9 : Proposed Site Plan for re-development of the cow shed and yard at Yew Tree Farm.**

The proposed development site is located entirely upon 'previously developed' land which is comprised of a large, disused concrete and asbestos cow shed and its associated yard which is an area of concrete hard standing. It is accepted that agricultural development does not formally qualify as 'PDL' but, in landscape terms, it is nonetheless distinct from open, greenfield spaces and this point is accepted by West Oxfordshire, for example in relation to the consideration of the planning permission for residential development on the adjoining Dutch Barns. It is very unlikely that any form of restoration of the cow shed will be achieved, except through some form of redevelopment, as proposed by the applicant. Hence the 'previously developed' element is a material consideration, consistent with Policy H2, and probably therefore a distinguishing factor from other greenfield development in the AONB.

The proposed development site is approximately level and slightly raised above the adjacent road, Mill Lane. The surrounding ground slopes gently down towards the flood plain of the River Evenlode to the north.

The proposed re-development comprises a small site of up to 7 dwellings to be built within the 'previously developed' footprint of the existing farm building and concrete yard to the south of Mill Lane. A mix of dwellings is proposed. This is consistent with Policy H2 on page 47 of the adopted Local Plan. This policy links to the 'General Principles' of Policy OS2 on page 33 of the plan and, in this regard, the landscape and visual evidence confirms that the proposed development respects the village character and local distinctiveness, helps maintain vitality, and is:

- Proportionate and appropriate in scale to its context
- A logical complement to the existing scale and pattern of development
- Compatible with adjoining uses, and
- Enhances local landscape and the setting of the village

The proposed development consolidates the existing built form at the eastern end of High Street and completes the redevelopment of Yew Tree Farm that was commenced in the 1980s with the adaptive re-use of the habitable farm buildings. The high quality designs and the correct vernacular choices of materials, form, orientation and scale mean that the re-development of the remainder of Yew Tree Farm will provide a conclusive finish to the settlement with a definitive sense of place, as opposed to the present tapering off through a degraded agricultural hinterland.

The proposed Martyrs' Garden/Orchard provides a destination that gives purpose to a stroll along High Street, whether it functions as a turning point or a rest upon a longer walk into the open countryside. It commemorates and interprets the story of the Ascott Martyrs, creating a local point of interest which will become a way point for recreational walkers on the long-distance trails that High Street connects. This in turn will bring additional trade and exposure to the local businesses within the village, notably the shop and pub.

The landscape assessment recognises that even in its present condition the site represents a histo-cultural connection with the primarily agricultural activities upon which the village was originally founded. However, the last vestiges of agricultural occupation and use have now become deleterious upon the wider village setting and represent a modern epoch in

*agriculture which is at odds with the older and more pastoral feel of the village centre. Moreover, the buildings represent an increasing liability in terms of safety, potential misuse, vandalism or contamination. As such, there is no merit, present or predicted, in their retention, even in part.*

*The site is distinct from the highly valued surrounding landscape both visually and in landscape terms and does not represent an important area of open space or provide any key facility for the residents of the village. The sole public function of the land is to provide a vehicle turning point, albeit upon private land, and this function will be retained and consolidated within the proposed re-development.*

*The proposed re-development has been designed in an iterative manner to take account of local consultation, and also in accordance with the Cotswolds AONB Design Guide. The resulting high quality design is predicted to have a beneficial landscape effect upon the character of the village and will not therefore cause harm to the Lower Evenlode Valley Landscape Character Area. The re-development proposals are in accordance with policies OS2, BE2, BE4 and H2 and NE3 of the Local Plan 2011. These policies seek to ensure that new development is of a high quality that respects the character and appearance of villages, and that protects important areas of open space and historical importance, and that it does not harm the landscape setting of villages.*

## 7.0 Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment

*This chapter of the assessment considers the predicted landscape and visual effects of the proposed development on the landscape character and the visual amenity of receptors in the surrounding area.*

### Site Features

*The proposed development will not significantly alter the existing topography of the site. Minor grading of the site to facilitate vehicular access will not have an adverse visual impact.*

*The ridge heights of the proposed buildings are marginally higher than the existing cow shed roof, but are much less substantial in terms of bulk, overall scale and are much more in keeping with the scale, pitch and arrangement of roofs within the adjacent settlement.*

## Landscape Impact

*The predicted landscape effects upon the landscape character in the locale are assessed against the Landscape Receptors (LRs) derived from the baseline study. These receptors represent the principal characteristics giving rise to the distinctiveness of the locale identified within the overarching landscape character assessment and strategic policy documents, together with those identified at a local level via field study. These landscape receptors are grouped into high level strategic and statutory designations, local level landscape considerations and individual landscape characteristics that predominate within the village and its surroundings.*

