EMPSHILL FARM, FARMINGTON, CHELTENHAM, GLOUCS. GL54 3ND - PROPOSED LOG CABIN DIVERSIFICATION SCHEME

LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT STATEMENT

28th November 2023 LS6315/Doc001B

Landscape Institute Registered Practice

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LANDSCAPE MATTERS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION *2*

2.0 SITE CONTEXT *2*

3.0 METHODOLOGY *12*

4.0 FINDINGS *13*

5.0 LANDSCAPE PLANNING CONTEXT *18*

6.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT *23*

7.0 CONCLUSIONS *26*

Appendix A – LVIS Detailed Methodology 30
Appendix B – Glossary 38

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Landscape Matters Design LLP was instructed in October 2023 by Mr & Mrs Tew (the client) to provide a Landscape & Visual Impact Statement in relation to the siting of two timber log cabins in an existing woodland towards the northern end of the farm. The principal aim of this document has been to assess what the anticipated landscape and visual impacts of these two cabins might be on the site itself, as well as the wider Cotswolds National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - AONB) / landscape setting.

2.0 SITE CONTEXT

2.1 The cabin site (Grid Ref : SP140149) is located on gently sloping land (approx. 155m aod) on the north side of a valley that rises to around 184m aod in the nearby village of Farmington to the north-west, and drops down to around 140m aod to the south in the vicinity of the main Empshill Farm complex. The valley is orientated broadly west to east and contains a small tributary of Sherborne Brook that flows eastwards to Sherborne and beyond. In terms of major centres of population the site is approximately 22.2km west of Witney, 20.4km south-east of Cheltenham, and 17.9km north-east of Cirencester. At the more local level the towns of Burford are 11.4km away to the south-east, Bourton-on-the-Water 6.4km to the north-west, and Northleach 2.7km to the south-west. The core of the village of Farmington is 644m to the north-west, and the main A40 812m to the south. See Figures 1 and 2.

FIGURE 1 – SITE LOCATION

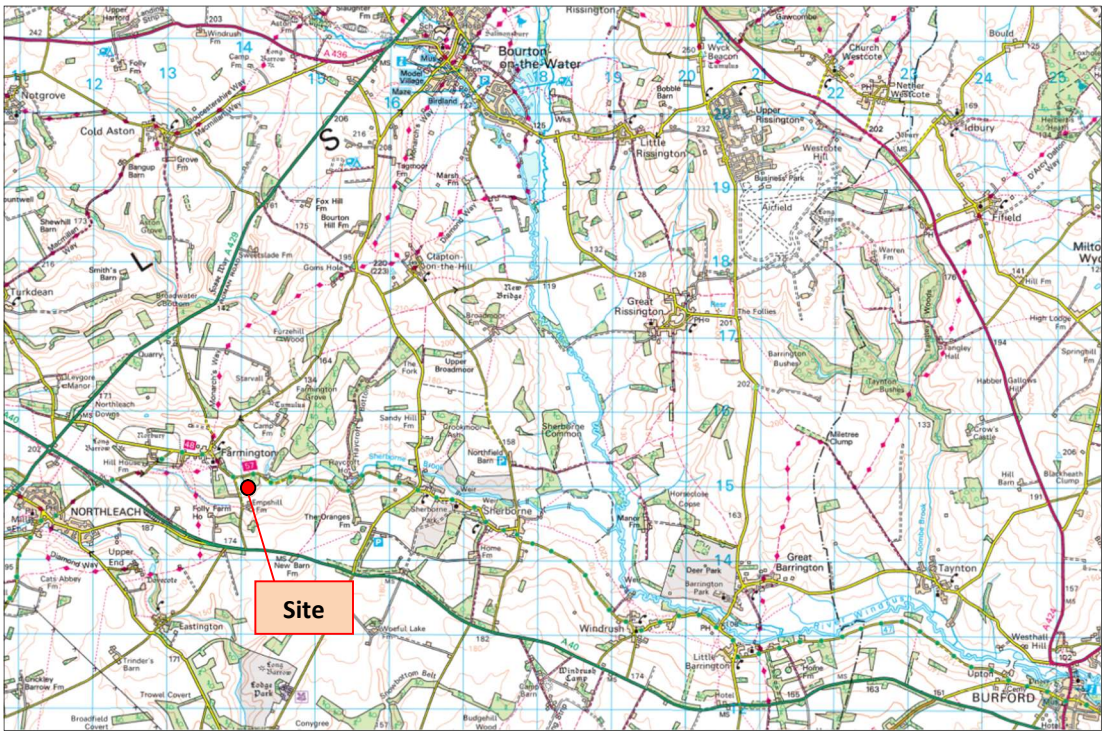
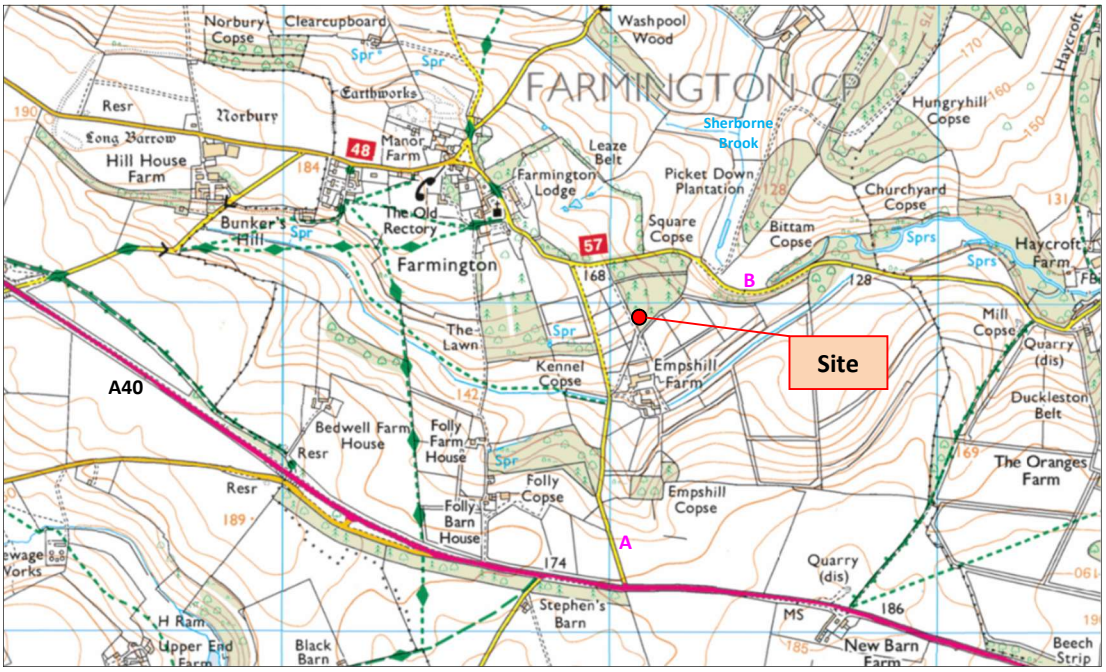


FIGURE 2 – LOCAL SITE LOCATION



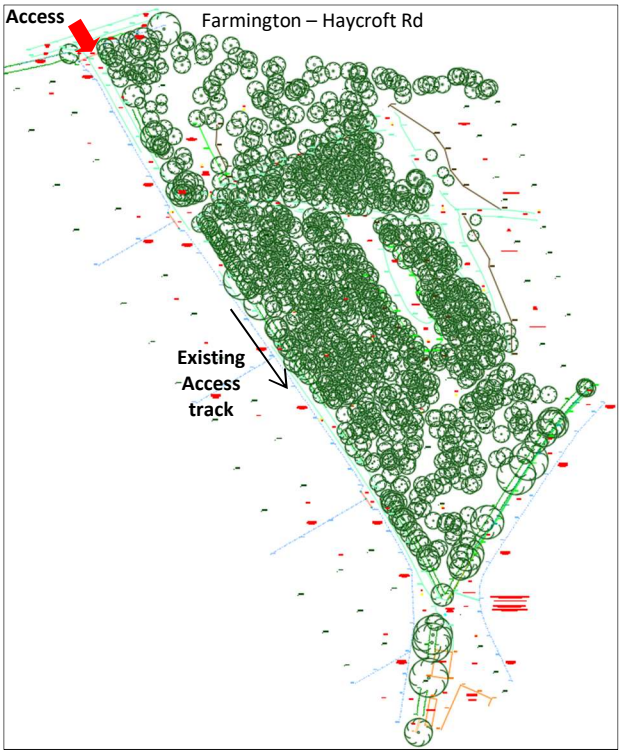
Empshill Farm is a 127 ha working farm put down to sheep, horses, and grass. Approximately half of the grass pasture is organic with an organic crop sold to the adjacent dairy farm and then followed on grazed by sheep. The other half is used for the non-organic production of hay / haylage that is grazed on by both sheep and horses. In terms of the farm complex this contains barn accommodation, a workshop, stable blocks, garaging, an outdoor manege, various outbuildings, and a surfaced farmyard. The farm lies within the parish of Farmington. It is located outside the defined settlement boundary and designated Conservation Area but within the Cotswolds AONB. Vehicular access (see Fig.2) is via Empshill Road (A) that links to the A40 to the south and the Farmington to Haycroft Road (B) to the north.

2.2 This assessment, together with other relevant reports / documentation, has been requested by the client in order to support the current full planning application that relates to the proposed erection of 2 holiday log cabins together with associated parking in the southern corner of an existing 35.6 ha plantation block of mixed woodland (see Figure 3) that includes Square Copse. Access for the installation phase and subsequent leisure usage will be via an existing securely gated 3m wide stone track that runs down the western boundary of the woodland plantation. Being 194m south of the Farmington-Haycroft Road, down this track, the site will be well set-back from the road frontage within the wood. Recently thinning works has been undertaken in the mixed woodland (spruce, western red cedar, sycamore, ash), which is to be replanted in due course with native tree species. To date much of the spruce has been cleared from the proposed 0.16ha diamond-shaped log cabin site. The remaining ash trees however appear to be suffering from ash-die back so will require felling in due course for health and safety reasons.

