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PRE-APPLICATION SUBMISSION FOR LAND NORTH OF REDLANDS FARM

LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL

ON BEHALF OF TERRA STRATEGIC

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Terra Strategic have instructed Pegasus Group to undertake a landscape appraisal with respect to a site located north of Redlands Farm, to the east of Swindon, referred to in this document as the 'Site'. This report has been based on a site visit which was undertaken on the 3rd August 2021, together with an analysis of environmental databases and relevant landscape character assessments. The purpose of this report is to comment upon the suitability of the site, to accommodate residential development from a landscape and visual perspective. It also provides guidance concerning the potential development layout as well as any necessary mitigation measures to help assimilate it within the surrounding environment.
- 1.2 Pegasus Group have a wide experience in the preparation of landscape appraisals, and the development of both design criteria and detailed designs on a variety of sensitive sites.

Scope of the Study

- 1.3 The study is not a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment but a lighter touch 'Landscape Appraisal' that seeks to determine the site's capacity to accommodate residential development. It considers the current character and extent of the site, as well as views into or across the site and what constraints these would have in terms of potential residential development. This study therefore seeks to determine the surrounding visual environment and views into or across the site, offering suggestions for design constraints and planting which supports the development, as well as provide an appropriate mitigation strategy that protects the key elements within the surrounding landscape.

Professional Judgement

- 1.4 Mindful of the guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (GLVIA3), the development has been reviewed based upon representative viewpoints from observations in the field and has allowed the potential for residential development to be located within the site to be assessed. This has allowed an understanding of the landscape and visual environment of the site, informing professional judgements concerning matters such as the most appropriate location for development, and how any potential impacts that may be caused by potential development can be minimised and appropriately mitigated.

2. EMERGING DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

New Eastern Villages

2.1 Currently the site is located within and adjacent to an area of land that is allocated to accommodate the New Eastern Villages (NEV), strategic housing area and set out within Policy NC3 of the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026.

2.2 *Policy NC3: New Eastern Villages – including Rowborough and South Marston Village Expansion* comprises six criteria, each intended to steer development within the strategic allocation. The policy is further supported by way of an illustrative plan, see **Appendix 1 Figure 11: New Eastern Villages Inset Diagram**. This diagram is noted as being 'Indicative subject to detailed masterplan work' and illustrates the spatial arrangement of areas identified within the NC3 policy criteria.

2.3 Criterion A states that:

“Land to the East of the A419, as defined on the Policies Map, is allocated for a mixed-use development. The form of the development shall comprise a series of new interconnected distinct villages and an expanded South Marston village defined by the network of green infrastructure corridors.”

2.4 Criterion B states that:

“The development shall provide:

- **an extensive green infrastructure network that maximises opportunities for habitat connectivity and enhanced biodiversity including extending the River Cole green infrastructure corridor and connecting with Nightingale Wood...”**

2.5 Criterion E states that:

“The character and identity of Wanborough, Bishopstone and Bourton will be protected by a principle of non-coalescence between the settlements. The land between the New Eastern Villages site boundary and the existing villages shall remain part of the countryside. However, small scale development within this area, as defined on the Policies Map, will be permitted where it retains or enhances the existing character of the countryside and:

- **involves the re-use, conversion or extension of existing buildings at a scale appropriate to their location, in accordance with the criteria specified in Policy DE1; or**

- **is an essential requirement directly related to the economic or social needs of the rural community.”**

- 2.6 Of particular relevance to the Site, is the Development Boundary and the Indicative Non-Coalescence Area identified on Figure 11. The Indicative Non-Coalescence Area is contiguous with that of the NEV Development Boundary.
- 2.7 Building upon and developing Policy NC3 and its associated documents in more detail, is the New Eastern Villages (NEV) masterplan¹: see Appendix 2. This is a masterplan that shows the full extent of the New Eastern Villages development and where it is situated. It includes, buildings, roads and footpaths, open spaces, linear routes and named village areas.
- 2.8 The NEV also has a policy in the Local Plan Review 2nd Reg 19 consultation document. In respect of landscape and biodiversity, Policy SA3 states the following:

“8. The development will ensure that:

a. the landscape context and views to and from the North Wessex Downs AONB are respected, including potential off-site mitigation;

b. the risk of flooding from the development is minimised, both within the development and at existing neighbouring communities; and

c. biodiversity, including the River Cole Corridor and River Cole Meadow County Wildlife Sites, is protected, integrated and enhanced.”

¹ Local Plan Review Appendix 5 drawing No. NEV/MP/OCTOBER 2016

3. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND SITE CONTEXT

Site Description

- 3.1 The site is located to the east of Swindon town centre, to the north of Horpit, a small hamlet positioned to the north of the village of Wanborough. It covers an area of approximately 19.7ha comprising largely flat agricultural land.
- 3.2 The site is identified by the red line on the attached **Figure 1 Site Location and Environmental Designations Plan**. It is formed by a series of four irregularly shaped pastoral fields subdivided by mature hedgerows and a watercourse running centrally through the site. The site is surrounded by other areas of agricultural land and is accessed via a well-established agricultural track that connects its eastern corner with the Breach Farm and Horpit (road) further south. To aid description and for clarity, each of these fields has been labelled A to D: See **Figure 2 Site Features Plan**.
- 3.3 Relative to the NEV Development Boundary, Fields A and B lie wholly within this boundary, which also covers part of Field C but excludes Field D. It should be noted that where the boundary passes through Field C, it follows an arbitrary running north to south through the field.
- 3.4 The site is not subject to any landscape designations, at either a national or local level. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is located to the south of the site, however due to the distance (approximately 2km), it is not considered that development of the site is likely to have any material effect upon the setting of the designation.

Landscape Character

- 3.5 The landscape within the area has been subject to a number of separate landscape assessments, undertaken at differing scales, these are:
- **At the National Level:** Landscape Character Assessment by Natural England – 108 Upper Thames Clay Vale
 - **At a Borough Level:** Landscape Character Areas, Adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance, Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft December 2004 – ii. Vale of the White Horse
- 3.6 At a national level, the landscape character of the study area has been described and documented in natural England's 'National Character Assessments' (NCA); the landscape is described by 108 Upper Thames Clay Vale.

3.7 This assessment makes 'Statements of Environmental Opportunity', some of which identify opportunities in line with future development, as a means to preserve and enhance the local landscape character; those of relevance to the site are as follows:

- **Seek to ensure that future development is designed to contribute positively to landscape character, focusing on local distinctiveness and being sensitive to setting;**
- **Incorporating new woodlands and tree screens into development as appropriate, taking care not to detract from the open landscape character of this NCA.**

3.8 At a borough level, the landscape character area (LCA) in which the site is located is identified as the **ii. Vale of the White Horse**. Its location and boundaries are described as follows:

"The Vale of the White Horse extends eastwards from Swindon towards Shrivenham and beyond. Settlement patterns are generally limited to small scale agglomerations giving the perception of a remote landscape, which is distant from human activity. Views across this whole area are far reaching, due to its fairly level terrain with only minor undulations. The south-western corner of the Vale of the White Horse Character Area, comprising the land to the south of Pack Hill, lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a nationally important landscape designation for which Local Plan Policy ENV11 provides a number of development constraints."

3.9 The key characteristics of the Vale of the White Horse that are of relevance to this appraisal include:

- **Topography - Broad, flat, low-lying valley (90m).**
- **Vistas - Extensive views towards the Downs and Midvale Ridge.**
- **Riparian - Numerous small streams flow across the vale from south to north, joining the River Cole**
- **Vegetation - Very few woodlands and fields bounded by hedgerows with scattered standard trees.**
- **Human Influences - Few scattered farms in the less accessible areas**
- **Field Patterns - Large fields with a strong north to south linear pattern following Parish boundaries.**

3.10 In addition to identifying key characteristics of the landscape character, the LCA also identifies 'Development Considerations', for development proposals within the area. These are as follows:

- **"Ensure that the scale and massing of development does not adversely affect the area's perception of remoteness,**
- **Where appropriate, have regard to the area's close proximity to, and in the case of the land to the south of Pack Hill, its location within, the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty,**
- **Where opportunities arise, provide additional tree planting to increase tree cover by creating blocks of woodland,**
- **Reflect the existing pattern of isolated units through an open, dispersed development pattern,**
- **Where opportunities arise, provide planting that reinforces existing hedgerows to compensate for the trees lost to Dutch Elm disease during the 1970's.**
- **Retain the perception of distinctiveness and separation from Swindon within the Rural Buffer area identified in the Local Plan."**

3.11 At a local level, the landscape character is typical of the key characteristics identified within the LCA for the Vale of the White Horse, being a low-lying rural landscape positioned on the edge of the urban extent of Swindon.