### AONB

*The susceptibility to change and the landscape value of the AONB are both high. The landscape sensitivity of the AONB is very high.*

#### Regarding the special qualities of the AONB

*The special qualities of the AONB are respected and enhanced by the proposed development. The landscape character of the river valley is unchanged by the proposed re-development. The enclosure and architectural quality of the site are improved. The tranquillity of the area is adversely affected in a very minor way - only because the farm is currently inoperative for livestock. The accessible landscape is improved. The opportunity to commemorate specific local heritage in the locale is advanced by the proposals.*

#### Regarding encroachment and precedent within the AONB

*The proposed new buildings are within the previously developed footprint and there is no substantial increase in the volume of built form. The proposed development is entirely within a previously developed site and the proposed built form is contained within the previously developed footprint of the existing buildings and concrete hard standing upon the site. Ridge heights are within acceptable parameters for the location with no*

inappropriately tall buildings or high roofs. Therefore, the proposed development does not represent any encroachment of development upon the AONB.

The proposed development is substantially more in keeping with the existing settlement of Ascott-under-Wychwood than the existing farm buildings that it will replace. This beneficial landscape effect proffers a good precedent for wider development within the AONB.

#### Regarding AONB Sustainability

The development will make a positive contribution in terms of sustainability because of the internal use of modern building techniques and technologies that will ensure that the building stock is efficient in terms of energy consumption and because it has a long life-expectancy. The additional residents that the proposed development brings to the community will be at a scale that will contribute to the support of local amenities such as the village shop, without creating an influx that will swamp existing services. Above all, development of the scale proposed in the West Oxfordshire 'Villages' is consistent, in principle, with the West Oxfordshire Local Plan adopted in September 2018.

The proposed re-development will help to maintain the vitality of the village by increasing the custom for local businesses and helping to sustain demand for essential village services. The Martyrs' Garden will provide a local point of interest, which will serve to attract walkers and picnickers and generate additional passing trade for the village shops and hostelrys.

#### Regarding Local Plan Policy on the AONB

The development complies with the policies EH1: Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and EH2: Landscape Character, of the Local Plan 2031, which seeks to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. The proposed development also conforms to Policies CE1: Landscape and CE3: Local Distinctiveness of the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan (2018-2023), which seeks to ensure that the landscape character, tranquillity and special qualities of the AONB are conserved and where possible enhanced. The proposed Martyr's Garden is also predicted to have a beneficial effect upon policies UE1: Sustainable Tourism, UE2: Access & Recreation and UE3: Health & Well-being.

#### Conclusions on the AONB

It is the finding of this LVIA that the magnitude of impact of the development upon the landscape character of the AONB as a whole would be negligible. Because of its small scale in comparison to the size of the AONB, it would not be sufficient to compromise the overall integrity and purpose of the designation in terms of precedent. Although minor landscape effects are exerted upon the special qualities of the AONB, these are, on balance, considered to be predominantly beneficial. The proposed development is also beneficial in terms of the contribution that it makes through its conformity with the policy direction of the AONB and local plan.

Overall, it is considered that the proposed re-development will have a moderate beneficial landscape effect in relation to the AONB's policies. It is consistent in principle with the Local Plan and the good design and limitation to the 'previously developed' elements of the site address precedent and encroachment concerns.

## **Sense of Place / Genius Loci**

*Sensitivity - High*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effects upon sense of place / genius loci is minor and beneficial.**

The well-treed hinterland that surrounds Ascott-Under-Wychwood is one of the striking characteristics of the village when observed from a distance. This appearance is accentuated by the relatively sparse distribution of woodland within the Evenlode Valley itself, with large woodland blocks being confined to the ridges above the valley sides. The existing site partially conforms to this aesthetic because of the well-stocked and mature boundary to the east and north of the site. However, the southern boundary is low and makes the site much more open. The proposed re-development will create a public open space adjacent to Mill Lane that will include additional hedgerow and tree planting. This will continue the intimate small-scale feature of paddocks and enclosures that cloak the village along the linear feature of the ancient strip system.

The proposed re-development shows a careful consideration of the settlement pattern and the design exhibits many features that will ensure that the new buildings and their environs fit well within the Genius Loci of the village edge. Moreover, the existing farmyard and disused buildings do not exhibit this conformity at all, at least to any appreciable extent (in relation to the cow shed) that could be described as positive in any way.

## **Historic Landscape Character**

*Sensitivity - High*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effect upon historic landscape character is moderate/minor and beneficial.**

The re-development of the cow shed represents a dual opportunity to remove from the village landscape an unsightly building that is too hazardous to be re-purposed (and in any case it is now visually inappropriate for its setting), whilst, at the same time, accommodating a development layout that is sensitive to the scale and historic pattern of built-form within High Street. However, it is imperative that the materials and detailing of the final scheme draw upon the best examples of what has already been achieved elsewhere in High Street.