Photographs of the site can be seen at Figure 4.

FIGURE 3 – EXISTING & PROPOSED SITES

Existing



Proposed

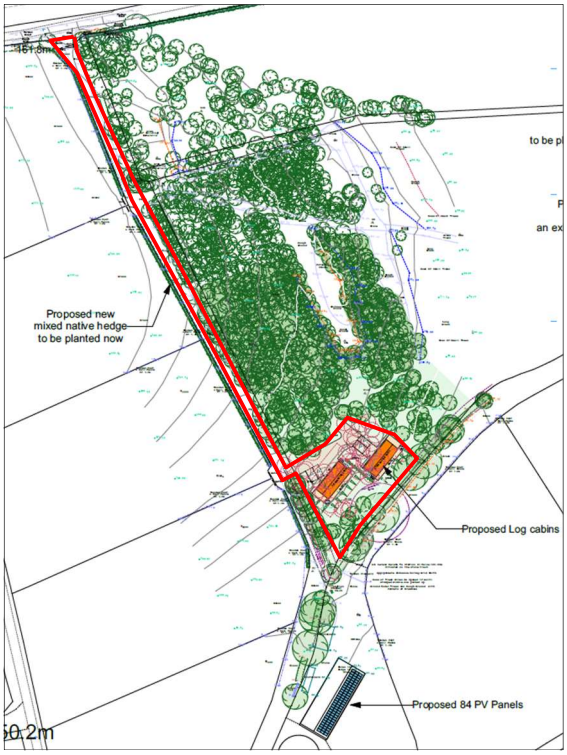
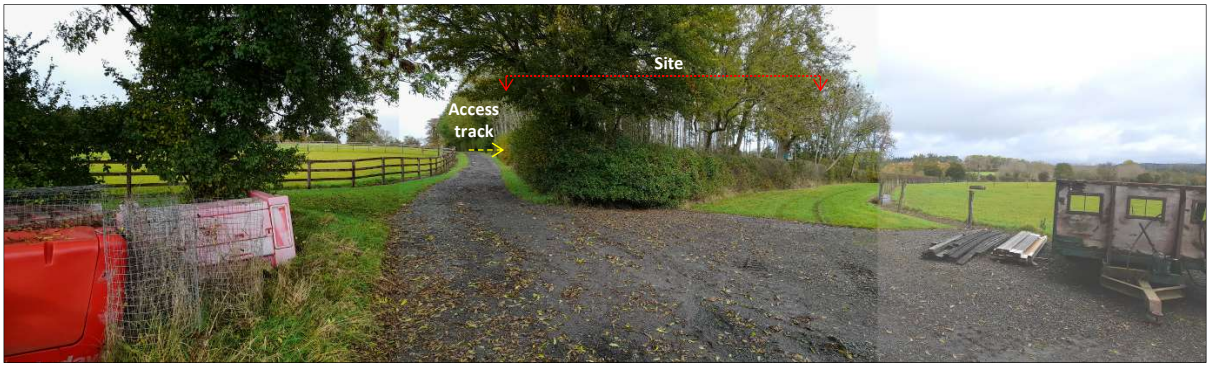


FIGURE 4 – EXISTING SITE PHOTOS

Looking north up the tarmac driveway from the main farm complex that serves the manege and the open barn (on which the solar panels are proposed to be installed to supply energy to the two cabins). Fenced horse paddocks are evident to the right (east). In the distance is the mixed woodland block within which the site is located towards its southern edge. The woodland immediately east of the site has already been felled and replanted with young native trees.

Looking northwards from the upper western side of the farm complex. Fenced horse paddocks are present on the left (west). The stoned access track linked to the Farmington – Haycroft Road (out of view beyond the hill crest) passes down the west side of the mixed woodland block and can be utilized to enable access to the site which is concealed from view by the mature western boundary hedgerow and the thinned trees beyond.



Looking north from the top end of the farm complex (stored materials to each side). The access track continues northwards to the Farmington – Haycroft Road (out of sight), with the proposed new access point to the site indicated by the dashed yellow arrow. The site is concealed from view by the mature hedges with hedgerow trees along the western and southern field boundaries. The mixed woodland vegetation is evident beyond.

Looking westwards from the south-east corner of the proposed site towards the thinned mixed woodland area (the left of centre area is where the cabins are proposed). Some of the retained ash trees suffering from ash die-back will require felling to enable the cabins and parking to be installed. The Farmington – Haycroft Road farm access track will be utilized, and through the creation of the new access point, serve the cabins. The existing western and southern site boundary hedges with hedgerow trees will be retained in full.

2.3 The site is located within National Character Area (England) Ref 107 : **Cotswolds**. *The Cotswolds form the best-known section of the predominantly oolitic Jurassic Limestone belt that stretches from the Dorset coast to Lincolnshire. The dominant pattern of the Cotswold landscape is of a steep scarp crowned by a high, open wold; the beginning of a long and rolling dip slope cut by a series of increasingly wooded valleys…… Smaller towns and villages nestle at the scarp foot, in the valley bottoms and on the gentler valley sides at springlines. Scattered hamlets and isolated farmsteads are found on the higher ground. The limestone creates a strong sense of place and unity which carries through to the buildings and walls which have been built using local limestone for centuries.*
Nationally important beech woods feature in the landscape and are a notable feature on the scarp edge and in a number of the incised valleys. Mixed oak woodlands are concentrated on the upper slopes of valleys and on the flat high wold tops. Woodlands can contain a wide and notable range of calcicole shrubs and ground flora. Parkland and estates are characteristic of the area. Farming is mixed, with much of the high wold dominated by arable on thin, brashy soils prone to erosion. Pasture is predominant in the valleys, and in particular on steeper slopes and on more clayey soils. Meadows and treelined watercourses are found along the valley bottoms.
The watercourses of the dip slope provide the headwaters of the Thames and flow eastwards within broad shallow valleys…..the area has a rich history……It is a notable visitor destination and has a longstanding reputation as the 'quintessential English landscape'.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs) within the NCA, which may be pertinent to this scheme, include :-

SEO 1: Protect and enhance the highly distinctive farmed landscape, retaining the balance between productive arable, pastoral and wooded elements and the open, expansive views particularly from the scarp, high wold and dip slope.

SEO 2: Safeguard and conserve the historic environment, cultural heritage and geodiversity that illustrate the history, evolution, foundations, land use and settlement of the Cotswolds landscape, and enable access to and interpretation of the relationship between natural processes and human influences.

SEO 3: Protect, maintain and expand the distinctive character of the Cotswolds and the network of semi-natural and arable habitats, including limestone grassland, beech woods and wetlands along streams and rivers, to enhance water quality, strengthen ecological and landscape connectivity, support rare species and allow for adaptation to changes in climate.

SEO 4: Safeguard and manage soil and water resources, allowing naturally functioning hydrological processes to maintain water quality and supply; reduce flooding; and manage land to reduce soil erosion and water pollution and to retain and capture carbon.

2.4 Within this NCA area the site locality is described, in the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Area publication as **Area 15 – Farmed Slopes** and specifically **15A – Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes**. The former has the following, potentially relevant, characteristic landscape features :-

- smooth gentle landform with gentler landform on lower slopes, and sense of exposure on some upper slopes;

- small, often geometric, broadleaf and coniferous woodlands and tree belts along watercourses draining the slopes.

- large deciduous and mixed woodlands bordering parkland, integrated by strong hedgerow network;

- productive arable and pasture farmland with a strong pattern of hedgerows.

At the more detailed level Area 15A is described as containing *generally small coniferous and broadleaf copses and farm woodlands. These have no distinct patterning and occur close to streams and woodlands or dotted across the slopes…..Woodlands are generally well integrated with their surroundings, their geometric form often being softened by their relationship with landform and surrounding hedgerows and field trees. The narrow nature of the vale and rural character of the pastoral lowlands below, also raises the visual prominence of development.*

2.5 The Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy & Guidelines report contains a Landscape Sensitivity section in which it describes the locality as '*Rising from the lowlands, the elevated and sloping landform of the Farmed Slopes makes them a highly visible feature and therefore very sensitive to change, particularly where this would introduce built elements to the otherwise agricultural landscapes, or interrupt the strong patchwork patterns created by hedged pasture and arable fields'*.

2.6 The rural website portal **MAGIC** indicates that the site does not lie within, or close to national trails, village greens, doorstep greens, millennium greens, country parks, scheduled monuments, registered battlefields, registered parks and gardens, Ramsar sites, National or Local Nature Reserves (NNR, LNR), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), SSSIs, or aquifers. No particular insect, mammal, bat or amphibian species are mentioned, except that Lapwing are identified as priority bird species. This portal does identify that :-