3.12 Whilst this is predominantly a rural landscape, urbanising influences in the form of industrial areas and housing development associated with Swindon diminish its rural quality, combining with transport and other infrastructure, to give the area an increasing suburban quality as you move further west. Due to the strong degree of enclosure created by the strong network of field boundary hedgerows, this suburban quality quickly diminishes as you move eastwards away from Swindon.

3.13 A key characteristic of the landscape in this area is the contrasting topography of the Downs and Midvale Ridge to the south. Views towards this higher ground from the study area are frequent, aiding orientation and providing a degree of local distinctiveness.

3.14 In terms of the emerging development context of the NEV, there will be a major change to the character of the area. However, given the nature of the development being proposed, it will create a considered and logical addition to that of the existing built-up area of Swindon and bring with it opportunity to create a more considered transition between the town and the wider landscape further east.

Opportunities and Constraints

3.15 Look to continue the strong green edge to the eastern side of the NEV to ensure that a suitable transition in the form of a defensible boundary and landscape buffer is created to help integrate the NEV with the surrounding agricultural landscape.

Human Influences

3.16 The LCA identifies human influences within the area, comprise of *'few scattered farms in the less accessible areas'*. This is consistent with the existing settlement pattern of the area, mindful that the LCA is bordered on its western side by the town of Swindon, which is identified by a settlement boundary on the landscape character area map and lies outside the Vale of the White Horse LCA.

3.17 Settlement within the LCA in which the site is located, comprises larger villages, namely Wanborough, Bishopstone and Bourton. Wanborough and Bishopstone are located 1.5km to the south and 3.5km to the southeast of the site respectively and are positioned on elevated ground at the foot of the scarp face of the Midvale ridge. Bourton the lesser of these three villages is located on a localised area of high ground 2.6km to the northeast of the Site.

3.18 In terms of the emerging development context of the NEV, the urban edge of Swindon will extend further east and effectively reduce the existing separation between it and the villages identified above. In terms of the distance between these villages and the eastern extent of Swindon (existing), and that defined by the by the development boundary of the NEV Masterplan (proposed), these distances are as follows:

Village	Approximate separation from Swindon (Existing)	Approximate separation from Swindon (Proposed)

Wanborough	1.2km	1.0km
Bishopstone	4.6km	3.2km
Bourton	4km	1.5km

Opportunities and Constraints

- 3.19 Ensure that development does not materially diminish the separation between the proposed NEV boundary and the outer lying areas and that it creates a considered addition to the edge of Swindon, providing a positive boundary with the surrounding countryside, that integrates appropriately with its rural character.

Topography

- 3.20 The topography of the area is distinctly flat and low lying, ranging from between 86m and 105m AOD and is consistent with the vale landscape in which it is located. This sits in stark contrast to the rising ground of the Midvale Ridge, which rises up sharply from around 105m AOD at its base to an average height of around 190m AOD with high points around Charlbury Hill at 253m AOD: see **Figure 3 Topography Plan**.
- 3.21 The Site itself is largely positioned on flat ground with a very gradual slope that falls away from around 96m AOD on its southeast side to around 93m in its northwest corner. The watercourse running through the centre of the Site (adjacent to Fields A, B & C), creates a localised area of low ground where short banks fall from the level of the fields to meet the water's edge.

Opportunities and Constraints

- 3.22 The topography of the Site presents little constraints to development provided suitable set back from the watercourse is observed to preserve its natural course and topography. The flat topography allows great opportunity to be flexible with the site layout and achieve a best fit for the Site.

Vegetation

- 3.23 Within the study area, vegetation is a mixture of agricultural fields (largely pastoral), which are small to medium in size and irregular in shape. They are defined by a series of well-established/tall hedgerows and riparian vegetation along existing watercourses. Tree cover is limited and largely confined to

watercourses and small copses of trees centred on existing farmsteads and residential built form. Hedgerow trees are limited.

- 3.24 Vegetation in and around the Site itself is typical of the surrounding areas, being a series of four pastoral fields whose boundaries are well defined by hedgerows and vegetation associated with the watercourse that runs northeast to southwest through the site.

Opportunities and Constraints

- 3.25 Look for opportunity to enhance existing hedgerows with additional hedgerow tree planting and look for suitable locations along watercourses to increase woodland cover in a manner and scale that is consistent with the surrounding vegetated pattern of the landscape.

Access and Infrastructure

- 3.26 The A419 and A420, along with Wanborough Road provide the main vehicular access routes to the study area, with a number of smaller country lanes and farm tracks feeding off these roads which ultimately provide access to the Site itself.
- 3.27 Whilst there is a strong network of public rights of way within the area, the majority of those that relate to the study area are either poorly delineated, signposted, or inaccessible. The site itself is devoid of any public rights of way, with the area surrounding it also having limited public access, which is mostly restricted to the narrow country lanes within the area.

Opportunities and Constraints

- 3.28 Look to create a better network of publicly accessible routes through the site and which allow integration with the wider footpath network of the surrounding landscape.

4. VISUAL AMENITY

4.1 The study area exhibits a largely flat landform. This lack of vertical relief result in a great deal of visual screening by intervening built form and vegetation that largely restricts views to the near and middle distance. Where topographical relief does exist, is along the Ridgeline of the North Wessex Downs AONB. These areas of higher ground offer wide expansive views out across the vale, the extent to which varies, subject to intervening vegetation and the relative elevation; see **Figure 4: Viewpoint Location Plan and Figure 5: Context Baseline Views.**

4.2 The Site is located on a flat area of ground and surrounded by a wider mosaic of agricultural fields, with a similar elevation to that of the site. Visually the Site is well contained, a result of the mature hedgerows that define its boundaries and the series of intervening field boundary hedgerows that subdivide the surrounding agricultural land in which it is located.

4.3 Due to the visual enclosure created by the largely low-lying ground and intervening hedgerows; coupled with a limited amount of publicly accessible footpaths within the area, clear and partial views towards the site are limited to those locations from the higher ground within the AONB to the south.

4.4 Broadly, visibility of the Site can be broken down as follows:

- Views from the agricultural land to the south and east
- Views from the eastern edge of Swindon
- Views from the elevated ground within the North Wessex Downs AONB

Views from the agricultural land to the south and east

4.5 Views within these areas are generally limited to the near and middle distance, with hedgerows largely forming the backdrop to the view with only canopies of trees in fields beyond visible along the skyline. The exception to this being the elevated ground around the Downs and Midvale Ridge, offering topographical relief, and which is visible from a distance.

4.6 As a result of the limited relief in these locations and being positioned at a height similar to that of the Site, views of the site from the south and east are not possible, due to the screening effect of the intervening vegetation and areas of built form: See **Viewpoints 1 and 2.**

- 4.7 Development of the Site for housing would result in no perceived change to the view.
- 4.8 In the context of the emerging development context of the NEV, views towards the Site would continue to be precluded by the intervening vegetation and built form that exist in the location. Views of the taller built form within the NEV; in particular that proposed within the local centres and education facilities may be visible above the skyline and along with the other taller built form within the NEV, provide a backdrop to the proposed development.

Opportunities and Constraints

- 4.9 Ensure that the height of development is largely 2 storeys in height, so that it remains consistent with that of the surrounding farmsteads and residential built form and the existing skyline is preserved. If any built form is to be considered above 2 storeys and may present a form that is visible from these locations, it should be carefully positioned to ensure that it can be composed by the taller buildings proposed as part of the NEV further west.

Views from the eastern edge of Swindon

- 4.10 Views of the Site from the eastern side of Swindon are not possible. A number of footpaths do exist within this area; however, they are for the most located on the southwest side of Wanborough Road at a similar elevation to the Site. This results in a strong degree of screening being created by the intervening vegetation (roadside vegetation associated with Wanborough Road) and built form at Wanborough. Views are generally confined to the near and middle distance, with views over one or more pastoral fields, seen against backdrop of mature hedgerows and isolated trees.
- 4.11 Opportunity for a more elevated and open view back in the direction of the site is possible for a short section of Wanborough Road, where it rises up to pass over the A419. However due to the proliferation of more established vegetation associated with the cluster of properties around Wanborough House, Lotmead Farm and mature roadside vegetation, views to the east are limited and views of the Site itself are not possible: See **Viewpoint 3**.
- 4.12 Development of the site for housing would result in no perceived change to the view.

- 4.13 In the context of the emerging development context of the NEV, views towards the site would be precluded by the development within the proposed district centre located to the south of the A420 and east of the A419, as well as the other Villages located along the western side of the NEV, namely Upper Lotmead Village, Lotmead Village and Foxbridge Village.

Opportunities and Constraints

- 4.14 Ensure that the height of development is restricted to a maximum of 2.5 storeys, so that it remains consistent with that of the surrounding farmsteads and residential built form and the existing skyline is preserved.