The Martyrs' Garden/Orchard is a proposed new commemorative open space that is intended to be a distinctive focus for the continuation and preservation of the legacy of the Ascott Martyrs, 1873. This will have a minor beneficial effect upon the histo-cultural landscape both in terms of its cultural commemoration of the Martyrs themselves and the historic orchard landscapes that were once a very prominent feature of High Street and have now been reduced to a few remnant, dotted trees.

## **Tranquillity**

*Sensitivity - Medium*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Adverse)*

**Landscape effect upon tranquillity is minor and adverse.**

The additional nine dwellings that comprise this re-development proposal are predicted to have only a minor adverse effect upon the tranquillity of High Street. Beyond this very immediate local effect, the small number of additional traffic movements within the wider village is predicted to be insignificant.

In terms of visual tranquillity on the short section of Mill Lane adjacent to the existing farmyard, the occlusion of traffic movements on the B4437 by the proposed landscaping and The Martyr's Garden is predicted to be beneficial.

## **PRoWs**

*Sensitivity - High*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effect upon Public Rights of Way is moderate/minor beneficial.**

The perception of the landscape and the settlement character will be improved for walkers on the adjacent roads, PRoWs and bridleways owing to the removal of the dilapidated and unattractive cow shed and its replacement with new buildings more in keeping with the traditional built character of the village.

The Martyrs' Garden will be located at a key juncture on the PRoW network at the edge of the village and will form a natural focal point and rest stop.

## **Oxfordshire Way**

*Sensitivity - Very High*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Negligible*

**Landscape effect upon the Oxfordshire Way is negligible.**

The Oxfordshire Way is a popular, named regional trail that brings passing tourism to Ascott-under-Wychwood in a sustainable manner. It has much higher footfall than most of the other local PRoWs and therefore deserves special attention. It does not pass close by the site and is separated from it by the River Evenlode. The settlement character of Ascott-under-Wychwood is perceived by walkers on the trail and the perceived quality is mostly high, other than for some modern agricultural sheds. The proposed re-development is too far separated from the trail to have a discernible impact, however, it is predicted that any negligible influence exerted would be beneficial following the re-development.



## Accessibility

*Sensitivity - Medium*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effect upon tranquillity is minor and beneficial.**

*There is a paucity of accessible open space in the countryside surrounding Ascott-under-Wychwood. There is no open access land or CRoW dedicated land and access to the countryside is via the linear routes of the PRoW network only.*

*In terms of practical accessibility, provision for all-ability access is mostly poor. Trails are frequently uneven or degraded. There are several pinch points where perambulators requiring walking aids would be unable to proceed such as the narrow footbridge over the River Evenlode close to Ascott Mill.*

*The Martyrs' Garden that is proposed as part of the re-development of the Yew Tree Farm farmyard will be a welcome addition at the margin of the village, and it will offer a new public open space that will service an existing informal demand for better access to the countryside.*

## Hedgerows

*Sensitivity - Medium*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effect upon tranquillity is minor and beneficial.**

*The proposed development will bring the existing hedgerow boundaries back into active management and improve their health and landscape value. Proposed new hedgerow planting will increase the amount of hedgerow surrounding the site and this will serve to integrate the development with the appearance of the existing settlement.*

## Hedgerow Trees

*Sensitivity - Medium*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effect upon tranquillity is minor and beneficial.**

*The inclusion of new trees within the boundaries of the proposed housing development and also in association with the boundaries and commemorative planting of the Martyr's Garden will increase the amount of hedgerow over-storey in the location. This is very much in keeping with the appearance of the existing settlement edge boundaries that run along the length of High Street.*

## Trees in Fields

*Whilst trees in fields are a strong feature within this section of the Evenlode Valley including several remnant ancient boundaries and a number of notable veteran trees, the proposed re-development has no impact upon this landscape element.*

## Field Pattern

*Sensitivity - Medium*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effect upon tranquillity is minor and beneficial.**

The existing concrete farmyard of Yew Tree Farm is much more open than the enclosed perimeter of gardens and paddocks that shrouds most of the hinterland of High Street. The proposed addition of new enclosing landscaping, planting and The Martyrs' Garden will replicate this established pattern of well treed enclosure and extend it to incorporate the re-development.

## Settlement Character

*Sensitivity - High*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effect upon settlement character is moderate/minor and beneficial.**

The design process has been iterative and adaptations to the design have taken account of the feedback from local consultations. The mass and scale of the existing built form on the site is overbearing and dominant within the landscape. The proposed forms are more diffuse and distributed and will integrate better with the existing roof layout of the settlement. The layout, orientation and depth (set-back from Mill Lane) are appropriate and in keeping with existing properties and patterns along High Street.