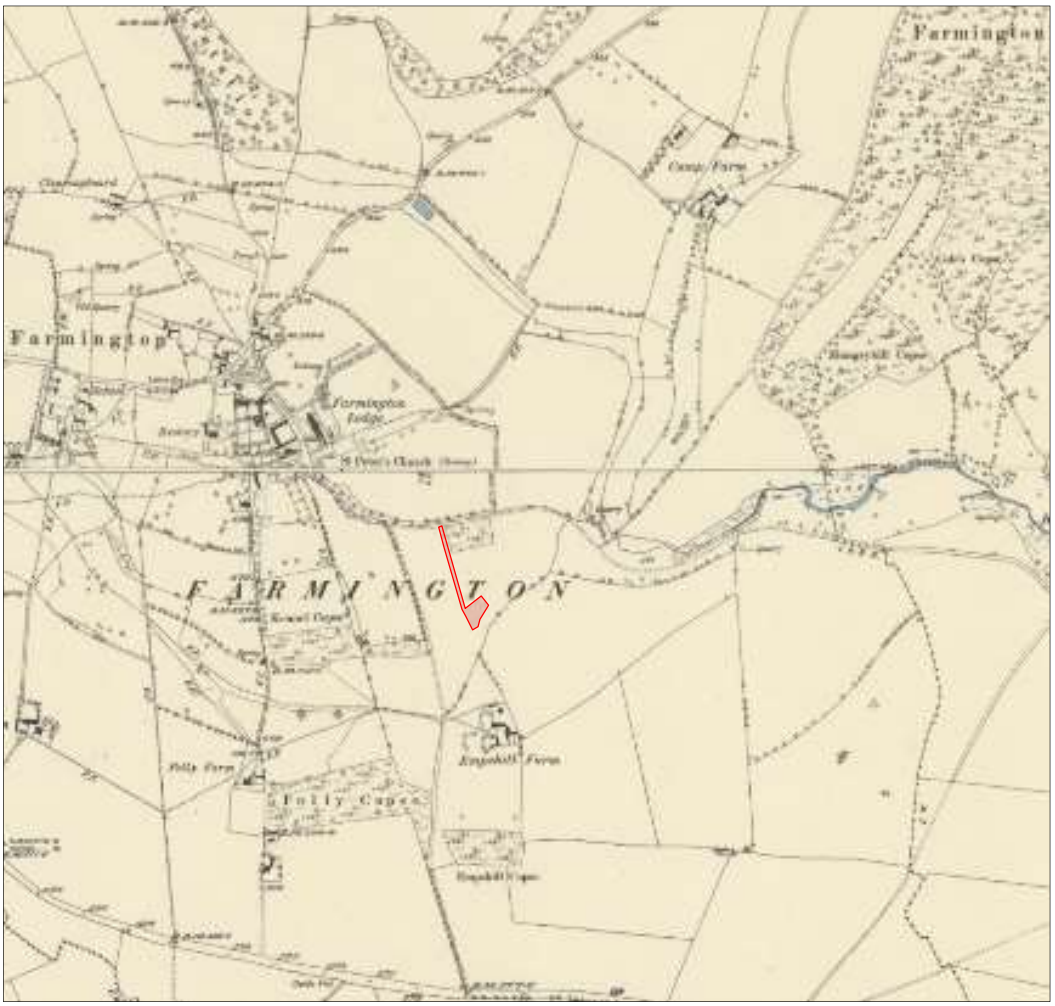
- The site lies within the Cotswold Jurassic groundwater NVZ (ID 83)
- It has a Low to Medium groundwater vulnerability / soluble rock risk
- Empshill Farm has been awarded eWGS support for 2.15ha of woodland in 2009 (ref : 17542) and 17.08ha of woodland of which 9.6ha of WGS3 thinning operations between 2009 and 2014.
- National historic landscape characterisation identifies that this is an enclosed agriculture landscape, with planned fields, and piecemeal enclosure of open strip fields.
- Agricultural Land Classification is Grade 3 - Good to Moderate
- Soilscape Area 3 - shallow lime-rich soils over chalk or limestone; loamy; freely draining; lime-rich fertility; characteristic semi-natural habitats - herb-rich downland and limestone pastures; beech hangers and other lime-rich woodlands; main land cover – arable and grassland.
- There are a number of rectilinear deciduous woodland blocks within the surrounding area
- The woodland block within which the site is to be located is covered by a Woodland Management Plan, and some of the open land to the west and north-east has been entered into the Countryside Stewardship Middle Tier. North of the Farmington – Haycroft Road much of the land is included within an Entry level plus Higher Level Stewardship agreement.
- The site lies within Network Enhancement Zone 2.

- With regards listed buildings the closest are three Grade II buildings on Empshill Farm itself (closest 225m away to the south), namely the Farmhouse, stableblock, barn, stables, and shelter shed. Further afield there are numerous Grade II listed buildings within the village of Farmington, together with the Grade I Church of St. Peters (some 532m away to the north-west).

2.7 A search of historical Ordnance Survey (OS) maps / Google Earth identified that the proposed site and the surrounding area has been under agricultural use for centuries.

The 1884 Ordnance Survey (OS) map shows a post-inclosure landscape of small to medium sized rectilinear fields, some of which had mature hedgerow trees along their boundaries and/or adjacent to footpaths. Three deciduous copses are named (Kennel, Folly, and Empshill) although a smaller rectangular copse is also shown north of the site (on the south side of the Farmington – Haycroft Road). The historic core of Empshill Farm is shown together with Folly Farm to the west. Otherwise there is little habitation within the agricultural landscape until one enters Farmington village. Whilst there are no footpaths immediately within or adjacent to the site there are a number to the west. The site lies within a relatively large triangular open field, see Fig.5.

FIGURE 5 : ORDNANCE SURVEY 1884 MAP (proposed site marked in pink)



The 1903 Second Edition OS map shows little change except that the small copse adjacent to the Farmington – Haycroft Road is now referred to as Square Copse.

The 1922 OS map shows that Kennel Copse has been significantly enlarged to the north (referred to as The Lawn), and Square Copse to the east adjacent to the Lane with mixed woodland. A small roughly circular conifer block of woodland has also been planted beyond the north-east corner of Empshill Copse.

The 1945 Google Earth aerial photograph, as well as the 1958 and 1961 OS maps, show little if any change in the landscape, apart from maturing Copse woodland vegetation.

The most dramatic changes appear to have taken place post-1961. By the time of the 1999 Google Earth aerial image (see Fig.6) a large new barn, yard, and stable block had been built on the north side of the farm complex; the already enlarged, mainly deciduous Square Copse had been significantly extended in a southerly direction down to the field boundary with a well-developed, largely mixed tree species cover; and the access track had been established down the west side of the copse. Only the western side of the original large triangular field has been retained as pasture.

FIGURE 6 : 1999 Google Earth aerial image (proposed site marked in pink)

Four years later (2003) further expansion of the Farm complex had occurred in the form of a large new manege on the north side of the farm, together with improved vehicular access drives both to the west and east sides of the complex.

Between 2009 and 2017 the Google Earth aerial imagery indicates that a new small building had been constructed on the east side of the farm, and a circular horse walker north of the manege.

By 2020 the Google Earth image shows that the eastern half of the enlarged Square Copse has been felled and replanted. In addition, the open barn has been constructed at the extreme northern end of the farm complex.

The current Google Earth image shows little change apart from the recent thinning works within the site itself (see Fig. 7).

FIGURE 7 : Current Google Earth aerial image (proposed site marked in pink)

2.8 Gloucestershire's Natural Capital web portal identifies that in terms of the county's nature recovery network the north-eastern portion of Square Copse is a High priority woodland area that provides High ecosystem services, whilst the western side is only of Medium priority and Medium ecosystem services provision benefit. The highest demand / opportunity for ecosystem services benefit is considered to be east / north-east of Square Copse in order to connect to the Sherborne Brook habitats, rather than west or south of that Copse (which is considered only of medium benefit). This might take the form of new native woodland creation and/or with limited open habitat retention. The farm lies within the Cotswolds Valley Nature Improvement Area (NIA). The farm and surrounding area is considered to provide a medium demand / opportunity for recreational improvement.

2.9 Gloucestershire County Council's online mapping tool identifies that part of Farmington Grove, to the north-east of the site on the north side of Sherborne Brook,

is a Local Wildlife Site and ancient woodland. In terms of mineral resources much of the Farm contains sandstone and limestone deposits.

2.9 The Sustran's website identifies that the national cycle-route No.57 passes along the Farmington – Haycroft Road to the north of the site, and links to route No.48 within and to the west of Farmington.

2.10 The Gov.UK Flooding web portal indicates the site and wider farm is not liable to flooding by rivers (Sherborne Brook) or surface water.

2.11 Gloucestershire C.C's online rights of way map shows that there are no public rights of way within the site or the landholding farmland to the north, south, or east (see Figure 8). The nearest public footpath (Farmington FP8) heads initially west, opposite the main entrance gates at Empshill Farm, and then north skirting the village of Farmington. In the village itself there are a number of footpaths (FP3, 4, and 7) together with the recreational path Monarch's Way. Further afield to the south-west and south-east are several footpaths, bridleways, and restricted byways by the A40.

FIGURE 8 – GLOUCESTERSHIRE C.C. RIGHTS OF WAY MAP

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 An initial desktop study was undertaken to discover what was the current extent of knowledge regarding the site and locality. Key edocuments referred to include :-

i) Natural England for NCA 107 : Cotswolds

ii) GOV.UK portal for flooding information

iii) MAGIC portal for access, land use, nature conservation, environmental data

iv) Google Earth and Bing map – aerial photography

v) Historic and current Ordnance Survey map data

vi) Gloucestershire CC for their online public rights of way map and minerals data

vii) Gloucestershire's Natural Capital website for its nature recovery information

viii) Cotswolds AONB for its landscape character area assessment, as well as its Landscape Strategy & Guidelines publication

ix) NPPF (September 2023) for planning aspects related to development within AONBs

x) Cotswolds DC's Local Plan and planning portal with regards landscape, tourism, green infrastructure, and nature recovery.

