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Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Full Planning application for 4no. dwellings with associated access, landscaping and parking. Acorn Lodge, London Road, St. Albans, AL3 8HB. Dacorum Borough Council. 22/03252/FUL

On behalf of: Founthill Land, Planning and Development

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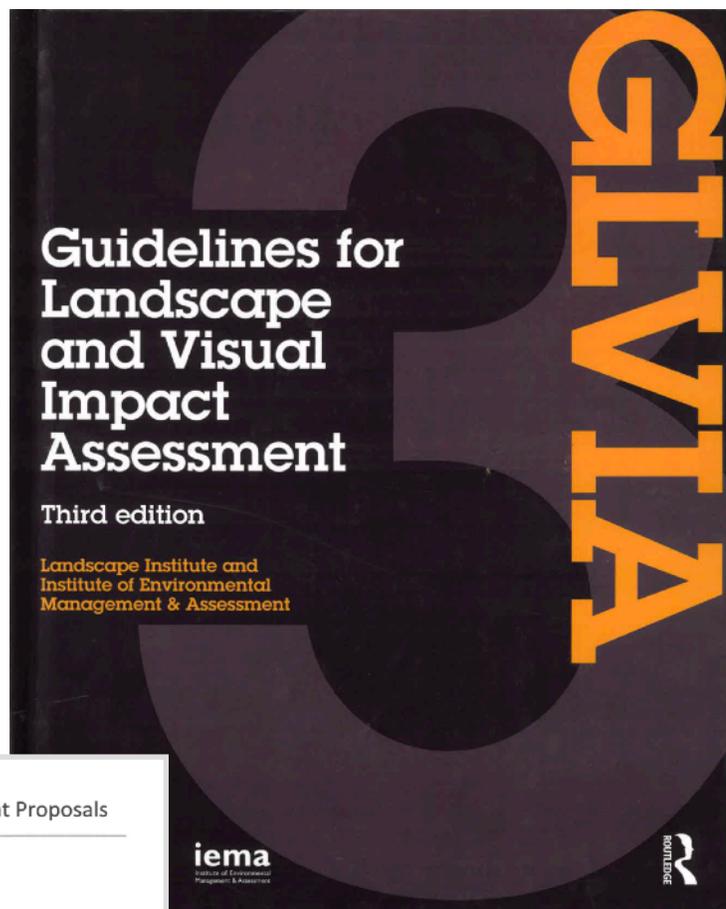
Introduction

Planning Direct has been appointed to prepare this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) on behalf of Founthill Land, Planning and Development; the applicant. This LVIA accompanies a planning application for the erection of 4no. dwellings with associated access, landscaping and parking. Acorn Lodge, London Road, St. Albans, AL3 8HB.

This report has been prepared to support the aforementioned planning application.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was carried out and prepared by Andrew Cann, Director of Planning Direct, in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3), Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management Assessment.

In preparing the LVIA note has also been taken of the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19 'Visual Representation of Development Proposals'.



Aim and Scope of the Assessment

The aim of this report is to assess the qualities and value of the existing landscape resources and the visual amenity of the site and its surrounding area; describing the proposed development in context of the landscape and then predicting and evaluating the landscape and visual effects arising from this proposed development.

Landscape and Visual impacts are interrelated issues, however they are considered independent. A LVIA comprises of two interrelated parts:

- **A landscape impact assessment**, which aims to determine the effects of the proposed development on the physical landscape and its potential in changing its character; and
- **A visual impact assessment**, which aims to determine potential changes in the visual context from the proposed development, including general setting and views for receptors — such as local residents, walkers, vehicular traffic.

In addition to the required assessments above this report will look in detail at the former planning history of the site (from an LVIA perspective) in order to inform this assessment.