Analysis of successive estate and ordnance survey maps shows how High Street has maintained a spacious, open feel with plenty of relief from built form and gaps through which to view the hinterland of paddocks and the wider countryside. Most of what were roadside paddocks and orchards have now been enclosed as residential gardens, but the pattern of open space is still very apparent and legible from the public street. Ascott under Wychwood is a typical linear village – with gaps.

The proposed development, on the residual part of Yew Tree Farm, will be contiguous with the existing settlement, including the redevelopment of the Dutch Barns, and presents the opportunity to create an appropriate orchard with appropriate histo-cultural significance for the setting, consistent with the gaps present in the settlement character. It will form a resolution to the organic eastward development of High Street depicted on the Enclosure award map of 1838.

## Building Style & Materials

*Sensitivity - High*

*Magnitude of Landscape Effect - Minor (Beneficial)*

**Landscape effect upon tranquillity is moderate/minor and beneficial.**

The building styles are in keeping with the strong architectural identity of the settlement. The proposed development is of a scale, mass and amount that is proportional to the site and in keeping with the density and settlement character of High Street with which it is contiguous. The proposed development will utilise construction materials that are widely used within and contribute significantly to the local vernacular.

*Overall, it is considered that the landscape effects associated with the proposed re-development are beneficial due to the fact that the existing farm buildings have become obsolete and are inappropriate in terms of scale and materials, and that the proposed residential re-development has been designed via an iterative process in accordance with local design guidance and the specific opportunities that the site affords.*

## **Landscape Character - Summary**

*The proposed development is for a small group of new houses at the eastern end of High Street at the junction with Mill Lane, on the eastern side of the village of Ascott-under-Wychwood.*

*In terms of design, albeit at outline stage, the new dwellings are appropriate to the settlement in terms of their proposed scale, roof pitch, form and orientation and the materials used in the designs are in keeping with the local vernacular and reflect the appropriate design guidance for the locale.*

*The outcome of the landscape assessment is that the site itself will experience a minor beneficial landscape effect as a result of the change from a concrete agricultural farmyard and large concrete and asbestos cow shed to a small group of residences constructed and arranged in the local vernacular.*

*The landscape effects associated with the changes to the site are not experienced widely, as the landscape elements that are altered by the site are small parts or sections of extensive elements or networks that extend across the landscape as a whole. The changes are all small in scale, in terms of the overall amount, and they mostly represent beneficial landscape effects brought about by improvements in quality and/or increases in quantity in respect of the individual landscape elements.*

*The hedgerows will be improved qualitatively in terms of the restoration and management of the existing resource and in addition there will be new lengths of planting around the public open space.*

*The existing trees will be retained and a small amount of new planting stock will be introduced that correctly reflects the local native ecology.*

*Existing hedgerow trees will be retained and brought into active management, which will improve their form and longevity, and also increase their ecological value.*

*The majority of the landscape elements that make up the unique landscape setting around the site are recipients of beneficial landscape effects that are minor or very minor in terms of overall scale. A small number of landscape elements receive no effects and are not altered by the proposed development.*

*The adverse landscape effect upon tranquillity in the locale is minor in terms of magnitude and does not require mitigation.*

*The proposal would comply with the local development plan, as it would make an overall positive contribution to the character and appearance of the village.*

*In addition, it provides a vehicle for the removal of a redundant and dilapidated building which significantly detracts from the historic built character of the adjacent settlement, and also precludes any further degradation of the derelict farmyard in terms of vandalism or contamination.*

*It is predicted that the proposed re-development will not harm the Lower Evenlode Valley Landscape Character Area and that the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB will be preserved.*

## Visual Impact

From the south, the visual changes brought about by the proposed development are only experienced from public locations upon the fast-moving B4437 road and from the two adjacent PRowS.

The B4437 is dominated by fast-moving traffic, which is near continuous at peak times. Pedestrians are excluded from the route by the lack of any adjacent footpath and the soft and uneven verges. Horse riding along the route is too hazardous and the route is only suited to the most determined cyclists.

Overall, the susceptibility of visual receptors at VR 1, 2, and 4 is low. VR 3 is at the junction of the footpath with the main road and will have a higher susceptibility due to the recreational nature of potential users, although this elevation is limited by the fact that the footpath has no wider connectivity other than with the hazardous main route. As the footpath does not form part of a safe looping route, and because of the very unpleasant walking environment on the road verge, the footpath is not well-used at this point. Therefore, susceptibility is low-medium.

The magnitude of the proposed changes varies along the route of the B4437 as the view changes. VR 1 is at the visual limit and there will be no view in summer and only the possibility of very minor glimpses of the new roof ridges in wintertime. Sensitivity is high due to the confluence of the various corridors and rights of way that pass through the crossroads.