xi) Sustrans for cycle routes

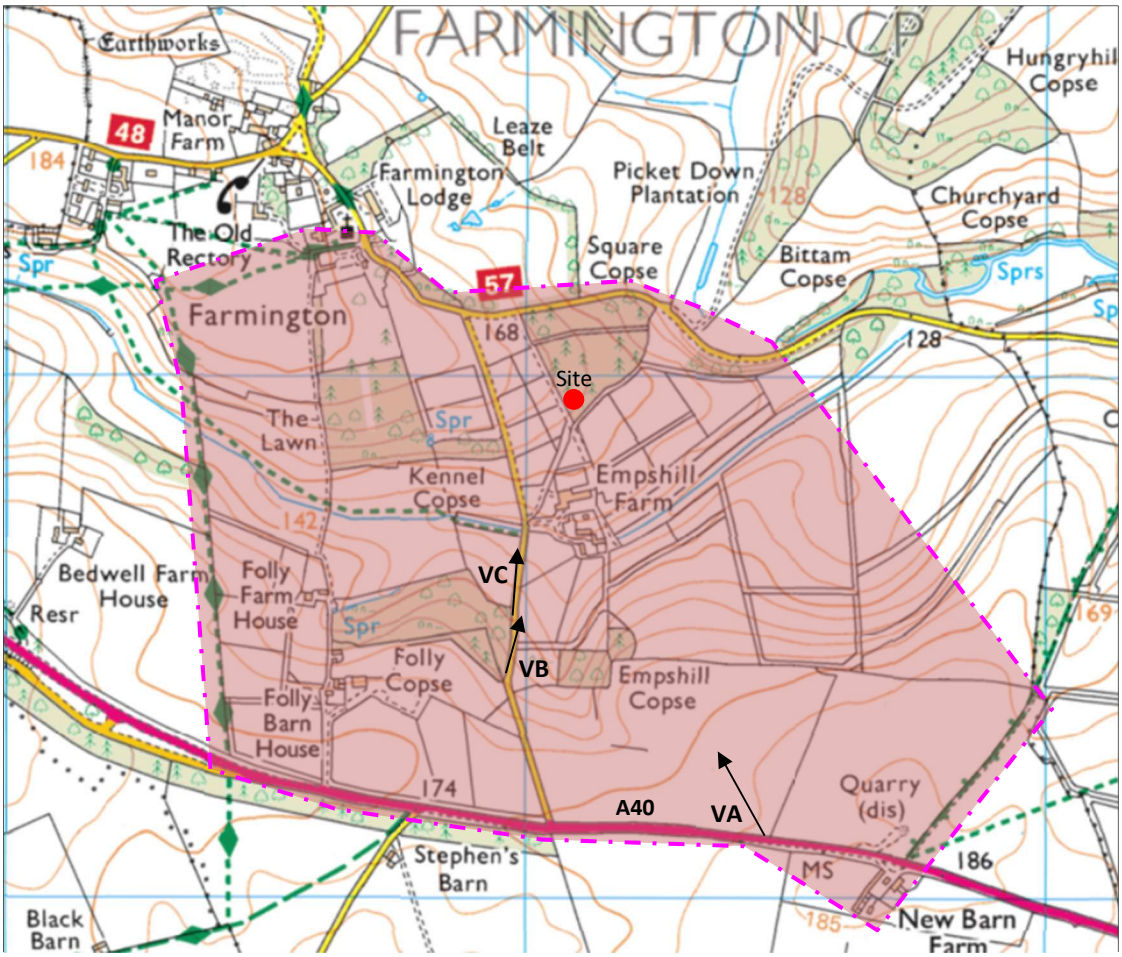
3.2 A site visit was undertaken on 31st October 2023 which looked specifically at the site in its landscape setting. This involved a walkover landscape survey to assess the visual impact of the proposed development within its immediate surroundings when viewed from the local roads and rights of way. The visit was undertaken from 10.45am in cloudy, overcast conditions through to 2.10pm in dry bright sunny conditions. All photographs were taken on a Samsung Android mobile phone's 13 megapixel digital camera. No manipulation of the photographs was subsequently carried out apart from a) the occasional lightening of some of the images in order to aid clarity and b) appropriate cropping of less relevant sections of the photographs in order to either merge panoramic shots together and/or to ensure that they fitted on the report page.

3.3 Although this is not a full Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (due to the very limited nature of the development) the survey and assessment approach was undertaken in accordance with the intentions of The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (third edition), 2013 by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 The site survey visit entailed walking the public rights of way within the immediate and wider locality, as well as public highways (see Figure 9) in order to determine what publicly-accessible views there might be of the site. In addition, the survey checked to determine whether any private off-site properties with windows facing towards the scheme might have views to it. Where it was clear that there would either be no views towards the site or they were of minimal importance these have been excluded from this report.

FIGURE 9 – Landscape study area, public and potential private viewpoints



Potential Visual envelope VA Public Viewpoint

Although there was a relatively large potential visual envelope area (see Figure 9) it became very evident that due to the presence of mature vegetation within and around the cabin site, the adjacent rolling topography, the mature copse and hedgerowed setting within the wider locality, and the lack of roads and public rights of way in close proximity to it, there appeared to be no public or potential private

viewpoints (e.g. from New Barn Farm, Folly Farm House, or Folly Barn House) of the site where the cabins are specifically to be located at all.

Only three publically-accessible viewpoint locations were identified within the visual envelope area from which the existing access track to the cabin site and/or the existing open barn (on which the solar panels are proposed to be installed in order to provide electricity to the cabins). These are discussed below :-

Viewpoint A (VA) see Figure 10 – This is an elevated long-range (899m) view from the verge of the A40 looking in a north-westerly direction. The vast majority of the A40 verge provides no views towards the site due to the presence of boundary hedgerows / trees. But at this specific location there is a narrow unvegetated gap through which passing travellers can obtain a very brief glimpse of the landscape to the north. The panoramic vista is extensive, dominated by arable land in the foreground and woodland in the distance. None of Empshill Farm is visible. Nor is the open barn or the cabin site. One can just make out a very short, upper portion of the access track that will serve the cabins.

FIGURE 10 – Viewpoint A (VA)

Viewpoint B (VB) see Figure 11 - This is a long-range (511m) view from Empshill Road that links the A40 to Empshill Farm. Due to its elevated position vehicle users / walkers / cyclists can briefly see over the top of the adjacent roadside hedgerows and trees in a north-easterly direction towards the site. The Empshill Farm buildings and proposed cabin site are screened from view. But the upper portion of the fenced access track route (not the surfacing itself) can be glimpsed.

FIGURE 11 – Viewpoint B (VB)

Viewpoint C (VC) see Figure 12 - This is a medium-range (414m) view from a similar location to Viewpoint VB (although slightly lower down the hill) looking northwards from the country lane. The cabin site is concealed from view by the foreground mature tree and boundary hedgerow vegetation as well as the open barn building. The route of the existing access track is evident, as is the open barn.

Figure 12 – Viewpoint C (VC)

4.2 Baseline Situation – Visual Aspects Review

Based on the site survey it is considered that the following overall characteristics exist for the proposed development site in its current condition :-

Visual Sensitivity – Very High / Low

Based on the site's location within the nationally recognized AONB, where there is a very high expectation of visual amenity, the visual sensitivity rating would be Very High. This is tempered however by the fact that there are no views of the actual cabin site, only one brief view from a minor country lane of the existing open barn roof, and three brief views of part of the existing access track route. The number of visual receptors is therefore likely to be low and there are 'not many open views'. As such the visual sensitivity rating for the specific scheme is considered Low.

4.3 Baseline Situation – Landscape Aspects Review

From the desktop research (paragraphs 2.2 to 2.11) together with the site visit appraisal the hard and soft landscape features within the locality / the site's landscape setting have been identified as :-

Surrounding agricultural land

This area appears to mirror well the landscape characteristics of the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Area 15A – Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes in that the locality does contain *'generally small coniferous and broadleaf copses and farm woodlands. These have no distinct patterning and occur close to streams and woodlands or dotted across the slopes…..Woodlands are generally well integrated with their surroundings, their geometric form often being softened by their relationship with landform and surrounding hedgerows and field trees'*. One miss-match however is that whilst there are some woodland blocks (often linked by hedgerows) there appears to be a noticeable gap to the east of the site where the landholding comes closest to the Sherborne Brook. This gap in woodland cover has been identified in the Gloucestershire's Natural Capital portal (para 2.8 above) and Figure 13.

Figure 13 – Aerial view of locality & Natural Capital biodiversity opportunity inset

1 Site
2 Immature replanted Copse
3 Sherborne Brook
4 Identified woodland gap
'green' – existing priority habitat
'purple' – highest priority areas

The field in question is approx.0.71ha in size and used as sheep pasture. The southern half is gently sloping but it then dips away steeply down to the country lane and the Sherborne Brook valley (see Fig.14). Whereas there is a good mature hedge on the north side of the lane there is just a stockfence on the field side of the lane. There are no hedges up the east and west sides of the field either, although there is a hedge with hedgerow trees along the southern field boundary. Square Copse is to the west and an open woodland / poplar plantation to the east. This winter the client is intending to plant a new native mixed hedge along the northern field boundary, and then extend this in 2025 along the western field boundary, which will provide some landscape, visual, and ecological benefit but the bulk of the field will remain as open, low biodiversity pastureland.

Figure 14 – 'Identified woodland gap' (Note 4) field

Site itself (see Fig.4)
The access track that will serve the holiday cabin scheme is 3m wide and surfaced with permeable gravel / stone. It is bounded to the east by the mature Square Copse tree and hedgerow vegetation, and to the west by paddock post and rail fencing. This suitably designed track is to be retained 'as is' in its current condition.

The site where the cabins are proposed is currently an immature mixed species woodland comprised originally of Norway Spruce and Ash. Due to stress many of the Spruce have been felled in the last couple of years. The remaining Ash trees are struggling from ash die-back, so although they do provide an open tree canopy, they will need to be removed for health and safety reasons regardless of whether the cabin scheme progresses or not. In the near future this previous dense wooded landscape feature is likely to be temporarily lost when it is felled. In time the desire is to replant much of this area with native species for landscape and ecological benefit, which should be an enhancement even if trees are not replanted in close proximity to the new cabins. Around the western and southern site boundaries are mature mixed native hedgerows (hawthorn, sloe, elder, field maple, dog rose, and ash) which soften the edge of the woodland, provide shelter from the wind, and provide valuable landscape / wildlife corridors. These are to be retained although some of the ash trees within these hedgerows will need to be removed and replaced with more suitable native tree species. The southern hedge is lower / more gappy in places than the western one, so it would be beneficial if this could be bulked up. The woodland floor is dominated by ruderal floral species (nettle, herb Robert, creeping buttercup,

dandelion, spear thistle, cow parsley, cleavers, bramble, and garlic mustard) none of which are of great landscape or ecological value. In terms of hard landscape elements there seems to be the remains of a Cotswold stone wall running along the north side of the southern hedge, and in the largest ash tree along this hedgerow there is a single owl box.

The open barn is a standard steel-framed agricultural structure with weathered timber clad sides and a shallow slope, grey corrugated roof complete with skylights. Planning approval was granted in 2017. It is currently used for farm storage.