Views from the elevated ground within the North Wessex Downs AONB

- 4.15 Views from the elevated ground to the south vary greatly, depending on the elevation of the visual receptor. From the more elevated parts of the Ridgeway, where tree cover turns over to more open pastoral land uses, clear open views towards the site are possible, where it is seen as part of a much wider panorama that stretches out north across the Vale of the White Horse and over Swindon: see **Viewpoint 4**.
- 4.16 Where visible, clear and partial views of the site are possible, where it is seen as part of a collection of low-lying agricultural fields, well defined by mature hedgerows and riparian vegetation. In turn it is seen within the context of a wider series of agricultural fields on the eastern edge of Swindon.
- 4.17 In the context of the emerging development context of the NEV, the Site will be seen as set well within the context of this development, fronted by the built form within Redlands Village and set against the backdrop of the wider allocation, in particular built form within Lotmead Village and Lower Lotmead Village. Additionally, the majority of the Site will be visually softened against these areas, by virtue of the riparian vegetation associated with the existing watercourse and the safeguarded canal alignment.

Opportunities and Constraints

Ensure scale massing and density of development is consistent with that proposed in the surrounding villages. Retain and enhance vegetated corridor along watercourse and use to create a visual break with development to the north at Lower Lotmead Village. Allow suitable degree of open space is provided to the

east and west of the site to allow integration with surrounding countryside incorporating biodiversity enhancement that will connect with and reinforce the green infrastructure network.

Summary

- 4.18 The site is extremely well contained as a result of the generally flat and low-lying topography of the site and the surrounding areas, this combines with the strong network of intervening field boundary and riparian vegetation, screening views of the Site from the surrounding roads and public rights of way network.
- 4.19 The exception to this being views towards the site from the elevated ridgeline to the south, within the AONB. From these locations, views of the Site are possible but seen at a distance, as part of a much wider panorama.

5. POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- 5.1 The Site as a whole provides a good opportunity to accommodate residential development when considered in the context of the wider NEV allocation. Currently, the Site is already largely located within the NEV development boundary, with Field D and part of Field C representing the additionality of developable area that would create a logical and considered addition to the NEV Development Boundary.
- 5.2 Whilst the proposals would represent a relatively large area of development, in the context of the NEV and that which is already allocated as part of the NEV within Field A and Field C, it is modest and in keeping with the scale and massing proposed as part of the NEV. The Site's suitability to accommodate development has by and large, already been tested and identified as capable of accommodating development, which has been subject to landscape testing/assessment as part of the Local Plan process, including the Sustainability Appraisal.
- 5.3 As illustrated on the overall site masterplan: see **Appendix 3 Illustrative Masterplan**, development will be located within the northern part of Field A, the northern end of Field B and within Field C. No development is proposed within Field D.
- 5.4 The development parcel identified within the northern part of Field A, is already allocated for development within the NEV; as part of Lower Lotmead Village, as is the southern end of the development parcel proposed within Field C; already allocated for development within the NEV as part of the Redlands Village. Development of Field C would see development extent out to the existing field boundaries, rather than follow the arbitrary alignment through the middle of the field currently defined by the NEV Development Boundary.
- 5.5 The site is remarkably well contained in physical terms, both through man made and natural features and has good potential to incorporate valuable green infrastructure elements within the layout in particular potential integration within a wider green infrastructure network.
- 5.6 In visual terms, visibility of the site is varied. From the lower lying ground, views of the site are extremely limited by a combination of low-lying landform and well-established field boundary vegetation, while from areas of greater relief, clear and

more open views of the site are possible, where it appears as a generally low-lying area of ground set within a wider agricultural landscape.

- 5.7 Through careful scale and massing of the built form, the potential effect on the surrounding landscape and settlement pattern of the area can be minimised and the interface between the existing residential areas and the surrounding landscape enhanced. This would allow the new development to become a considered part of the existing settlement at the edge of Swindon with the additionality of built development being proposed outside the NEV Development Boundary representing a logical addition to the NEV. Proposed open space and landscape enhancements brought about by the proposal would have the potential to bring with them a number of biodiversity and amenity benefits.
- 5.8 In the context of the emerging development context of the NEV, development of the site south of the safeguarded canal alignment (Fields B, C & D), would integrate well with and create a considered addition to the northern side of Redlands Village, while a smaller scale (allocated) development in the northern part of Field A, provides a modest addition to the south side of Lower Lotmead Village.
- 5.9 These two villages would maintain a suitable degree of separation, retaining their individual identity by virtue of both the physical and visual break afforded by the existing watercourse and safeguarded canal alignment. This break will be further enhanced with suitable landscape treatments to better serve this purpose, as well as bring with it biodiversity and amenity enhancements that connect with the wider GI vision of the New Eastern Villages design ethos set out within Criteria A & B of Policy NC3.
- 5.10 Development of the site, although partially located outside the current NEV development boundary, would not materially diminish the current separation between surrounding villages over that established by the NEV. In addition, there would also be no perceived change to the current separation established by the NEV and the surrounding villages. Realignment of the NEV development boundary to incorporate the full extent of the site proposed would also allow a more defined, logical and defensible boundary to be created on the eastern edge of the NEV and one that is consistent with existing field boundaries. This would be consistent with Criterion E of Policy NC3 and SLPR policy SA3.

5.11 It is considered that the site does have potential to accommodate the additionality of residential development beyond that already allocated as part of the NEV, provided the relevant constraints are observed and development proposals are considered accordingly.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

5.12 Development Considerations identified within the LCA, for development proposals within the area are as follows:

- "Ensure that the scale and massing of development does not adversely affect the area's perception of remoteness,
- Where appropriate, have regard to the area's close proximity to, and in the case of the land to the south of Pack Hill, its location within, the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty,
- Where opportunities arise, provide additional tree planting to increase tree cover by creating blocks of woodland,
- Reflect the existing pattern of isolated units through an open, dispersed development pattern,
- Where opportunities arise, provide planting that reinforces existing hedgerows to compensate for the trees lost to Dutch Elm disease during the 1970's.
- Retain the perception of distinctiveness and separation from Swindon within the Rural Buffer area identified in the Local Plan."

5.13 Consideration of both the above guidelines and the landscape character and visual issues arising from this development, have allowed a landscape strategy for the site to be developed see **Figure 6 Landscape Constraints and Opportunities**. These have been incorporated into the overall site masterplan: see **Appendix 3 Illustrative Masterplan**. Key landscape design objectives for the site are identified below:

1. Look to promote views out towards the elevated ground to the south around the Downs and Midvale Ridge;
2. Set back development from the existing watercourse and the canal safeguarded alignment to preserve this as a distinctive feature within the site and create a physical break between Lower Lotmead Village and Redlands Village to preserve their individual identity;
3. Retain and enhance riparian vegetation along the existing watercourse and the canal safeguarded alignment to create a visual break between Lower Lotmead Village and Redlands Village and to create an enhanced GI corridor that will bring with it both biodiversity and amenity benefits;
4. Retain and enhance existing hedgerows and take opportunities to plant new hedgerow trees;

-
5. Create a defined and defensible boundary to the eastern edge of the development, with suitable landscape buffer created beyond to allow integration with surrounding countryside;
 6. Provide new strategic pedestrian and cycle routes which connect with the wider NEV area; and
 7. Ensure that built form is contained to fields A, B & C. This will ensure that the developed edge of the proposals responds to physical field boundaries, whilst ensuring that, coalescence with the surrounding villages will not result'

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 From the constraints identified within this study, it is clear that the site would be able to accommodate residential development, provided that suitable measures are taken to preserve its key characteristics and that opportunities for biodiversity and amenity enhancements are incorporated into the final design.
- 6.2 While the site's character will change from agricultural land to that of a residential development, the landscape is suitably robust to accommodate this change and the site is visually well contained beyond its immediate surroundings. Any potential negative effects could therefore be mitigated through the careful placement and massing of built form, with suitable strategic planting measures used. This would ensure that the site would become a beneficial addition to the transition between the New Eastern Villages allocation on the edge of Swindon and the rural landscape of the Vale of the White Horse, in a manner that is sympathetic to both the existing landscape character of the area and the emerging settlement pattern of the NEV.

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August 2021**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Terra Strategic and Hayfield Homes (the Applicants) intend to apply to Swindon Borough Council (SBC) for planning permission to develop new residential dwellings on land north of Redlands Farm, Swindon, as part of the New Eastern Villages (NEV). The Site is identified by the appended Location Plan. Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 Policy NC3 identifies the area for development within the south/eastern part of the New Eastern Villages.
- 1.2. Savills is instructed by the Applicants to request the formal Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening opinion of Swindon Borough Council (SBC). Planning permission for the Proposed Development will be sought via two applications, a first phase of development as part of a 'full' planning application, and the greater part of the site through an 'outline' planning application. For the purpose of this screening request, these are considered together as a single project. The extent of the Site is shown by the red line on the appended Site Boundary Plans, showing the full and the outline application areas respectively (P21-0975_08-1 and P21-0975_08-2).