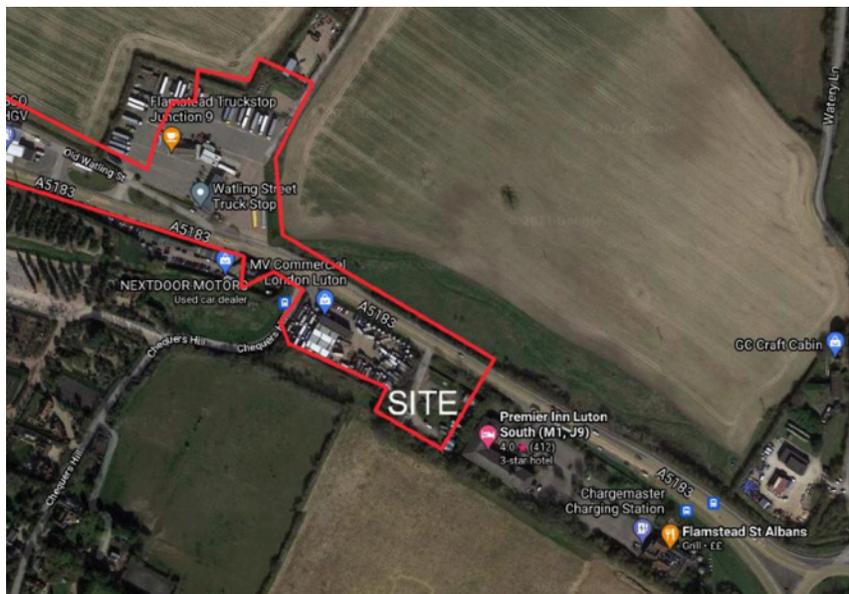
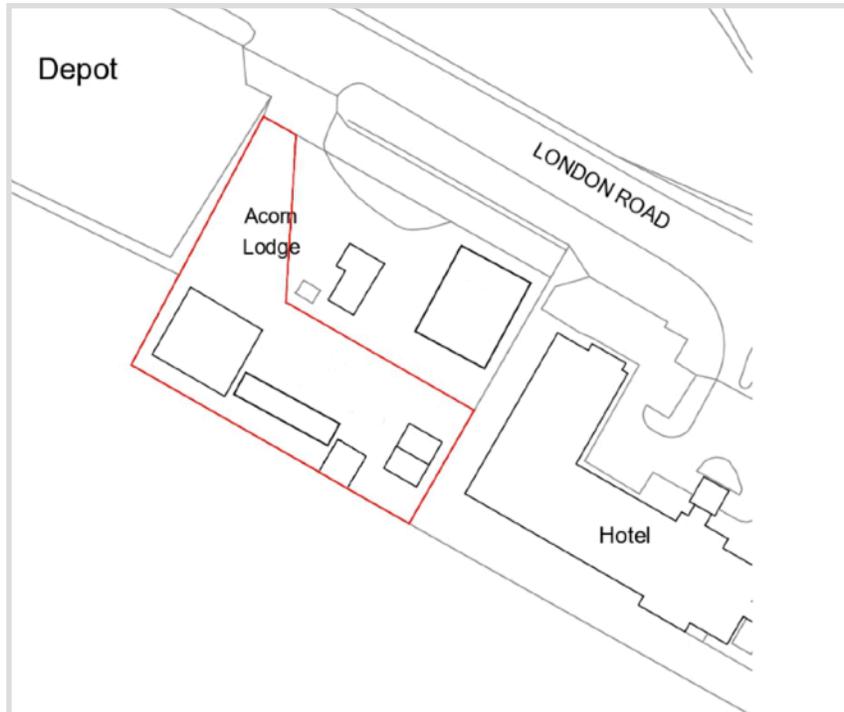
Location and Site Description

The location is on the south side of London Road, within the settlement of Friars Wash.

To the north and south of the site are agricultural fields. To the immediate sides a storage depot and hotel.

The development in the area is of a commercial / industrial nature with little to commend it in architectural or place-making style. There appears to be little landscaping other than standard commercial landscaping surrounding the hotel site.

Acorn Lodge [The site] is a B8 site with one barn on site at present. A prior approval application has been accepted and approved for the addition of 3 more storage buildings.



Proposed Development

The details of the proposed development are covered in the application form, Planning Statement and accompanying drawings.

The proposal seeks to erect four houses in two styles on the site with an overall footprint lower than that of the existing an approved development on site. Landscaping will be added to better integrate the development into the locality. It is proposed that a landscaping plan be provided as a condition.