Based on the site survey and desktop study stages it is considered that the following overall characteristics exist for the site in its current / recent state :-

a) Landscape Quality – Ordinary

Bounded to the north by dense, incongruous non-native conifer trees, with the site itself already thinned, and with the remaining diseased Ash partial canopy in need of felling the primary woodland habitat is Poor / Ordinary. The access track and open barn are not of significant landscape quality either. The southern and western hedgerows do however raise the landscape quality rating to Ordinary even though they contain diseased Ash trees.

b) Landscape Value – Low

Although the site lies within the AONB, which is of national importance, the thinned Ash woodland with a ruderal ground flora layer is very common and should be easy to mitigate. The hedgerows would be more difficult to mitigate but neither of them will be required to be removed.

c) Landscape Sensitivity – High/Medium

With regards the various key 'landscape character' elements on site it is considered to have an overall High rating because the current site is a typical woodland feature within this part of the AONB / Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes Landscape Character area linked to a native hedgerow network. Woodland as a landscape / habitat feature is considered worthy of conservation, as are the hedgerows. The 'landscape' rating is considered to be slightly lower, i.e. Medium, because the current woodland is susceptible to change in that it will be felled. But it should be relatively easy to replace with a healthy mix of other native species which will not adversely affect the locality's character.

5.0 LANDSCAPE PLANNING CONTEXT

5.1 This is largely addressed in the accompanying Planning Support Statement (PSS). There are however specific aspects of a more specific landscape / visual nature that were not covered in that PSS which are considered in more detail below :-

5.2 **National Planning Policy Framework** (September 2023)

Given the site's location within the Cotswolds AONB relevant NPPF paragraphs are :-

Paragraph 174 states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:-

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity……..(in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;

e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

In the case of the log cabin development items a), b), d), e), and f) if one considers the diseased Ash woodland as a degraded habitat, are likely to be pertinent.

Paragraph 176 goes on to stress that '*great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in ….Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues….The scale and extent of development within…these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas'*.

Given the likely leisure and health-related aspects of the log cabin enterprise :-

Paragraph 92 details that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other...

b) are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of attractive, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and

c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, ….and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

Paragraph 98 goes on to state that 'access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for ….physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change'.

With regards making effective use of land Paragraph 120 states that planning policies and decisions should '*encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside'*.

Achieving well-designed places is also considered of importance. Paragraph 126 seeks '*the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities*'.

In Paragraph 130 relevant sections pertinent to the cabin scheme include that planning decisions should ensure that developments :-

a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting….

d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using …spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to …visit;

f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users…

5.3 Cotswold District Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted 3rd August 2018)

The District Council has two key policies relevant, from a landscape and visual perspective, to the log cabin scheme.

The first is ***Policy EN4*** - 'The wider natural and historic landscape' where the Local Plan states that :-

1. Development will be permitted where it does not have a significant detrimental impact on the natural and historic landscape (including the tranquillity of the countryside) of Cotswold District or neighbouring areas.

2. Proposals will take account of landscape and historic landscape character, visual quality and local distinctiveness. They will be expected to enhance, restore and better manage the natural and historic landscape, and any significant landscape features and elements, including key views, the setting of settlements, settlement patterns and heritage assets. Included within this Policy are references to the importance of retaining tranquil areas, the avoidance of light pollution, and the retention of Dark Skies.

Policy EN5 – 'Cotswolds AONB' states that (in terms of the proposed small-scale development) :-

1. In determining development proposals within the AONB or its setting, the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape, its character and special qualities will be given great weight.

5.4 Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategies & Guidelines

Under landscape character area 15 : 'Farmed Slopes' the AONB suggests the following strategies and guidelines with regards new development that may be pertinent to the log cabin scheme :-

- maintain the open, often highly visible and sparsely settled character of the Farmed Slopes;
- Avoid development that will intrude negatively into the landscape and cannot be successfully mitigated…
- Avoid development that may restrict or obscure views to or from the Farmed Slopes;
- Ensure new development is carefully integrated into the rural character of the Farmed Slopes;
- Avoid developments incorporating standardised development layout, suburban style lighting, construction details and materials that cumulatively can lead to the erosion of peaceful rural landscape character;
- Adopt measures to minimise and where possible reduce light pollution;
- Identify key viewpoints to and from the Farmed Slopes;
- Plant trees and hedges within and around new development to reduce impact on the landscape…;
- Retain existing trees, hedges etc as part of the scheme;

In terms of the creation and establishment of woodland / shelterbelts / farm copses the document suggests that :-

- Limit new woodland creation to conserve views;

- Promote the felling of inappropriate coniferous plantations, and replanting of farm woodlands on enclosure age woodland footprints using species native to the area;
- Ensure any new woodland reflects the prevailing shape and scale of existing geometric woodland;
- Conserve hedgerow and in-field trees and seek opportunities to plant replacements.

Finally with regards the impact of tree diseases such as ash die-back the document suggests :-

- Recommend alternative species to ash that reflect the appearance and structure of Cotswold woodland;
- Establish a programme of plant replacement trees in the landscape outside of woodlands e.g. hedgerow trees, wood pasture and parkland.

5.5 Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023 - 2025

Chapter 6 of the Plan considers the conservation and enhancement of the landscape within the AONB. The desired outcome is that the '*evolving landscape and much-loved character of the Cotswolds is better understood and at the heart of all we do and the decisions we make'*. To help bring this about policies that may be relevant to the log cabin scheme are :-

CE1.1 - Proposals that are likely to impact on, or create change in, the landscape of the Cotswolds National Landscape, should have regard to, be compatible with, and reinforce the landscape character of the location, as described by the Cotswolds Conservation Board's Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Strategy and Guidelines. There should be a presumption against the loss of key characteristics identified in the landscape character assessment.

CE1.2 - Proposals that are likely to impact on, or create change in, the landscape of the Cotswolds National Landscape, should have regard to the scenic quality of the location and its setting and ensure that views – including those into and out of the National landscape – and visual amenity are conserved and enhanced.

CE1.3 - Conserving and enhancing landscape character should be a key objective of Environmental Land Management and rural development support mechanisms in the Cotswolds National Landscape.

In addition to the above the Plan also contains Outcome 6's requirement that noise pollution and visual disturbance are to be minimised to maintain tranquillity; Outcome 7 regarding the minimization of light pollution / retention of Dark Skies; Outcome 9 in relation to conserving, restoring, and enhancing a connected mosaic of distinctly Cotswolds habitats and species; and Outcome 12 where the National Landscape plays a full part in improving the nation's health, benefitting the mental and physical well-being of those who experience it. Under Outcome 14 – 'Sustainable tourism' there is the desire for businesses and visitors to have a shared commitment to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the National Landscape. There are two policies that may be relevant to the log cabin scheme :-

UE3.1 - Tourism within the Cotswolds National Landscape is delivered and managed in a way that minimises adverse effects on the natural beauty of the National Landscape and the emission of greenhouse gases.

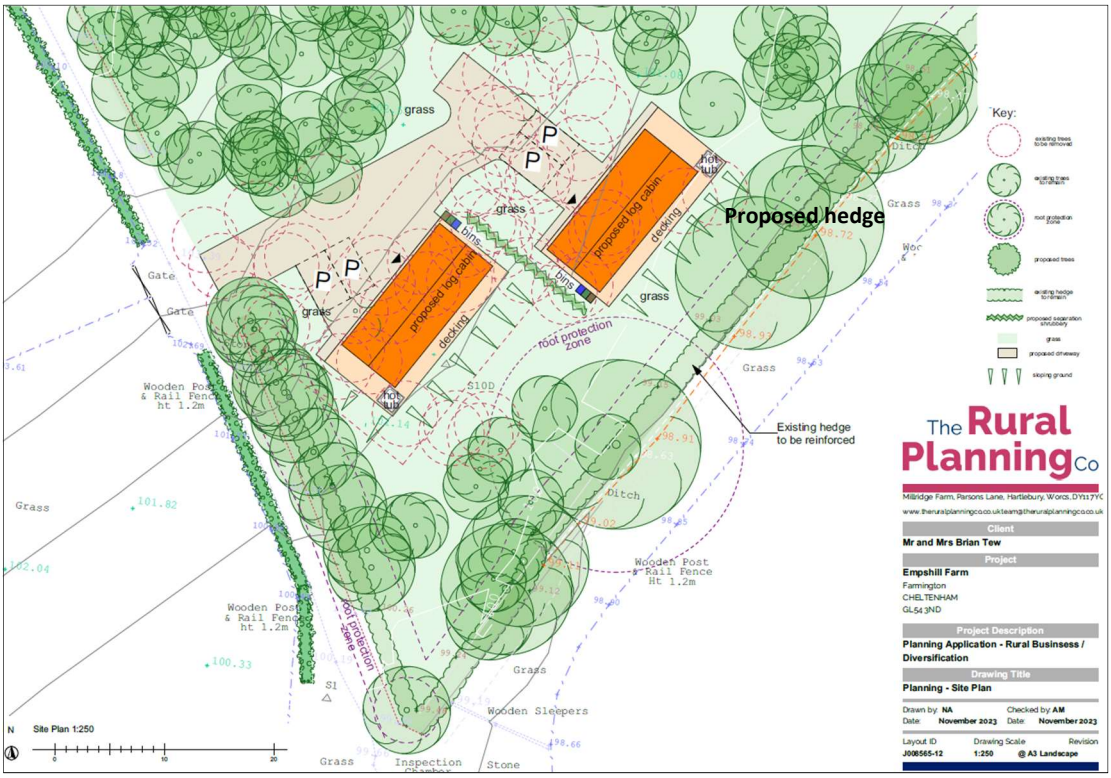
UE3.4 - Visitors should be provided with a variety of accommodation options over a range of prices. The siting and design of visitor accommodation should be compatible with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape including its special qualities.

6.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Based on the existing site, the proposed scheme drawings (J008565-01, 11, 12, and 14; as well as Figures 3 and 15), plus the findings from Chapters 1 to 5 of this report the scheme will entail :-

a) Log cabin diversification development – The 0.16ha site will require 52 dead / diseased plantation / hedgerow trees to be felled and a portion of the site regraded to provide the required flat pad bases to be formed for the two cabins. This will involve a minor cut and fill operation in which all material will be retained and reused on site. Adjacent plantation trees and native species boundary hedgerows will be retained in full and protected during the construction period to ensure their long-term survival. The existing stone access track from the Farmington – Haycroft Road will be utilized to enable cabin users to drive / cycle / walk into and out of the farm without the need to disturb the main farm / livery complex.