At VR 2, one of the intervening hedgerows seen at VR1 is now behind the viewer and the amount of visual screening between the viewer and the proposed development is reduced. Viewers in this location are less numerous due to the remoteness of the location and susceptibility is therefore reduced. The magnitude of the predicted change remains minor.

At VR 3, the viewer is at the point of closest approach between the B4437 and the proposed development site. At this point there is a large gap in the roadside hedge and this gives access to a view across the arable fields towards the site. The available view is limited at the road edge but continuous along the perpendicular footpath. Sensitivity is medium due to the lower susceptibility of the footpath which does not form a safe circular route. The magnitude of the predicted visual change is minor and beneficial due to the improved appearance of the site following the re-development.

VR4 represents views from the B4437 east of the site. Access to views from along the road is mostly limited to vehicle drivers and their passengers due to the fast-paced road with no pavement and the uneven, overgrown verge. The predicted visual change is minor and beneficial.

Travelling away from VR4 eastwards on the B4437 reveals no further opportunities for a view towards the proposed development. The road towards the village of Chilson is equally prevented from obtaining any view by the local low-rolling topography of the valley side. No further vantage points are obtained through the low lying river floodplain and the village of Chilson has no public views of the proposed development.

At VR 5, the viewer has exited Chilson to the north via Pudlicote Lane and has recovered enough elevation for views across the valley to be possible despite local variations in

topography. However, Pudlicote Lane is a deeply sunken road between two very large and established hedgerows. There is no opportunity for public views from within the route of the sunken road itself and the views available at VR 5 and VR 6 are recorded through gateways that are elevated above the trafficked surface of the road. Therefore, road users of all types will obtain no view and only a small number of viewers who leave the main thoroughfare and ascend the steep embankment will be able to see towards Ascott-Under-Wychwood via the gateway. Therefore, susceptibility is low. Magnitude is minor and beneficial due to the removal of the oversized cow shed and its proposed replacement with a cluster of buildings more in keeping with the character of the adjacent settlement.

At VR6, walkers may obtain a similar view to VR 5, also via a field gate. It is a slightly more elevated but also a slightly more remote view and susceptibility remains low. Overall, sensitivity is medium and the magnitude of the predicated visual change is minor and beneficial.

The northern end of Pudlicote Lane is entirely shrouded by mature oak plantation and this woodland also obscures any longer distance views towards the proposed development. The belt of woodland flanks the southern side of the A361 and continues to block all views into the Evenlode Valley until the road has descended the valley side sufficiently for the local topography to prevent any further views. As such, the A361 obtains no views of Ascott-Under-Wychwood at all.

Returning towards the village of Ascott-Under-Wychwood via London Lane the viewer descends rapidly. There are several mature hedgerows and small copses situated between London Lane and the village, as well as some very mature veteran oak trees. Views towards the site are dependent upon the alignment of gaps within the tree cover and even the large roof of the existing cow shed is seldom visible and even less noticeable. These filtered or glimpsed views are further diminished when there are leaves upon the trees and hedges.

At VR 7 susceptibility is low due to the remote location of Ascott Hill Farm and the absence of any footpath. The magnitude of change is minor and beneficial due to the proposed visual improvement of the site.

Continuing down London Lane to VR 8, the available views are decreased as the landscape begins to flatten out. This family of views is comprised of glimpses between mature trees. It is a remote location with low recreational use. The magnitude of the predicted visual change is minor and beneficial.

Ascott-under-Wychwood is well enclosed by mature boundary trees and the wet woodland species associated with the floodplain. Once the viewer descends into the floodplain the overall woodland cover becomes too dense to permit any views towards the site.

At VR 9, upon the Oxfordshire Way, the viewer comes to the point of closest approach between the popular PRoW route and the proposed re-development site. However, there is no view of the proposed re-development site and therefore no change to the visual amenity of this section of the route.

VR 10 is also upon the Oxfordshire Way and represents a group of glimpsed views through trees that are available from north of the site as the regional trail climbs out of the floodplain. Sensitivity is high due to the popularity of the route, its regional significance and the high value of the surrounding landscape. However, the cow shed roof is barely visible

with the naked eye due to the density and depth of tree cover, and the magnitude of the predicted change is therefore negligible.

This visual impact assessment also includes a range of visual receptors that are in close proximity to the proposed re-development site. Magnitude is automatically elevated in these locations because the proposed changes will occupy a larger proportion of any available views.