EIA SCREENING

- 1.3. Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017 enables an applicant to request the relevant planning authority adopt an EIA screening opinion. This report is a request for the Council's EIA screening opinion. In accordance with Regulation 6 of the EIA Regulations, it includes:
 - a) a plan sufficient to identify the land;
 - b) a description of the development, including in particular—
 - (i) a description of the physical characteristics of the development and, where relevant, of demolition works;
 - (ii) a description of the location of the development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected;
 - c) a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development;
 - d) to the extent the information is available, a description of any likely significant effects of the Proposed Development on the environment resulting from—
 - (i) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant; and
 - (ii) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity; and
 - e) such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make, including any features of the Proposed Development or any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment.

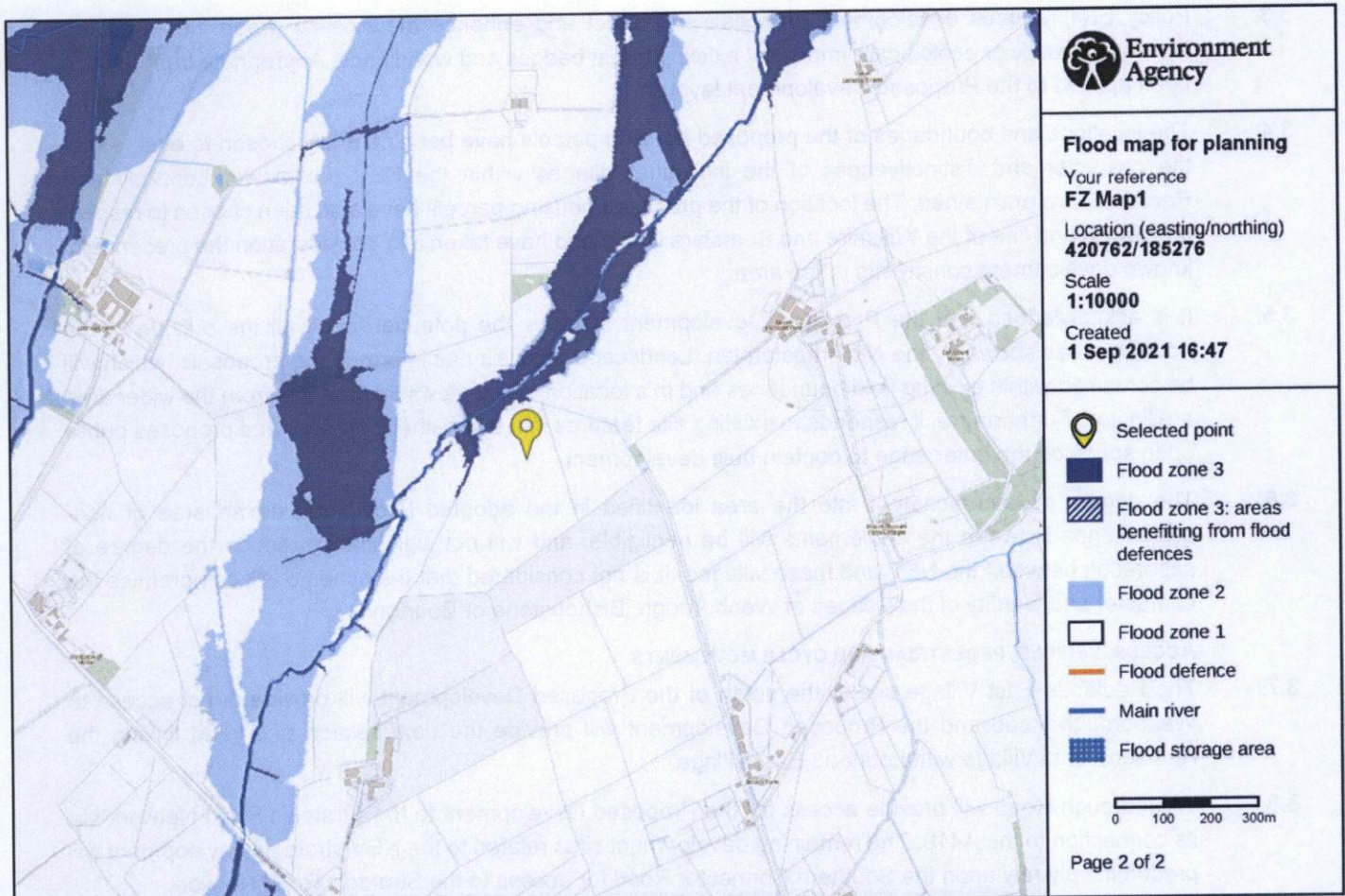
- 1.4. This screening report is structured into the following Sections:
- Section 2: describes the Site, its location, the surrounding context and identifies sensitive receptors;
 - Section 3: provides a description of the development proposed;
 - Section 4: outlines the EIA screening process;
 - Section 5: considers the environmental effects;
 - Section 6: describes any additional mitigation and control measures proposed to reduce effects;
 - Section 7: conclusion; and
 - Section 8: requests the EIA screening opinion, should the Council adopt a screening opinion that the proposal is EIA development and an EIA is required to accompany the planning applications.

2. The Site and local context

- 2.1. The Site is situated to the east of Swindon and north of Wanborough. It covers approximately 19.7 hectares (ha) of land, 4 ha of which will be the subject of a full application and 15.7 ha within an outline application. The land is currently in agricultural use, with fields bordered by hedgerows with a few mature trees. The Site sits within an area that currently is predominantly in agricultural use.
- 2.2. The Proposed Development forms a part of the south eastern area of the NEV, known as Redlands Village. The Site adjoins the southern part of the Redlands Village development, where planning permission for up to 370 dwellings, a community facility, primary school and associated infrastructure was granted in 2019 (S/OUT/16/0021).
- 2.3. This is within the wider context of the New Eastern Villages Local Plan allocation for 8,000 homes, 40 ha of employment space, a secondary school, primary schools, transport infrastructure and health, retail and leisure facilities across an area of 724 ha. Significant new transport infrastructure is planned as part of the NEV strategic development, with the Southern Connector Road approval (S/19/0703) linking the NEV with the Commonhead Roundabout and Pack Hill.
- DESIGNATIONS / CONSTRAINTS / SENSITIVE RECEPTORS**
- 2.4. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located approximately 2.4 km south of the Site, on the southern side of Wanborough.
- 2.5. The closest designated heritage assets are both Grade II Listed: Earls court Manor, which is located approximately 700 metres east of the Site boundary (800 metres from the proposed built development), and to the north of the Manor, Lower Earls court Farm, which is some 870 metres from the Site boundary (940 metres from the proposed built development). There are also a number of Grade II Listed buildings within Horpit. A Scheduled Monument, the site of a Roman Town (West of Wanborough House), is located approximately 1.3 km west of the Site, and the Hall Place Scheduled Monument approximately 2 km to the south.
- 2.6. Coombs Hinton Parva SSSI is located approximately 2.8 km south east of the Site. The SSSI designation relates to the botanically rich chalk grassland and varied invertebrate fauna. The status of the SSSI is recorded as being in favourable condition.
- 2.7. According to the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning, the majority of the Site is located within Flood Zone 1, with an area adjacent to the course of the River Cole being Flood Zones 2 and 3 (Figure 1).

New Eastern Villages (NEV)

Land north of Redlands Farm, Swindon



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Figure 1 – Flood zone map

3. The development screened

3.1. The Proposed Development to be screened provides for:

- Residential development of up to 280 dwellings;
- Vehicular and pedestrian connections with the scheme to the south, and to the northern boundary of the Site;
- Public open space provision, incorporating a Local Equipped Area of Play;
- Strategic pedestrian/cycle routes, to connect with the wider NEV area;
- A landscape buffer designed to prevent coalescence with surrounding settlements;
- A safeguarded corridor 50m wide to allow for the future delivery of the canal.

3.2. The proposal is part of the wider NEV, which allocates the wider area for approximately 8,000 dwellings, employment and community facilities.