FIGURE 15 : PROPOSED SCHEME



A new short section of SuDS-compliant permeable stoned driveway and parking bays (2 No. per cabin) will be constructed to enable cabin users to park their cars directly outside the cabins (and not along the existing track which could result in physical and visual clutter). Two discrete mobile timber log cabins will be positioned within the woodland setting and orientated so that they have views out in a south-easterly direction over the boundary hedge to the wider Cotswold farm landscape beyond. They will be bounded on two sides by composite timber decking. Disturbed land around the cabins / site will be reseeded with an appropriate grass mix. For privacy purposes, landscape / green infrastructure benefit, visual, and ecological value a new 15m long mixed native hedgerow will be planted between the two cabins (species to be selected from hawthorn, spindle, dogwood, field maple, hazel, dog rose, and sloe). In addition, and for similar reasons, a new 205m long mixed native hedgerow will be established along the west side of the existing access drive.

b) Solar pv barn – Approximately 35m due south of the log cabin site is an existing 30m x 12m open barn. In order to provide renewable energy to the cabin scheme the corrugated roof of the barn will be covered with solar pv panels and, when on-demand electricity is not required, the surplus energy will be stored in batteries located within the barn itself.

c) Off-site woodland – East of Square Copse and approximately 190m north-east of the cabin site is a steep-sided portion of a sheep field which has been identified as a 'habitat gap'. In order to create a suitable mixed native woodland habitat and to compensate for the loss of trees on the cabin site it is proposed to plant 300 locally appropriate native trees and shrubs here (indicative species to be selected from wild cherry, pedunculate oak, small-leaved lime, silver birch, field maple, disease-resistant elm, common alder, hornbeam, hawthorn, crab apple, and spindle). This will help connect the existing woodland to the west, east, and north. This wildlife corridor will be strengthened and complemented through the planting this winter, as a separate initiative by the client outside of this current planning application, of a new mixed native hedge adjacent to the Farmington –Haycroft Road. This is likely to be in situ prior to the determination of the application. Further native hedge planting is also envisaged during 2025 along the western sheep field boundary and on the north side of Square Copse. The existing owl box that is in an ash tree on the southern edge of the log cabin site will be relocated at a higher level within an existing tree adjacent to the sheep field.

6.2 Magnitude of Landscape Effects – Small Positive

Based on the proposed scheme the following effects are likely to arise :-

- The loss of 52 trees is regrettable but would have arisen regardless of whether the cabin scheme proceeds or not since ash die-back will result in the deaths of these particular trees. But the replacement 300 new healthy native trees (6:1 ratio) in an adjacent, important habitat gap (along with the client's other hedgerow planting) should make a significant contribution to the farm landscape / setting.
- The planting of a total of 220m of new mixed native hedgerows within the cabin site and along the access drive (species to be selected from hawthorn, spindle,

dogwood, field maple, hazel, dog rose, and sloe) should be beneficial new landscape and ecological features that are appropriate to the locality.

- The moving of the owl box (too low in its current position) away from the cabin development to a quieter location and taller tree in close proximity to hunting grounds should be advantageous.
- The use of SuDS-compliant permeable surfacing should ensure that surface run-off is not detrimentally affected, but will percolate down into the ground as at present.
- The use of timber for the cabins, and recycled timber for the composite decking should help lock up carbon in the development.
- Since the cabins are made in the UK this will also reduce the scheme's carbon footprint.
- The use of on-site renewable energy will help to avoid the need to import oil / gas.

In light of the above, the proposed woodland glade scheme should ensure that it complies with and makes a positive contribution towards the Cotswolds AONB setting and Farmed Slopes landscape character area, and be of biodiversity and wildlife corridor benefit. The magnitude of landscape effects is therefore considered to be Small positive.

6.3 Magnitude of Visual Effects – Non-existent / Very Small Negative to Very Small Positive.

Based on the known viewpoints and visual receptors, plus the nature and extent of the proposed development, it is considered that the site's :-

- Visual Sensitivity rating (see paragraph 4.2) is considered to be Very High (due to its location within the AONB) / Low (as the scheme itself is barely visible)*.*

- Magnitude of Visual Effect rating is the overall visual effect based on an assessment of the three identified publically-accessible viewpoints post-construction based on the Scheme Plan. Taking these viewpoints in turn :-

Viewpoint VA

Magnitude of visual effect is anticipated to be non-existent for the cabin development or the solar panels on the barn as they cannot be seen from this location. The occasional vehicle using the existing access drive is also likely to go unnoticed. At night, cars entering the site and driving down the access track may, due to their headlights, be very briefly glimpsed although the new hedging on the west side of the drive in conjunction with the existing vegetation on the east side will help to contain that light spread. But overall, and for the vast majority of the time, the expansive attractive view from the A40 should not be affected. Magnitude of visual effect will therefore be Non-existent / Very small negative.

Viewpoint VB

Magnitude of visual effect is anticipated to be non-existent for the cabin development or the solar panels on the barn as they cannot be seen from this location. In the early years post-construction the occasional vehicle entering or leaving the cabin site via

the existing access drive may be briefly glimpsed, when driving northwards, by an occasional vehicle user on Empshill Road. This will be exacerbated slightly at night when car headlights are used. Once the new western hedgerow begins to reach maturity (year 5 onwards) even these glimpses are likely to be reduced (as well as the current on-farm vehicles). Both in the daytime and at night cabin user cars should be concealed / headlight glow diminished by the intervening hedgerow leaves and branches. Views of the maturing hedge set against the plantation woodland background should improve the visual attractiveness of the locality in an appropriate manner.
Magnitude of visual effect will therefore be Non-existent / Very small negative initially improving to Very small positive.

Viewpoint VC
Very similar to Viewpoint VB in many ways as the cabin site will not be visible, and the magnitude of visual effect with regards that element should thus be non-existent. In terms of the open barn it is only briefly glimpsed and the principal component of it is its westerly and southerly side elevations, which will remain unchanged. The very limited view of the roof is only likely to change in colour from the current light grey corrugated roofscape to a darker pv array panel colour. Due to the angle of view of receptors and the angle of the roof, glint from the panels is considered to be minimal. Views of cabin user vehicles will be almost identical to those at Viewpoint VC except that they will last fractionally longer (as a greater length of track is evident).
The Magnitude of visual effect will therefore improve from Non-existent / Very small negative initially to neutral longer term.

Taking these 3 viewpoints together it is considered that post-construction the magnitude of visual effect will be ***Non-existent to Very small negative*** in the short term improving post-construction to ***Very Small positive***.

6.4 Nature of Landscape and Visual Effects
Taken in the round and in light of the above magnitude of landscape and visual effects it is considered that the overall effect will be **Very *small / Small positive***.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 This LVIS has been produced with regards the proposed erection of 2 ‘mobile’ timber log cabins within an approximately 0.16ha wooded site on the north side of the Empshill Farm complex. Access for the installation works would be via the existing access track (i.e. no new access provision will be necessary until immediately adjacent to the site). Although wooded this part of the landholding has witnessed recent tree felling due to the presence of dead spruce, and further felling works are required due to the presence of ash die-back. As part of a farm diversification strategy the client wishes to use this new open area to create a small-scale visually discrete tourist accommodation facility close to, but separate from, the existing farm complex. Parking will be provided adjacent to each cabin. Renewable solar energy will provide power to the cabins by means of proposed pv panels that are to be fitted

to the roof of an adjacent open barn. The two mature boundary hedges with hedgerow trees will be retained in full. The loss of 52 dead / diseased trees will be more than compensated for by the planting of a new small native woodland block (comprised of approx. 300 trees and shrubs) to the north-east of the site on steep land associated with the Sherborne Brook valley where there is an identified gap between woodland habitats to east and west.

7.2 At a national level the proposed scheme will help to meet the requirements of :-

NCA 107 : Cotswolds – Statement of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) 1 in that it will protect and enhance the highly distinctive farmed landscape, retaining the balance between productive arable, pastoral and wooded elements and the open, expansive views; SEO2 in that it will not impact on Farmington Conservation Area or nearby listed buildings; SEO3 in that it will protect, maintain and expand the distinctive character of the Cotswolds and the network of semi-natural and arable habitats, as well as strengthen ecological and landscape connectivity; and SEO4 in that with the retention of soil on site and the inclusion of SuDS-compliant surfacing / materials there should be detrimental impact on the existing soil and water resources.

NPPF – The proposed scheme will play its small part in enhancing the local and natural environment (Paragraph 174) through protecting the boundary hedgerows; enhancing the woodland habitat off-site which will increase biodiversity; by locating the cabins discretely out of sight down an existing access track the intrinsic character and beauty of the AONB should not be detrimentally impacted; avoids the best and most versatile agricultural land; will provide biodiversity net gain (by utilising a 7 to 1 woodland tree replacement strategy on a semi-improved grassland habitat), by relocating an owl box to a more suitable position, and by enhancing the green infrastructure of the Sherborne Brook valley; minimize light pollution and retain the locality's sense of tranquillity (by means of its location away from other properties and within a woodland setting, the limited number of cabins, hedge planting, and the use of Dark Sky-compliant downlighting).
In light of the above and the appropriate use of materials and colours for the cabins / decking / surfacing / locally appropriate native planting the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB will be conserved and enhanced (Paragraph 176).
Users of these two cabins will be able to enjoy the fresh air, beauty, local public rights of way network, Sustrans National Cycle Network, and architectural / heritage beauty in the locality that will promote physical and mental health / well-being (Paragraphs 92 and 98).
The design of the site layout, cabins, and roof-mounted pv panels will also satisfy Paragraphs 126 and 130. The cabins will be both attractive and of high quality using natural renewable timber resources that lock up carbon and are visually appropriate to the AONB setting. Positioned towards the edge of a woodland, bounded on two sides by mature hedging, and with attractive views southwards over the wider local countryside the scheme will create a strong sense of place that will be welcoming and accessible.