VR 11 is at the eastern end of High Street and has a narrow view into the open meadow area on the south side of Mill Lane. The derelict cow shed occupies the opposite part of the view and is neither attractive nor appropriate in terms of materials or scale/form. The proposed building area is predicted to encroach upon this view slightly more from the left-hand side than the cow shed does. However, the new development will conform to current AONB design guidance and will be much more attractive and appropriate to the locale than the existing building. The proposed Martyrs' Garden/Orchard may also reduce the impression of openness at this end of the street, however, the visual effect is not widely felt. The removal of the cow shed and replacement by a small group of appropriately designed houses and a commemorative garden/orchard is considered to have a moderate/minor beneficial visual effect upon this view from the end of High Street.

VR 12 represents a sequence of public views from bridleway 111/10 that crosses the field adjacent to the farmyard of Yew Tree Farm on the south side of Mill Lane. The route is popular with walkers, horse riders and cyclists because it offers a long route through the landscape to the village of Chilson and beyond, on a route that is free from hazardous traffic. Sensitivity is therefore high. The magnitude of the visual effects received at and close to this VR is moderate and closely related to the immediate proximity of the proposed development. The visual effects are beneficial due to the proposed removal of the existing cow shed, which is the visual element that detracts from the existing scene, and its proposed replacement with housing that is more in keeping with the character and style of the settlement.

VR 13 is on the public footpath that sets out perpendicularly to Mill Lane in the direction of the B4437. This short section of the footpath is much more trodden than the length that extends to the busy road behind the viewer. This is because the formal adopted path network has ceased to serve a useful function due to the intersection with the very busy road. Instead, local users have created an informal network of routes along the nearby field boundaries on privately owned farmland. Sensitivity is high and the magnitude of the proposed changes is predicted to be moderate, but beneficial based upon the visual improvements to the site.

At VR 14 the viewer is situated upon Mill Lane slightly to the north of the site. The visual sensitivity in the locale is high as the route is both a public road and forms a section of the wider PRow network. Due to the close proximity of the site, the magnitude of change is moderate, but beneficial because of the visual improvements to the site that the proposed development is predicted to bring.

VR 15 is further along Mill Lane to the north. As the viewer recedes from the site, the key visual features cease to occupy such a large proportion of the view. Sensitivity remains high and the magnitude of the predicted visual effects remains moderate because although the southern part of the site is well screened by trees from this location, the viewer has become

*slightly more elevated and the northern part of the site is seen quite clearly. The proposed development is predicted to constitute a beneficial visual change.*

*As with all development sites, the magnitude of any visual changes are accentuated when the viewer is in very close proximity to the development. There is a point at which the site will occupy such a large proportion of the available view that it is inevitable that the magnitude of any change will become first moderate and then substantial. At Yew Tree Farm, this visual envelope is constrained to a short section of Mill Lane and short sections of the adjacent PRowS. However, the proposed development will change the visual appearance of the site in ways that are, on balance, more beneficial than adverse: owing to less bulk, a tidier and more managed appearance (appropriate to such close contiguity to the village) and sympathetic materiality. Therefore, there are no significant adverse visual effects associated with the development that will require mitigation beyond that which has been included within the iterative design process.*

## **Visual Impact - Summary**

*The GLVIA3 guidance uses a sensitivity and magnitude matrix in order to determine whether or not the changes brought about by a proposed development are significant and whether they require mitigation. Changes which are both significant and adverse require mitigation to be specified in order to ensure that the adverse effects associated with the development can be adequately minimised.*

*Due to the nature of the proposed changes which replace a large and unsightly concrete block and asbestos roofed cow shed with a small residential extension to the existing settlement, there are numerous beneficial aspects to the visual impacts associated with the proposed development.*

*All of the visual effects are predicted to be long term effects. This means that they will be permanent and not temporary rather than they are expected to come into effect over a long period of time.*

*The small scale of the development means that short-term effects associated with the construction phase are limited to the same footprint as the development itself. There is no requirement for the construction of any temporary access routes, support structures or major plant. The construction phase will entail a temporary increase in noise and traffic movements in close proximity to the proposed development and this will create a reciprocal reduction in tranquillity until the works are completed.*

*The visual effects experienced at or close to most of the VRs are beneficial because of the dilapidated appearance and inappropriate scale and materials associated with the existing site. Whilst the dilapidation of the site is not apparent from the more distant VRs, the large planar roof of the cow shed is the dominant feature of the site in long range views, and this has an adverse visual effect upon those VRs. The replacement of the large derelict building with a small development of houses that is complementary to the existing character of the adjacent settlement and utilises more sensitive building materials, gives rise to beneficial visual effects upon most of the visual receptors.*