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- 3.3. Policy EN1 requires development proposals to protect and enhance the existing green infrastructure, including visually or ecologically important existing trees, hedges and woodlands. Appropriate buffers have been applied to the Proposed Development layout.
- 3.4. The locations and boundaries of the proposed housing parcels have been carefully chosen to ensure that the character and distinctiveness of the individual villages within the NEV (i.e. Lower Lotmead and Redlands) are maintained. The location of the proposed housing parcels have also been chosen to respect the setting and line of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal and have taken into consideration the presence of known development constraints in the area.
- 3.5. It is acknowledged that the Proposed Development includes the potential for dwellings outside of the housing areas shown by the NEV masterplan. Landscape analysis has informed the proposals, which will be contained within existing field boundaries and in a location where views into the Site from the wider area are limited. Furthermore, it responds to existing site features in a sympathetic manner and proposes public open space on the outer edge to contain built development.
- 3.6. The degree of encroachment into the area identified in the adopted Local Plan as an area of non-coalescence between the settlements will be negligible, and will not significantly reduce the degree of separation between the NEV and these villages. It is not considered that the scheme will compromise the character and identity of the villages of Wanborough, Bishopstone or Bourton.

ACCESS, VEHICLE, PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE MOVEMENTS

- 3.7. The Redlands East Village site to the south of the Proposed Development will provide direct access to Wanborough Road and the Proposed Development will provide the next section of a road linking the Redlands East Village with Lotmead East Village.
- 3.8. Wanborough Road will provide access for the Proposed Development to the Strategic Road Network via its connection to the A419. The remaining development sites related to the NEV strategic development will predominantly rely upon the Southern Connector Road for access to the Strategic Road Network.
- 3.9. Any additional mitigation measures required following detailed assessments will be discussed and agreed with the highway authority. The focus will be towards managing the speed of traffic along the local highway network in coordinated approach with the other NEV developments.

4. EIA screening

- 4.1. EIA is only required for categories of development outlined in the EIA Regulations if it is considered that implementing the project would be 'likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location'. The EIA Regulations set out a process through which it can be decided whether a proposal is 'EIA development' for which an assessment is required – EIA screening.

Screening for EIA Development

- 4.2. In determining whether or not the Proposed Development requires an EIA, the local planning authority is required to follow the Regulations and the relevant schedules. The Planning Practice Guidance 'Environmental Impact Assessment' section (PPG) provides additional guidance.
- 4.3. Initially, it should be established whether the project is of a type listed in Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 of the

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Regulations. The Proposed Development (section 3, above) does not qualify as a Schedule 1 development and it is not located wholly, or partly, within a 'sensitive area' as defined in Regulation 2(1).

- 4.4. It does fall within the description in Schedule 2 Part 10(b) 'Urban development projects', as the proposal includes more than 150 dwellings, and the overall area of the application site exceeds 5 hectares.
- 4.5. It is therefore necessary for the local planning authority to undertake EIA screening to establish whether the Proposed Development is likely to have significant effects on the environment. This takes account of the selection criteria in Schedule 3, in accordance with Regulation 5(4)(c), together with any information provided by the applicant (Regulation 5(4)(a)).
- 4.6. The PPG provides advice on taking into account mitigation measures at the screening stage. Paragraph 023 (ref. 4-023-20170728) states:

'Developers are encouraged to identify any features of their Proposed Development and any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment and to include these with the information required to inform the screening decision (see Regulation 6). The extent to which mitigation or other measures may be taken into account in reaching a screening opinion depends on the facts of each case. The local planning authority must have regard to the amount of information available, the precautionary principle and the degree of uncertainty in relation to the environmental impact. However, there may be cases where the uncertainties are such that Environmental Impact Assessment is required.'

- 4.7. The Site does not lie within a sensitive area as defined by the Regulations. Therefore, the test of whether the proposal is EIA development is whether it would be likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of its characteristics, location and potential impact in the context of the selection criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the Regulations, which are:
- Characteristics of development;
 - size and design of the whole development;
 - cumulation with other existing and/or approved development;
 - use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity;
 - production of waste;
 - pollution and nuisances;
 - the risk of major accidents and/or disaster relevant to the development;
 - the risks to human health.
 - Location of development; and
 - Type and characteristics of the potential impact.

Mitigation

- 4.8. We have identified features of the Proposed Development and any standard measures envisaged that will avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment as identified by the PPG guidance at Paragraph 023.

Identifying the potential for cumulative effects

- 4.9. This EIA screening request gives consideration to 'the cumulation with other existing and/or approved development' in terms of the characteristics of the proposal (Schedule 3.1.(b)), and consideration of 'the

cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development' (Schedule 3.3.(g)). The following have been identified as relevant in the context of the Proposed Development:

- S/19/0703 - Southern Connector Road, approved 12/2019.
- S/OUT/16/0021 – Redlands Eastern Villages, Swindon, 370 dwellings, approved 06/2019.
- S/OUT/19/0582– Lotmead Eastern Villages, Swindon, 2,500 dwellings, approved 03/2021.

5. Consideration of the need for EIA

- 5.1. This section is structured around the selection criteria for screening schedule 2 development as set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations.

Characteristics of the development in this location

SIZE AND DESIGN OF THE DEVELOPMENT

- 5.2. This development site of c.19.7 ha is an integral part of the NEV local plan allocation for residential-led development with community facilities and transport links. Up to 280 dwellings are proposed by the Applicants. When completed and occupied, it could be expected to accommodate some 670 to 750 residents. Amenity areas, green space and surface water drainage attenuation measures would also be included as required. The parameters of the development would be set out in the outline planning application, with detailed design reserved for future approval on that part of the site (15.7 ha).

CUMULATION WITH OTHER EXISTING AND/OR APPROVED DEVELOPMENT

- 5.3. The Proposed Development is located north of Redlands Farm, approximately 1 km east of the urban fringe of Swindon. As noted above, the Site is located within a defined local plan allocation, within which, planning permission has been approved for mixed-use development at the Lotmead Site, and the Redlands Village allocation, i.e., either side of the development subject of this screening request. Furthermore, the approved Southern Connector Road will be routed to the west of the Site.

Southern Connector Road (SCR)

- 5.4. The aim of the SCR scheme is to provide access to the new NEV housing and employment areas from Commonhead Roundabout and Pack Hill and provide footway and cycleway connections along the route. Permission was granted for construction in December 2019.

Redlands Eastern Villages

- 5.5. This scheme comprises 370 dwellings, a community facility, primary school, open space, access and associated infrastructure. This development makes up the southern part of the allocation for the Redlands village, alongside the Proposed Development. Outline planning permission was approved in June 2019 and reserved matters applications have been submitted in 2021.

Lotmead Eastern Villages

- 5.6. This scheme comprises 2,500 dwellings, up to 1,780 m² of community/retail uses, up to 2,500 m² of employment uses, sports hub, playing pitches, two two-form entry primary schools, green infrastructure and associated infrastructure. This development is located adjacent to the north of the Proposed Development and constitutes a significant proportion of the New Eastern Village allocation. An outline application was approved in March 2021.

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Land north of Redlands Farm, Swindon



Cumulation

- 5.7. The addition of residential development in this location has been planned at a strategic level for all of these schemes through the local plan process. The NEV Planning Obligations SPD details the Strategic Infrastructure Needs for transport and green infrastructure based on the relevant policies from the Swindon Local Plan. The SPD details transport requirements for the NEV from Policies TR1 and TR2 including mitigation works west of the A419, A420 highway improvements, sustainable transport solutions and other requirements such as the Southern Connector Road. The SPD also details green infrastructure requirements which include contributions towards Great Western Community Forest (Policy EN2) and contributions towards the management and maintenance of open space (Policy IN1).

NATURAL RESOURCES

- 5.8. Land and soils – Detailed information of Agricultural Land Quality for the Site is not shown on MAGiC, however, the surrounding fields are all classified as Grade 3b and therefore it is inferred that the agricultural land quality of the Site is likely to be Grade 3b.
- 5.9. Water – It is not considered that the development would have any extraordinary demands on water supply or disposal of waste water. Information produced to accompany the applications will outline the sustainability measures to be incorporated in the design of the buildings intended to minimise the use of water use and maximise energy efficiency.
- 5.10. Biodiversity - The fields are considered to be of low ecological value, with vegetation to the field boundaries, and along the watercourse of more interest. The majority of the boundary features would be retained and incorporated into the development design. An area within the south-west section of the Site is of slightly higher biodiversity value. It has potential for significant biodiversity enhancement and is therefore retained in the proposed development layout.

THE PRODUCTION OF WASTE

- 5.11. No demolition is required prior to construction. The construction operation will produce waste. It is not considered that this would generate any unusual or complex waste requiring specialist control or management and will therefore be unlikely to result in significant adverse effects to the environment.
- 5.12. Once complete, the development would generate household waste. The residents would be provided with the means to segregate waste in accordance with local policy.

POLLUTION AND NUISANCE

- 5.13. During construction there may be some release of dust and noise from equipment and activities. However, there are few receptors currently in close proximity. The use of good site practice in construction can minimise such temporary impacts to acceptable levels. Restrictions and management requirements can be secured in a Construction and Environment Management Plan (CEMP) which will ensure that any construction activities will be in accordance with environmental protection legislation which will limit disturbance as far as reasonably practicable.