7.3 At the more local level the scheme has also taken into consideration the :-

Cotswold District Local Plan (Policies EN4 and EN5) in that the scheme will not have a significant detrimental impact on the natural and historic landscape; takes into account landscape and historic landscape character, visual quality and local distinctiveness; and will not impinge on any key views or nearby settlements or heritage assets. The AONB's natural beauty / character / special qualities will be conserved and enhanced through the use of appropriate building design and materials, as well as ecologically beneficial and attractive woodland and hedgerow planting.

Cotswold AONB Vale of Bourton Farmed Slopes / Landscape Strategies and Guidelines / Landscape Management Plan – the scheme will maintain the open, often highly visible and sparsely settled character of the area; will not intrude into the landscape; avoids development that may restrict or obscure views to or from the Farmed Slopes; is carefully integrated into the rural character of the farmed landscape; and will appear rural in nature (as against suburban / urban). The felling of the diseased trees on site will be necessary on health and safety grounds, and the planting of the new woodland and hedgerows has been given careful consideration to conserve views, link up adjacent woodland, and utilize locally appropriate native species.
There will be no loss in the key characteristics identified in the Farmed Slopes landscape character assessment; and the connected mosaic of distinctly Cotswolds habitat and species will be conserved and enhanced (Outcome 9) through the planting of new woodland and hedgerows. It should also satisfy Outcomes 6, 12, and 14, as well as UE3.1 and 3.4 with regards minimising adverse effects on the natural beauty of the National Landscape and the emission of greenhouse gases, as well as conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape including its special qualities.

7.4 The baseline assessment of the application site concluded that :-

Visual sensitivity is Very High (AONB location) ***/ Low*** (actual site based on 3 publically-accessible viewpoints)
Landscape Quality is Ordinary
Landscape Value is Low
Landscape Sensitivity is High (landscape character) ***/ Medium*** (landscape).

7.5 Magnitude of Landscape & Visual Effects

By setting the new cabins discretely within a small hedge-bound woodland location away from other properties but accessed via an existing track that connects to the Farmington-Haycroft Road, the planting of an important woodland link habitat, and providing renewable energy via panels affixed to an existing barn, it is considered that :-

The ***Magnitude of Landscape Effects will be Small positive***.
The ***Magnitude of Visual Effects will move from Non-existent to Very small negative in the short term improving post-construction to Very Small positive.***

By combining the magnitude of landscape effects with the magnitude of visual effects the ***overall nature of landscape and visual effects is considered to be Very Small / Small positive.***

In light of the above findings the LVIS considers that the scheme will provide an appropriately located, discrete, and attractive renewable energy powered log cabin development within the AONB, in addition to an ecologically and visually enhanced environment in keeping with the landscape character of the locality that will bring physical and mental health benefits to its recreational users.

APPENDIX A – LVIS DETAILED METHODOLOGY

Baseline Situation – Landscape Aspects

A description of the landscape characteristics is provided in relation to the Site and the surrounding landscape. Further analysis of the existing landscape is also made to determine aspects such as Landscape Quality, Landscape Value (non-monetary) and site visibility (see Glossary) to assist in the determination of landscape sensitivity.

Landscape Quality
Landscape Quality refers to the strength of expression of landscape character and condition(intactness) of constituent characteristic elements from visual, functional, ecological and cultural perspectives. This is not the same as Scenic Beauty (see Glossary). An outline evaluation of the landscape quality of the Site and surrounding landscape is provided based on the categories provided in Table 1 (see below).

Table 1 : Categorization Guidance for Landscape Quality

Landscape Quality	Criteria
Exceptional	Very strong representation of characteristics with very few (if any) minor incongruous elements present. Landscape elements are all in a strong functional and visual condition. Cultural patterns are clear and well preserved over a wide area. In rural landscapes, the semi-natural vegetation characteristics of the character area are well established over large areas.
Good	Characteristic elements well represented but a number of minor incongruous elements present. Landscape elements are mostly in a strong functional and visual condition. There is a pattern of historic components sufficient to suggest a common pattern of development. In rural landscapes, the semi-natural habitats are fairly large, closely clustered and frequent allowing relatively easy cross-interaction.
Ordinary	Characteristic pattern of elements but sometimes masked or disrupted by incongruous elements. Visual and functional condition of characteristic elements generally (but not necessarily entirely) satisfactory. Cultural pattern fairly undisturbed but lack of consistent pattern prevents categorization as a significant example of an historic landscape type. In rural landscapes, the semi-natural habitats are in relatively discrete but medium-sized units with some opportunity for cross-interaction.
Poor	Weak or degraded landscape character with a small number of characteristic elements present and at least as many incongruous elements present. Visual and functional condition of landscape elements generally poor. In rural landscapes, the semi natural habitats are of limited area and patchy, providing limited opportunity for cross-interaction.
Very poor	Heavily degraded landscape character dominated by incongruous elements. Land has been subject to extensive alteration of distinctive landscape components removing its historical and cultural significance. In rural areas, there are only fragments of semi-natural vegetation present, too isolated to allow natural repopulation

Historic Landscape Aspects
Research of historic aspects of the landscape in this document have been approached in two ways – a) sites designated for historic-related reasons as well as changes observed between older maps and aerial photographs; and b) the heritage assessment report submitted as part of this application.

Landscape Value
Judgments on the value or importance of the affected landscape are provided together with the basis of this judgment in relation to the scale of importance (e.g. local, regional or national), to whom the landscape is valued and to the particular aspects that are valued. Landscape designations provide an indication of areas where the landscape is considered to be of higher value to the community (locally, regionally or nationally). Descriptions of landscape value will be based on the category guidelines in Table 2.

Table 2 : Categorization Guidance for Landscape Value

Importance / Criteria	Local	County	Regional	National
Rare & very limited scope to mitigate	High	Very High	Very High	Exceptional
Rare but some scope to mitigate	Medium	High	High	Very high
Infrequent but scope to mitigate	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Fairly common with scope to mitigate	Very Low	Low	Low	Medium
Very common and easy to mitigate	Very Low	Very Low	Very Low	Low

Baseline Situation - Visual Aspects

Study Area
The extent of the study area is considered in terms of the area from which the proposed development will potentially be visible. The October 2023 walkover survey entailed looking outwards from the site to the surrounding area, as well as from the surrounding area back towards the site. Limitations of the initial survey included that the survey was undertaken only during the late autumn / early winter months when the trees and vegetation had partially lost their leaf cover. Based on the findings from the survey work it enabled the likely extent of the study area to be confirmed. Three publically accessible viewpoints were identified but no private viewpoints.

Assessment of Landscape Effects

An assessment of landscape effects deals with the effects of change and development on landscape as a resource. It is involved with changes in the physical

landscape (landscape elements), which may give rise to change in how the landscape is experienced (together with landscape elements these are termed “landscape characteristics”). Areas with similar landscape characteristics can be described as having a certain landscape character or of being a particular landscape character type. These can be described and categorized at different scales depending on criteria used.

The context of a location, in its wider setting, can influence the experience of the landscape and therefore its landscape character. Thus, changes in the landscape character at one location can potentially affect the context of another landscape character type. In certain situations this can have an effect on the setting of valued or important landscape elements (e.g. registered parks and gardens or listed buildings).

The landscape impact assessment describes the likely nature and scale of impacts to individual landscape elements and characteristics and the consequential effect on the landscape character in relation to the development site itself and on the wider landscape. Due to the inherently dynamic nature of the landscape, it can be accepted that change arising from a development may not necessarily be important. An ‘important’ landscape effectresults when a landscape capacity threshold is exceeded, resulting in a change to the landscape character (either in a positive or negative direction). The landscape capacity is related to landscape sensitivity.

Landscape Sensitivity :-
Landscape sensitivity primarily relates to the sensitivity of the landscape elements to change (i.e. the condition and value of the landscape elements together with the strength/importance of contribution they make towards the landscape character and how resilient to change or replicable they are individually).

Landscape sensitivity also relates, in a more holistic sense, to the sensitivity of the landscape character to change (landscape character sensitivity) i.e. the landscape value of the landscape character and the degree to which the combination of landscape characteristics (including landscape structure and quality) present can resist or recover from change or be replicated. Some indication of this can be gained from local landscape policy guidance. Landscape sensitivity ratings have been categorized as described in Table 3.

Table 3 : Landscape Sensitivity Ratings

Sensitivity	Landscape	Landscape Character
Very High	A large number of key elements are susceptible to change and are very difficult to replace without affecting the existing character	Typically internationally recognized landscape with strong landscape structure and many distinct features worthy of conservation
High	A number of key elements/characteristics are susceptible to change and fairly difficult to replace without affecting the existing character	Typically of national or regional recognition with recognizable landscape structure and some features worthy of conservation; may contain occasional detracting features
Medium	A number of elements/characteristics are susceptible to change but there is scope to replace these elements without adversely	

	affecting the character	Typically of county or district recognition or non-designated, but value expressed through consensus, demonstrable use or non-official publications. Distinguishable landscape structure, few or no features of conservation; some detracting features
Low	A small number of elements/characteristics are potentially susceptible to change but are easily replaced and potentially enhanced	Typically of local recognition, non-designated areas with no features worthy of conservation. Weak landscape structure or transitional in nature; some evidence of degradation and frequent detracting features
Very Low	Remaining elements/characteristics are not susceptible to change. High probability to mitigate or replace the lost elements and to enhance the existing landscape	Typically areas identified for recovery. Damaged landscape structure, evidence of severe disturbance or dereliction; detracting features dominate

Magnitude of Landscape Effects :-
The Magnitude of change (in the landscape) is concerned with the number of changes and scale of change to the landscape characteristics, the geographical extent of the area influenced, their duration, and their reversibility. The magnitude of landscape effects has been categorized as follows in Table 4.

With regards the geographical area over which the landscape effects are likely to be felt these are categorized as follows :-
Site - within the development site itself
Immediate setting - the areas located adjacent to the site
Landscape character area - covers an area that falls within a single landscape character area
Multi-landscape character areas - at the largest scale covering two or more landscape character areas.