The only VR that experiences adverse visual effects is VR 11 from High Street. This is because upon this approach, the cow shed is hidden from view by trees, shrubs and a stone wall, which gives the viewer a glimpse of the open countryside. This is more pronounced in winter when the mature hedgerow and the trees adjacent to High Street are bare of leaves. However, the overall effect is minor given that the proposed buildings are also largely hidden from view. All of the other VRs, which comprise an exhaustively comprehensive set, receive either beneficial or neutral visual effects as a result of the proposed re-development. Whilst it is acknowledged that aesthetic preferences can be highly subjective and differ from one viewer to another, in this case, the local design guidance gives a very clear indication of the preferred materials, design details, patterning and layout that are considered to be appropriate to the locale. It is clear that in the case of Yew Tree Farm, the existing building upon the site would fall well short of the prescriptive standards set out in the design guide, both in terms of the materials used and the bulk and scale of the building itself. In addition, the existing building is poorly screened and therefore constitutes a considerable eyesore from close proximity where visual sensitivity is greatest.

The proposed development has been designed iteratively in order to take account of the design guidance and feedback upon the proposals in terms of aesthetic appearance, materials and scale. In contrast to the existing building, the proposed development is very much in accordance with the preferred aesthetic for new development within the locale in terms of scale, style, roof pitch and materials used. For these reasons it is clear that against this tangible measure of aesthetic merit, the proposed development represents a set of beneficial visual changes against the visual receptors.

For most receptors, the visual effects experienced will be beneficial, since there is little aesthetic merit in the existing buildings whilst the proposed new dwellings conform well to the local design guidance in force, whilst remaining within the parameters of the existing developed form.

It is acknowledged that the landscape change from agricultural farm use to residential development use may be perceived as a loss and culturally as an adverse effect. However, this is a landscape effect rather than a visual one.

The visual effects experienced at VRs 12, 13, 14 & 15 are necessarily significant due to the amount of the available view that the re-development will occupy at such close proximity. However, the proposed re-development will deliver positive visual effects at all of these VR locations and to the families of allied views that they represent. This is due to the beneficial impact of removing the unsightly and dilapidated modern farm buildings that currently have a widely felt adverse visual effect upon views in towards the eastern end of the village.

By reason of its high quality design and use of vernacular building forms and materials in accordance with the local design guide, the proposed re-development will have a beneficial effect upon the internal views from with Mill Lane.

Furthermore, the introduction of new trees and planting associated with The Martyrs' Garden and the surrounding landscaping at this easterly extent of the village will unify the proposed re-development visually with High Street, which is itself well-enclosed by mature trees and hedges in all views from outside of the settlement.

## **Cumulative Effects**

*Cumulative effects are a consideration where other developments are taking place within a particular locale or are in the process of obtaining planning permission.*

*Consideration of cumulative landscape or visual effects is designed to ensure that a group of proposed landscape changes within a given geographical area do not together cause landscape change that is unacceptable because of its inappropriate overall scale.*

***There are no cumulative effects associated with this proposed development.***

## **Temporary Effects**

*There are no significant temporary effects that require advanced establishment of mitigation measures.*

*Construction works would only be temporary and any significant disturbance can be suitably controlled under relevant conditions and supporting legislation.*

## 8.0 Summary & Conclusions

The proposed re-development comprises a small site of up to 7 dwellings to be built within the 'previously developed' footprint of the existing farm building and concrete yard to the south of Mill Lane. A mix of dwellings is proposed. This is consistent with Policy H2 on page 47 of the adopted Local Plan. This policy links to the 'General Principles' of Policy OS2 on page 33 of the plan and, in this regard, the landscape and visual evidence confirms that the proposed development respects the village character and local distinctiveness, helps maintain vitality, and is:

- Proportionate and appropriate in scale to its context
- A logical complement to the exiting scale and pattern of development
- Compatible with adjoining uses, and
- Enhances local landscape and the setting of the village

The proposed development consolidates the existing built form at the eastern end of High Street and completes the redevelopment of Yew Tree Farm that was commenced in the 1980s with new development and the adaptive re-use of the habitable farm buildings. The high quality designs and the correct vernacular choices of materials, form, orientation and scale mean that the re-development of the remainder of Yew Tree Farm will provide a conclusive finish to the settlement with a definitive sense of place, and purpose, as opposed to the present tapering off through a degraded agricultural hinterland.

### Visual Impacts

The landscape is open and highly legible and therefore it is relatively easy to infer that the views from areas of private land are similar to those surveyed and recorded during the ZVI assessment work. Furthermore, there are only a few scattered residences outside of the curtilage of the village, which may experience a minor change in their private view. Most of the private and inaccessible land is open farmland and therefore has low sensitivity in comparison with the PRow network, dwellings and places where substantially more people go for more recreational reasons.

The proposed development site is visually enclosed both by local topography and permanent, established hedgerows and trees. As a result, the visual envelope for unconstrained or uninterrupted views towards the site is confined to a very small area in the immediate proximity of the site itself, largely from the south.