RISK OF MAJOR ACCIDENTS OR DISASTERS

- 5.14. No potential for major accident or disaster is considered likely from construction on this site. The potential for accidents or disasters resulting from the occupation and use of the Proposed Development is considered to be negligible.
- 5.15. When considering the risk of disaster caused by climate change, the Site is not in location that will be

affected by coastal storms or sea level rise. The projected general trends of climate change in the 21st century¹ shows a progressive increase in mean air temperatures during summer and winter months, a reduction in the rate of precipitation during the summer months but an increase during the winter months, with a slight reduction in average wind speed in the summer and a small increase during the winter period. Whilst the detailed design of the buildings will need to account for the for the comfort of occupants, it is not considered that such issues pose a disaster risk.

RISKS TO HUMAN HEALTH

During construction

- 5.16. A development on land used for agriculture would not be expected to require anything more than industry-standard best practice for construction site health and safety management.

Upon completion

- 5.17. There are not any anticipated risks to human health from the proposed use of the land.

Types and characteristics of potential impacts of development in this location

- 5.18. The following paragraphs consider the potential of the proposal to affect aspects of the environment that might be significant in this location and identify mitigation that would be employed where necessary to avoid or reduce significant effects.

SOILS

- 5.19. The extent of soils that may remain undisturbed is likely to be limited principally to the area around the River Cole, at the perimeter of the Site, and within open spaces planned through the layout of the scheme.
- 5.20. Soil is an important component of the ecosystem and also has a role as a store of carbon. Its functions can be impaired or lost as a result of development if it is not managed properly. The inherent quality of soil, as distinct to its agricultural value, is recognised in the Government's 'Soil Strategy for England - Safeguarding our Soils' which seeks to encourage the sustainable management of soil resources. Appropriate management of soil resources during construction can help with the re-establishment of soil functions following their storage or movement.
- 5.21. The primary measures to mitigate damage to or loss of soil resources includes measures to re-use as much as possible of the soils displaced during the construction phase within the landscaping and to ensure that the quality of soils retained on-site and any that has to be removed off-site is maintained by following best practice guidance on soil handling, as described in the Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites. This will ensure that significant effects to soils would not result from the development.
- 5.22. Given the limited extent of agricultural land that would be removed from production, and that the Site is allocated for housing development in the Local Plan, Article 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure)(England) Order 2010² does not apply to this proposal.
- 5.23. It is not considered that there would be any significant effect on soils or agricultural land resources.

¹ Source: <https://ukclimateprojections-ui.metoffice.gov.uk/products>

² The Order requires local planning authorities consult DEFRA on proposals that are (1) not in accordance with a development plan, and (2) would result in the loss of 20ha or more of best and most versatile land currently used for agriculture

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WATER

- 5.24. The majority of the land is in Flood Zone 1, with a very low probability of flooding in any year (<0.1%) and is also at a very low risk from surface water flooding. Part of the Site near the River Cole is categorised as Flood Zone 2 and 3.
- 5.25. The proposal will be located within FZ1, and a surface water drainage strategy will be designed to ensure that there is no increase in flood risk at the Site, or elsewhere.
- 5.26. With construction site controls implemented and a sustainable drainage system, there would be no direct impact on the water environment during the construction and operation phases of the Proposed Development. Adverse effects as a result of surface water drainage are not anticipated.

AIR QUALITY

- 5.27. Construction activities and traffic generation are the two primary consideration when determining whether proposals will have a potential impact on air quality.
- 5.28. The Institute of Air Quality Management guidance on the assessment of dust from construction indicates that receptors within 350 metres of a Site have the potential to be affected by dust generated during the earthwork and construction phases. The nearest existing receptor is the Redlands Farm which is located approximately 100 m south west of the Site. There will also be occupants of new dwellings that will be constructed to the north and south of the Site, as part of the NEV development.
- 5.29. Concentration-based limit values and objectives have been set for the PM₁₀ suspended particle fraction, but no statutory or official numerical air quality criterion for dust annoyance has been set at a UK, European or World Health Organisation (WHO) level. Construction dust management uses a risk based method, focusing on the appropriate measures to be used to keep dust impacts at an acceptable level. By adopting this approach, the implementation of standard best practice dust mitigation measures would be suitable response in this location. Effective measures can be secured by planning condition and would be implemented prior to works commencing in order to manage potential dust impacts to an acceptable level.
- 5.30. The primary source of airborne pollutants within Swindon is road vehicle traffic. Monitoring has demonstrated that air quality within Swindon is not compliant with the national air quality standards and objectives. Therefore an Air Quality Management Area has been declared for the Kingshill Road area in central south Swindon.
- 5.31. Whilst the Proposed Development will add to local traffic volumes, given the accessibility of the Site to the A-road network, and the walking and cycle connections, existing and proposed, it is not anticipated that the proposal would have an adverse effect on local air quality or be detrimental to the reduction of pollutant concentrations within the AQMA. It is not considered that the vegetation at Hinton Parva SSSI or any designated ecological sites will be affected by road traffic emissions generated by the Proposed Development.

NOISE AND VIBRATION

- 5.32. Construction noise effects will be temporary in nature and will be minimised through the use of appropriate restrictions and good site management practice. It is not considered that there would be any likely significant effect as a result of construction activities.
- 5.33. Once the construction phase is complete and the development is operational, it is not anticipated that

effects from the proposed residential use is likely to result in significant noise or vibration effects.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

- 5.34. The Site is well contained as a result of the generally flat and low-lying topography, which extends across the surrounding area. This combined with the strong network of intervening field boundary and riparian vegetation, screens views of the Site from the surrounding roads and public rights of way network.
- 5.35. The exception to this are views towards the Site from the elevated ridgeline to the south, within the AONB. From locations without tree cover, distant views of the Site are possible, viewed as part of a much wider panorama that incorporates Swindon.
- 5.36. In the context of the emerging development context of the NEV, the Site would appear set well within the context of development, fronted by the built form within Redlands Village and set against the backdrop of the wider allocation, in particular built form within Lotmead Village and Lower Lotmead Village. The appearance for the majority of the Site will be moderated by virtue of the riparian vegetation associated with the existing watercourse and the safeguarded canal alignment.
- 5.37. It is not considered that significant effects are expected in terms of landscape or visual amenity.

HERITAGE

- 5.38. The Site does not contain any statutory or non-statutory listed heritage assets and therefore the proposal would not directly affect heritage assets through its construction or operation. It is not considered that the setting of Earls Court Manor or Lower Earls Court Farm heritage assets (paragraph 2.5) would be affected due to the distance from the Site and the screening effect of vegetation.

6. Mitigation and controls

- 6.1. In addition to the information set out above, further information is presented below which is intended to assist consideration of whether implementation of the scheme would or would not, be likely to result in significant environmental effects.
- 6.2. The PPG provides advice on how account mitigation measures should be taken into account at the screening stage. Paragraph 023 of the PPG on Environmental Impact Assessment states:

'Developers are encouraged to identify any features of their Proposed Development and any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment and to include these with the information required to inform the screening decision (see regulation 6). The extent to which mitigation or other measures may be taken into account in reaching a screening opinion depends on the facts of each case. The local planning authority must have regard to the amount of information available, the precautionary principle and the degree of uncertainty in relation to the environmental impact...' Reference ID: 4-023-20170728.

CONTROL OF CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES

- 6.3. Construction would proceed in accordance with industry-standard best practice techniques and all legislative requirements will be met. Standard measures can be secured through planning conditions and for such a proposal usually include site waste management and construction management implemented

via a CEMP.

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH CONTAMINATED MATERIAL

6.4. In the unlikely event that contaminated material is identified during the demolition/construction process, the contractor would follow following standard procedure to:

- notify the Environmental Health Officer of the discovery;
- secure the area / take action to prevent the release of contamination;
- appoint a specialist / identify the substance and appropriate containment/disposal options;
- dispose in accordance with applicable legislation / obtaining the necessary consents and / or licenses;
- record waster transfer / disposal certificates.

SOILS

6.5. Measures to mitigate the loss of soil resources during the construction phase will identify the most appropriate re-use for the different types of soils and proposed methods for handling, storing soils on-site. The aim will be to ensure the re-use of surplus soil in accordance with Defra's Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites. The soil resources plan will ensure that the quality of soils retained on-site is maintained by following good practice, particularly to avoid compaction and biodegradation of soils that are temporarily stockpiled. This will ensure that the soil retains its ecosystem functions. Any surplus soils will be re-used in a sustainable manner (i.e. as close to the Site as possible and to an after-use appropriate to the soil's quality).