Table 4 : Magnitude of Landscape Effects

Magnitude of Landscape Effect	**Landscape Criteria**
Very Large	Typically, large scale changes and/or numerous changes to important landscape characteristics
Large	Typically, large scale changes to some landscape characteristics, or a high number of medium scale changes to the landscape characteristics
Medium	Typically, some medium scale changes to some landscape characteristics
Small	Typically, a low number of medium scale changes to landscape characteristics, or a number of small scale changes to landscape characteristics
Very Small	Typically, occasional, small scale changes to unimportant landscape characteristics

In general, the duration and reversibility weightings applied to magnitude are as follows :-
Very long term effect / before reversibility occurs : 20+ years
Long term effect / before reversibility occurs : 10-20 years
Medium term effect / before reversibility occurs : 3-10 years
Short term effect / before reversibility occurs : 1-3 years
Temporary effect / before reversibility occurs : Less than 1 year
Where variations between relevant criteria, duration etc. occur, reasoned professional judgment is applied and described in the assessment to determine the magnitude of effect.

Importance of Landscape Effect :-
Changes to landscape characteristics can be of a positive, negative, or neutral nature. The determination of the nature of effect on landscape receptors is related to the Baseline Situation and what is recognized to be either a desirable or an undesirable change (e.g. from assessments of landscape quality, landscape policy guidance and biodiversity action plans). A neutral effect may occur, e.g. if a characteristic element is replaced with a different but equally characteristic element. Therefore, it is possible for there to be a large magnitude of change but with a neutral effect overall.

Assessment of Visual Effects
Visual effects relate to the changes that arise in the content and character of available views as a result of changes in a landscape scene due to development, to people's responses to those changes and to the overall effects with respect to visual amenity. It may result from the change or loss of existing elements of the landscape and/or the introduction of new elements. They are defined as the relationship between the visual sensitivity, the magnitude of visual effect and the nature of visual effect.

Visual Sensitivity :-
The sensitivity of the visual receptor will be influenced by the following factors:-

- Location and context of the viewpoint and the significance of the view in relation to valued landscapes or features;
- Characteristics of the view, e.g. whether it is continuous or intermittent and static or transient;
- The importance of the view and the activity or expectations of the receptor at the viewpoint;
- Numbers of people affected and whether the viewpoint is publicly accessible (viewpoints at public locations are normally considered more sensitive than those at private locations although where many private residential locations are affected, a community may be affected); and
- The “popularity” or value of the view (e.g. as noted in guidebooks).

Locations (rooms) used in daylight hours are normally considered more sensitive than locations used during night hours.

The terminology in Table 5 has been used to describe sensitivity with regard to visual receptors.

Table 5 : Visual Sensitivity

Visual Sensitivity	Relevant Criteria	Typical Receptor Types/Locations
Very High	Nationally well recognized and advertised location for high visual amenity. Prominent location or vista with high visual amenity. Very high expectations of visual amenity. May affect many receptors.	National Trail users. Visitors to nationally recognized, well known and used attractions (e.g. important National Trust sites) where visual amenity is very important to its enjoyment.
High	Well-known area locally/regionally for high visual amenity. Open areas of recognized public access where primary enjoyment is of the views of the landscape. High expectations of visual amenity. May affect a number of visual receptors.	Users of widely advertised circular or well-used footpath routes (e.g. recreational routes) where primary enjoyment is from the landscape and visual amenity and there are few route options. Locations where direct views from daytime residential rooms/gardens can be gained. Public houses, restaurants, heritage assets etc. with direct views towards the development
Medium	Well-known area locally/regionally for high visual amenity. Open areas of recognized public access where primary enjoyment is of the views of the landscape. High expectations of visual amenity. May affect a number of visual receptors.	General recognized public access routes with some landscape interest although there is some choice of route. Views from recreational sports areas where amenity is gained from the landscape setting but is not essential to the activity. Residential rooms used primarily during night hours but with direct views towards the development, or residential properties with indirect views.
Low	Viewpoint context and location does not provide many open views. Fairly low numbers of people may be affected. Low expectations of visual amenity	People travelling from one place to another (e.g. general road) Other recognized public access routes where little landscape or visual amenity present. Places of work where some enjoyment from landscape context and relevant to type of work undertaken
Very Low	Viewpoint context is such that current visual amenity is lacking Expectations of visual amenity are very low. Numbers of people affected may be low. Activity at viewpoint is largely incidental to the view.	People at their place of work where visual amenity currently lacking. People travelling along direct fast routes where context and view changes rapidly (e.g. train, motorway)

Magnitude of Visual Effects :-
Each of the visual effects will be evaluated in terms of their size or scale, the geographical extent of the area influenced, and its duration and reversibility.

The size or scale of visual change is described by reference to elements such as :-
- The loss or addition of features in the view and changes to its composition

- The extent/proportion of change within the view, and whether views will be full, partial, or glimpses;
- The degree of contrast or integration of any new features or changes in the landscape with the existing or remaining landscape elements and characteristics in terms of form, scale, mass, line, height, colour, and texture;
- The duration of the effect

The geographical area where changes will be visible will vary with different viewpoints and is likely to reflect :-

- The angle of view and backdrop (e.g. skyline);
- The distance of receptor (viewpoint) from the development;
- The extent of the area over which the changes would be visible

Viewpoint proximity to the source of impact will be assessed as follows:-

Close-range: Within 250m
Medium-range: Between 250m and 500m
Long-range: Between 500m and 1,000m
Very Long-range Over 1,000m

In general, the duration and reversibility weightings applied to magnitude are :-

Very Long term effect / before reversibility occurs : 20+ years
Long term effect / before reversibility occurs : 10-20 years
Medium term effect / before reversibility occurs : 3-10 years
Short term effect / before reversibility occurs : 1-3 years
Temporary effect / before reversibility occurs : Less than 1 year

The terminology in Table 6 has been adopted for the definition of magnitude for visual effects :-

Table 6 : Magnitude of Visual Effects

Magnitude of Visual Effects	***Visual Criteria***
Very Large	Where the proposals become the only dominant feature in the scene and to which all other elements become subordinate.
Large	Where the proposals would form a significant and immediately apparent element of the scene and would affect the overall impression of the view.
Medium	Where proposals would form a visible and recognizable new development which may have an effect on visual amenity but is not intrusive within the overall view.
Small	Where proposals constitute only a minor component of the wider view, which the casual observer could miss or where awareness only slightly affects the overall visual amenity afforded.
Very Small	Where only a very small part of the development is discernible or that it is at such a distance that the effects are scarcely appreciated.

Where variations between relevant criteria, duration etc. occur, reasoned professional judgment is applied and described in the assessment to determine the magnitude of effect.

Nature of Visual Effect

Changes to view can be of a positive, negative, or neutral nature. The determination of the importance of effect on a view is related to the Baseline Situation and what is considered to be either a desirable or an undesirable change. The assessment of the nature of visual effect focuses on what is experienced, although some professional judgment has (by necessity) been applied to consider the subjective matter of whether the change could generally be received by the visual receptors as positive, negative or neutral. The assumptions and judgments made are reasoned in the text. A neutral effect may occur, for example, if a large number of elements in the landscape scene, forming a large proportion of the view, are changed but the resultant change in the composition, character and make-up of the view is small. Therefore, it is possible for there to be a large magnitude of change but with a neutral effect overall.

APPENDIX B – GLOSSARY

Baseline situation	The environmental conditions against which any future changes can be measured or predicted and assessed.
Characterisation	The process of identifying areas of similar landscape character, classifying and mapping them, and describing their character.
Characteristics	Elements, or combinations of elements, which make a contribution to distinctive landscape character.
Direct effect	An effect that is directly attributable to the proposed development.
Enhancement	Proposals that seek to improve the landscape resource and the visual amenity of the proposed development site and its wider setting, over and above its baseline condition.
Feature	Particularly prominent or eye-catching elements in the landscape e.g. wooded skylines or a particular aspect of the scheme proposals.
Indirect effect	Effects that result indirectly from the proposed development as a consequence of the direct effects, often occurring away from the site, or as a result of a sequence of interrelationships or a complex pathway. They may be separated by distance or in time from the source of the effects.
Landscape	An area, as perceived by people, the character of which is the result of the action and interaction of natural &/or human factors.
Landscape character	A distinct, recognizable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.
Landscape Character Assessment	The process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape, and using this information to assist in managing change in the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive. The process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.
Landscape characteristics	The specific landscape features and elements within the site.
Landscape effects	Effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right. The change resulting from a particular action or impact.

Landscape impact	The action on the landscape being taken.
Landscape quality	A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
Landscape receptor	Defined aspects of the landscape resource that have the potential to be affected by the proposals.
Landscape value	The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons.
LVA	Landscape and visual assessment is a tool used to identify and assess the likely significance of the effects of change resulting from development both on the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on the people's views and visual amenity.
Magnitude (of effect)	A term that combines judgments about the size and scale of the effect, the extent of the area over which it occurs, whether it is reversible or irreversible, and whether it is short or long term in duration.
Mitigation	Measures which are proposed to prevent, reduce, and where possible offset any significant adverse effects (or to avoid, reduce and if possible remedy identified effects), including landscape and visual effects.
Nature of effects	The combination of the separate judgments about the sensitivity of the landscape and visual receptors with the magnitude of the landscape and visual effects to allow a final judgment about each effect. It is not absolute and can only be defined in relation to each development and its specific location.
Receptor	For landscape this relates to defined aspects of the landscape resource that have the potential to be affected by the proposals. Visually it relates to individuals and/or defined groups of people who have the potential to be affected by the proposals.
Reversibility	Is a judgment about the prospects and the practicality of the particular effect being reversed within a specified time period.
Sensitivity	A term applied to specific receptors, combining judgments of the susceptibility of the receptor to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value related to that receptor.

Specific viewpoints	Viewpoints chosen because they are key and sometimes promoted viewpoints within the landscape.
SUDs	Sustainable Urban* Drainage Systems are a sequence of water management practices and facilities designed to drain surface water in a manner that will provide a more sustainable approach than what has been the conventional practice of routing run-off through a pipe to a watercourse. *The use of the word 'urban' is frequently omitted, but the meaning is still the same.
Susceptibility	The ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue negative consequences.
Visual effects	Effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people.