The well-wooded floodplain prevents any public views of the site from within the valley-bottom, riparian landscape. The Oxfordshire Way regional trail is the principal public access route through this landscape and this does not receive any visual effects.

There is only very limited PRow access to the wider area covered by the ZVI. Distant views towards the site are confined to busy roads with no pavements where they can only be

observed in passing and are neither sequential nor continuous. These views are only glimpsed or filtered and viewers in these locations have very low susceptibility to change. VRs have been selected and views from these public locations have been recorded. These images demonstrate that the magnitude of change in all cases is minor, other than in very close proximity to the proposed development, where the site begins to occupy a very substantial proportion of the available view.

Overall, the visual effects associated with the proposed development are broadly beneficial due to the proposed removal of the existing large barn which is not in keeping with the character of the adjacent settlement, and the proposed development's proposed adherence to local design guidance in terms of scale, pattern and materials choices.

The scheme will not appear overbearing to the adjacent residents of the already re-developed portion of Yew Tree Farm. The typical range of dwelling heights, their orientation and scale would not appear out of context with the existing dwellings on High Street.

There are no significant adverse visual effects associated with the proposed development.

### **Landscape Impacts**

The predicted landscape effects associated with the proposed development have been assessed against a wide range of landscape receptors including the effects upon national and local landscape designations and the landscape character in the locale, as well as a range of landscape elements that are of noted value within the landscape character assessment and which contribute to the distinctive character of the site and its environs.

Due to the obsolete and derelict condition of the existing cow shed and yards, together with the bulk and dominant scale of its roof and the inappropriate use of materials within the construction, there is a range of beneficial landscape effects associated with its re-development. There are a number of other landscape elements relating to the site that are sub-optimal and which the proposed development will improve, increase or rejuvenate in such a way that several landscape receptors will receive beneficial rather than adverse landscape effects. This includes the provision of an additional public open space at a key juncture on the PRoW network; and this is entirely (indeed uniquely) appropriate to the histo-cultural character of Ascott under Wychwood.

The proposed new dwellings will be sympathetic to the existing built fabric of Ascott-Under-Wychwood in terms of building materials and colour choices. However, the proposed development will be more in keeping with the settlement edge, and the finer grain of the settlement will be better reflected in the new layout and orientation of the proposed buildings than the imposing block of the cow shed.

The proposed development is (in aggregate) similar in scale and extent to the building that will be demolished and the developed footprint upon the site will be decreased by 44% for the built form and 18% in relation to hardstanding. There is no encroachment associated with the development and it does not set any precedents that could be considered to have an adverse effect upon the wider Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), especially as the pre-application response from West Oxfordshire confirms that the site is considered 'previously developed' for the purposes of the Local Plan (eg Policy H2).

*There are no significant adverse landscape effects associated with the proposed development.*

### **Mitigation**

*Potential adverse visual and landscape effects have been addressed by an iterative design process, over a 5-year period, which has sought to mitigate the predicted visual and landscape effects within the design process. This process has led to a number of positive changes to the design which will have beneficial effects upon the visual appearance of the proposed development, upon the landscape amenity in the locale and upon a number of landscape elements that are currently in poor condition and exert adverse effects upon the overall landscape character.*

*Due to the fact that there are no significant adverse visual or landscape effects associated with the proposed development and because the design process has been iterative and reflective upon the local landscape character, existing built form and settlement pattern, there is no requirement for additional mitigation.*

## **Conclusion**

*In conclusion, this LVIA finds that there are no predicted significant adverse landscape or visual impacts arising from the proposed development such that the proposals are consistent with the adopted Local Plan, notably Policies OS2 and H2. The development demonstrates a high degree of design quality and appropriate consideration for the local vernacular, settlement pattern and design guidance. Mitigation has been addressed "in design" in order to achieve a range of beneficial landscape and visual outcomes. As a result of this no additional mitigation is required.*

*Overall, this LVIA concludes that the re-development proposals would conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB, both in terms of what is removed from the existing visual and landscape baselines and what is brought to the landscape by the future re-development proposals. Replacing the deteriorating cow shed at the edge of the village will improve the visual quality of the village, safety, passive observation and risk of petty crime. It will also complete the redevelopment of Yew Tree Farm (started in 1980s).*

*The scheme has benefited from the considered input from several specialist consultants and the community through public engagement. This has been welcomed and has improved the final design via the iterative design process employed.*

*The design approach will respond to Ascott-under-Wychwood's traditional vernacular in terms of material palette and layout arrangement. The proposal provides a sensitive and distinct design that respects and contributes to the existing landscape setting.*

*There are no visual or landscape reasons that such a sensitive scheme should not be a welcome addition to Ascot-under-Wychwood.*