DRAINAGE, FLOOD RISK AND WATER QUALITY

6.6. A flood risk assessment will be prepared to demonstrate how water would be managed over the lifetime of the Proposed Development, taking into account predicted climate change and the vulnerability of its users. It is considered that a drainage strategy will establish that the development will not be at risk of flooding and flood risk will not be increased elsewhere. No significant adverse flood risk impacts are anticipated.

6.7. The potential effects of construction on groundwater or surface water will be controlled by the implementation of a CEMP. This would containing controls on the management of soils and excavations, and limit the potential for on-site spillages / accidents that could affect water quality. With such measures in place no significant adverse effects are envisaged.

6.8. During operation of the Proposed Development there is the potential for pollutants originating from motor vehicles to enter surface water systems. Such risk is mitigated through the inclusion of pollution control measures in surface water drainage systems, which can be secured by condition.

BIODIVERSITY

6.9. The majority of the Site comprises agricultural land with low biodiversity value. Existing hedges and trees within the Site would be retained as far as practical with new planting included within greenspace. The objective will be to achieve a net-gain in biodiversity. An area within the south-west section of the Site is of slightly higher biodiversity value and is therefore retained in the development layout. It is considered highly unlikely that the form of development proposed would result in 'significant' effects on ecological receptors in the event that it is implemented, given its required compliance with local and national planning policy and relevant wildlife legislation.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- 6.10. During the design and construction process, materials will be selected in accordance with sustainability principles, reducing waste and the carbon intensity of new buildings as part of the construction process, and when occupied to help minimise greenhouse gas emissions. The Government has pledged to bring greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. With respect to this proposal, an effective approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the use of efficient designs and insulation products to achieve high levels of thermal efficiency - the 'fabric first' approach. New buildings that benefit from the latest heating systems, high levels of thermal insulation of walls, floors, ceilings, windows and doors can achieve a substantial reduction in energy demand, and therefore, of CO₂ emissions. The focus of the design will limit the energy consumption and CO₂ emissions through optimising the building performance together with energy efficiency measures following the steps of the energy hierarchy.

THE PRODUCTION OF WASTE

- 6.11. During site clearance and construction, the approach to working will seek to optimise construction methods and material use, retain excavated material within the development area, and implement best practice waste management.
- 6.12. Waste would be minimised primarily through re-use on the site itself, and where this cannot be achieved, by recycling elsewhere if possible, with disposal to a licenced facility used as a last resort. In order to minimise the volume of construction waste, use of a Site Management Plan will ensure that adverse effects from the management of waste will be unlikely.

POLLUTION AND NUISANCE

- 6.13. The potential for pollution or nuisance to be caused during construction will be controlled and managed through the use of a Site Management Plan. There are no neighbouring land uses that are likely to be affected by residential development on the site. The risk of water contamination should be low given that the design of any approved surface water drainage system would include the necessary protective measures.

HIGHWAYS

- 6.14. The allocation for residential development can be implemented as required by Policy NC3 to promote sustainable transport, with measures that seek to achieve a modal shift away from private car use including:
- new walking and cycle links;
 - a frequent bus service through the District Centre that connects the Eastern Villages to Swindon Town Centre;
 - well-connected street patterns and walkable neighbourhoods providing high quality, safe and direct walking, cycling and public transport routes including links using the green infrastructure network; and
 - provision of a Travel Plan for new residents which includes measures to encourage the use of public transport, as part of a wider travel plan.

NOISE

- 6.15. During the construction phase, impacts with regards to noise from all construction activities will be considered and controlled. Levels of vibration decrease very rapidly through the ground within a few metres, it is considered that any vibration effects as a result of construction activity are unlikely to result in a significant impact at nearby properties.

AIR QUALITY

- 6.16. Dust generation during the demolition and construction phase would be temporary and can be managed to acceptable levels through standard good practice (such as dust suppression techniques) implemented through a CEMP.
- 6.17. Swindon Borough Council has designated one Air Quality Management Area at Kingshill Road. The implementation of a residential travel plan will manage impacts on air quality.

VISUAL AMENITY

- 6.18. Any development will inevitably alter the visual amenity of an area. Whilst as an allocated site the principle of development is accepted, the design of the scheme will respond to the key features within the site and the approved development nearby. The development proposals will include measures to mitigate effects on visual amenity, through landscape planting and open spaces which are designed to screen and soften the appearance of the scheme.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The proposal exceeds the threshold criteria for an 'urban development project' as classified in Schedule 2, but it is not within or partially within an environmentally sensitive area as defined by the EIA Regulations. The Site is not considered to be sensitive to new development and environmental impacts are unlikely to be complex or experienced beyond its locality. This has included the consideration of cumulative impacts in the vicinity of the proposed development.
- 7.2. Most of the principal environmental effects of development arise during site clearance and construction and would be mainly restricted to the immediate area where activity is underway. A CEMP is proposed to provide appropriate protection of amenity and the environment during that process.
- 7.3. Potential environmental effects associated with transport, noise and vibration, air quality, landscape and visual amenity, built heritage, soils, biodiversity, flood risk and the interaction of changes resulting from the Proposed Development are not expected to result in likely significant effects. The implementation of standard, simple and effective mitigation measures regularly used with the construction and operation of residential led development have been considered in this process. This has taken account of the nature and scale of the Proposed Development, its location, the sensitivity of the existing environment and the types / characteristic of potential impacts likely, such that it can be concluded that the Proposed Development would not be likely to result in significant effects.
- 7.4. Regulation 6(6) of the EIA Regulations advises that a local planning authority shall adopt a screening opinion within three weeks of the date of receipt of a request, and Regulation 5(5)(a) requires the main reasons for its conclusion to be identified, with reference to the relevant criteria listed in Schedule 3.

8. EIA scoping opinion

- 8.1. In the event that SBC adopts a screening opinion that the proposal is EIA development, the Applicants request that the Council also confirms in writing its opinion as to the scope, and the level of detail, of the information to be provided in the ES by providing its formal EIA scoping opinion.
- 8.2. Whilst the Applicants do not consider the proposal to be EIA development, should the Council decide that the planning applications should be accompanied by an Environmental Statement, this section identifies the assessment topics that the Applicants consider to be an appropriate scope for an assessment of the Proposed Development.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

- Chapter 1 Introduction
- Chapter 2 Site description
- Chapter 3 Scheme description, design and mitigation
- Chapter 4 Approach to assessment
- Chapter 5 Traffic and transport
- Chapter 6 Water resources (drainage and flood risk)
- Chapter 7 Biodiversity
- Chapter 8 Landscape and visual effects
- Chapter 9 Climate change
- Chapter 10 Cumulative effects
- Chapter 11 Summary of mitigation, residual and interaction effects
- Non-technical summary

- 8.3. A summary of the approach that would be taken to the assessment of the issues scoped in is as follows.

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

- 8.4. The traffic and transport impact of the proposed development will be assessed in line with guidance contained within the DCLG 'National Planning Policy Guidance' (March 2014) and the DfT publication 'Guidance on Transport Assessment' (March 2007) and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (now IEMA) 'Guidelines for the Environmental Assessment of Road Traffic'.
- 8.5. As recommended by the IEMA guidelines, the following environmental effects will be considered when considering traffic as a result of the proposed development:
- Severance;
 - Driver Delay;
 - Pedestrian Delay;
 - Pedestrian Amenity;
 - Fear and Intimidation; and
 - Accidents and Safety.

- 8.6. The extent of the transport impact will be determined using pre-defined significance criteria, outlined within the IEMA guidance. The criteria will be based on the net change in journeys as a result of the proposed development. The significance criteria will establish the scale of any beneficial or adverse effects the development will have on the transport network.
- 8.7. The following traffic and transport effects identified for inclusion within the assessment include:
- Net change in vehicular traffic patterns;
 - AM and PM peak hour junction capacity;
 - Local footway provision;
 - Local cycle facility provision; and
 - Effect on personal injury collisions.
- 8.8. The mitigation measures to be included as part of the assessment will be set out, likely to include the development of the site access points; a Pedestrian/Cycle Strategy; and the implementation of a Travel Plan. Any additional mitigation measures required following detailed assessment will be discussed with the highway authority.
- DRAINAGE AND FLOOD RISK**
- 8.9. The assessment will be consistent with current best practice recommendations in the form of statutory documents and recognised publications to ensure that the findings represent a robust approach. The assessment of flood risk and drainage will be carried out with regard to the following policy and guidance:
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance;
 - Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1);
 - Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) Partial Review;
 - Cherwell District Council Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Update, May 2017;
 - Cherwell District Council Level 2 SFRA, May 2017.
- 8.10. An assessment of the potential direct and indirect effects during the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development will be undertaken based on a review of published data, impacts identified within the site-specific FRA and Drainage Strategy and liaison with statutory authorities such as the LLFA and Thames Water.
- 8.11. Recommendations for appropriate mitigation measures will be made in order to minimise the potential effects of the Proposed Development on sensitive water resources in terms of quality and flood risk. The drainage strategy will account for cumulative effects associated with the adjacent development of the NEV to the south.
- 8.12. Any potential significant effects to key sensitive receptors within the local water environment will be considered for the construction phase of the development. Potential impacts could include the accidental spillage of fuel oils, leaching of contamination, vehicle washing, suspended solids in surface water runoff etc. These potential impacts will be suitably mitigated as part of a Construction Environment Management Plan setting out site specific measures.

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- 8.13. Without appropriate mitigation, the proposed development will result in an increase in impermeable area and increase the rate and volume of surface water runoff. Potential impacts and significance of effects to key sensitive receptors within the local water environment will be considered for when the development is occupied.
- 8.14. The Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) will assess the level of flood risk to the proposed development and surrounding area, and will be carried out to ensure that there are no adverse effects to the Site or surrounding area. This assessment and the design of any mitigation measure required will take account of future climate change to ensure that the development remains safe from flood risk during its lifetime. As part of the drainage strategy, the proposed surface water drainage system will be designed to replicate natural drainage as closely as possible.
- 8.15. In respect of the quality of surface water runoff from the Proposed Development, the surface water strategy will offer a level of treatment to improve the quality of runoff discharged from the Site, whilst also providing areas of biodiversity and amenity as an additional benefit.

BIODIVERSITY / ECOLOGY

- 8.16. The Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) will include a summary of the current ecology baseline conditions within the site and assess the likely significant effects of the proposed development on Important Ecological Features (IEFs) such as designated sites, habitats and populations of protected or notable species. Where 'significant' effects cannot be avoided through inherent design, the EclA will recommend additional mitigation and/or compensation measures.
- 8.17. The approach taken will follow the guidelines published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 'Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland, September 2018 (Version 1.1, updated September 2019).
- 8.18. The extent of the Zone of Influence (Zol) will be determined through a review of the baseline ecological conditions relative to the emerging scheme design and consideration of the Proposed Development.
- 8.19. The identification and evaluation of Important Ecological Features (IEFs) for the purposes of EclA and the assessment of significant adverse or beneficial effects on IEFs, will be undertaken with reference to the CIEEM Guidelines. This involves professional judgement based on available guidance and information, together with advice from experts who know the locality of the project and/or the distribution and status of the species or features that are being considered.
- 8.20. In addition, best practice guidance in relation to survey techniques will inform the completion of baseline studies and will be referred to in regard to any mitigation/ compensation measures proposed within the EclA.
- 8.21. The Guidelines recommend that the value or potential value of an ecological resource or feature be determined within a defined geographical context, with the assessment of impacts undertaken in relation to the baseline conditions within the Zol that are expected to occur if the development were not to take place. The Guidelines also recommend that the process of identifying impacts should make explicit reference to aspects of ecological structure and function on which the feature depends. Impacts will therefore be assessed in the context of the baseline conditions within the Zol during the lifetime of the proposed residential development.

8.22. Having identified the activities likely to cause significant impacts, the assessment will describe the resulting changes and assess the impact on valued ecological features. In accordance with the CIEEM Guidelines for EclA, a 'significant effect' is an effect that either supports or undermines biodiversity conservation objectives for the identified IEFs. The use of significance criteria or matrices are not supported by the CIEEM Guidelines. Conservation objectives may be specific (e.g. for a designated site) or broad (e.g. national/local nature conservation policy) or more wide-ranging (enhancement of biodiversity). Effects can be considered significant at a wide range of scales from international to local. Significant effects will be qualified with reference to an appropriate geographic scale.

8.23. The assessment of construction and operational effects on IEFs will be undertaken both before and after consideration of additional mitigation measures; the latter represents the assessment of residual effects, but including inherent measures incorporated into the proposals e.g., retention of habitats. In addition, the potential for cumulative impacts to arise from the in-combination effects with other development proposals will also be assessed.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

8.24. A Landscape Appraisal has been undertaken to establish the current character and extent of the site, identify views into or across the site, and relevant design constraints. The site is not subject to any landscape designations, at either a national or local level. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is located to the south of the site. Due to the intervening distance (approximately 2km), it is not considered that development of the site is likely to have any material effect upon the setting of the designation.

8.25. The methodology for undertaking the LVIA will follow the third edition of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013). The detailed methodology for the assessment of effects will be agreed with the LPA's landscape representative, including the number and location of viewpoints to form the basis of the assessment.

8.26. The assessment will identify the landscape character and key features of the landscape and any landscape designations that affect the site. Reference sources will include: Local Planning Policy; Landscape and Heritage Designations; Natural England's National Character Areas; District and local level Character Areas; Natural England's Natural Area Profile; Public Rights of Way; Local OS Maps; and Aerial Photographs.

8.27. This will be used to identify the Primary Visual Envelope of the Site and record key viewpoints, which will be used to inform the landscape and visual assessment of the proposed development.

8.28. The second stage of the assessment would seek to describe and make a judgement for the effects on Landscape Character, which may affect discrete character areas and/or character types comprising features that may possess a particular quality or merit. It will also record the Visual Effects that may arise as a result of the proposed development on views from visual receptors, users of public rights of way, and upon the amenity value of the views.

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- 8.29. Measures to mitigate any visual impacts and enhance the landscape value and visual quality of the area are a fundamental part of scheme design and landscape design process. The approach will be to produce a high landscape quality and scheme design, taking account of the setting of the site. If any adverse visual impacts are identified through the assessment, mitigation measures will be considered such as scale, massing, materials and finishes, alongside the landscape strategy.
- 8.30. An assessment of any residual effects which may remain following the incorporation of mitigation measures will be undertaken and the significance of these effects stated. The evaluation of residual effects will be considered for the time of completion, and for Year 15 following. This allows for the consideration of the screening effects of planting that will be incorporated as mitigation for the development.
- 8.31. The output of the LVIA will:
- establish the baseline conditions in relation to the site;
 - assess the sensitivity of the landscape to change brought by the proposed development;
 - assess the landscape and visual impact of the development (including lighting) on the site and relevant surrounding area;
 - identify areas of landscape and visual concern and/or benefit in relation to the development and during its construction;
 - advise on any proposals to mitigate significant negative effects; and
 - identify the residual impacts of the development.

THE CONSIDERATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE ASSESSMENT

- 8.32. IEMA guidance recommends that a focus on proportionate assessment is important in avoiding undue burden and that EIA should focus on a project's significant impacts. It is proposed that this chapter will summarise the climate change aspects considered in each of the topic chapters. The chapter will set out how the proposal responds to the requirements of relevant local plan policy relating to development and climate change. Consideration will relate to the 2080s, i.e., more than 50 years after the scheme is occupied.
- 8.33. Measures proposed to adapt to, and minimise the effects of, climate change will be highlighted to the extent that it is feasible to do this for the outline planning application. Implementation of the proposed development will take place over several years. Over this period, it is inevitable that changes in policy requirements will occur, the decarbonisation of electricity generation will advance further, and new technical measures will be introduced to reduce the energy requirements of buildings and optimise how people use them. Climate change adaptation is required to be informed and flexible: detailed responses will therefore be specified progressively as is appropriate at the time of each reserved matters approval.

CUMULATIVE PROJECTS

- 8.34. The requirement for cumulative effects assessment is set out in Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations. At Schedule 4(5), the EIA Regulations require 'A description of the likely significant effects of the development on the environment resulting from, inter alia: ... (e) the cumulation of effects with other existing and/or approved projects, taking into account any existing environmental problems relating to areas of particular environmental importance likely to be affected or the use of natural resources.'

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- 8.35. Cumulative impact comprises the combined effects of the Proposed Development with other existing and/or approved development. This is relevant when the construction and operational phases could be concurrent, and where there are sensitive receptors common to other developments.
- 8.36. It is proposed that the EIA would consider other planning permissions that are not yet constructed or operational (PPG Reference ID 4-024-20170728), along with allocated schemes where there is a reasonable degree of certainty that they will proceed within 3 years (PPG Reference ID: 42-014-20140306).
- 8.37. The following have been identified as relevant in the context of the Proposed Development:
- S/19/0703 - Southern Connector Road, approved 12/2019.
 - S/OUT/16/0021 – Redlands Eastern Villages, Swindon, 370 dwellings, approved 06/2019.
 - S/OUT/19/0582– Lotmead Eastern Villages, Swindon, 2,500 dwellings, approved 03/2021.



9. Site location plan

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10. P21-0975_08-1 Full Application Area

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11. P21-0975_08-2 Outline Application Area

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12. Phase II Botanical Survey



13. Landscape Appraisal