An assumption about the impact of that plan, agreed with the agent, has been made with regards to an image produced later In this report demonstrating how the appearance from the roadside will change once the houses have been erected and landscaping has some time to bed in.

Natural England Comments

Comments from Natural England were made as a Statutory Consultee:

Landscape advice

*The proposed development is located within a proposed area of search which Natural England is **considering as a possible boundary variation to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**. Although the assessment process does not confer any additional planning protection, the impact of the proposal on the natural beauty of this area may be a material consideration in the determination of the development proposal.) Natural England considers the Chilterns to be a valued landscape in line with paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Furthermore, paragraph 176 of the NPPF states that development in the settings of AONBs should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise impacts on the designated areas. An assessment of the landscape and visual impacts of the proposal on this area should therefore be undertaken, with opportunities taken to avoid or minimise impacts on the landscape and secure enhancement opportunities. Any development should reflect or enhance the intrinsic character and natural beauty of the area and be in line with relevant development plan policies.*

An extension to an existing AONB is formally designated once a variation Order, made by Natural England, is confirmed by the Defra Secretary of State. Following the issue of the designation order by Natural England, but prior to confirmation by the Secretary of State, any area that is subject to a variation Order would carry great weight as a material consideration in planning decisions.

Thus the site is not within an AONB. In addition Natural England have inferred that they have not submitted a Variation Order. Consequently whilst the impact of the development on the natural beauty of the countryside is a material consideration and should be considered (which this LVIA addresses) there is no additional protection on this site nor land it is adjacent to nor in the wider landscape. Thus the conducting of an LVIA is a more than appropriate exercise and one that in many other similar countryside locations would not be deemed necessary.

Planning History

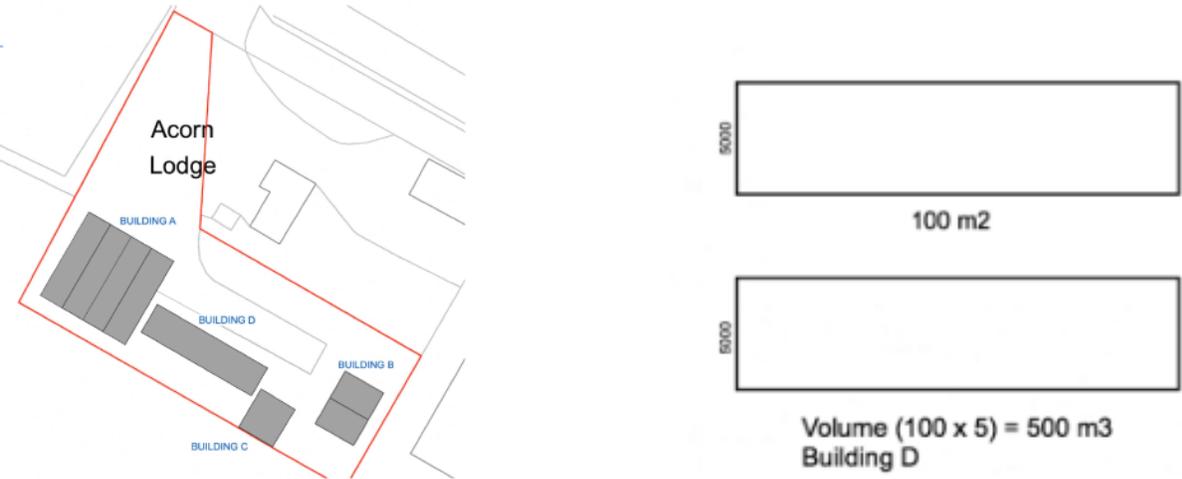
Reference no.	Description	Decision	Date
4/00400/15/FHA	Installation of Acoustic Fence	Approved	6th May 2015
22/00331/LDP	Construction of a new storage building	Approved	7th June 2022

4/00400/15/FHA - Installation of Acoustic Fence

Planning permission was granted for a close boarded 2.4m tall Acoustic Fence to be erected around the entire perimeter of the site and along the side of London Road. Other than the gateway to the site this would have effectively blocked all views into the site at pedestrian / motor vehicle level from London Road.

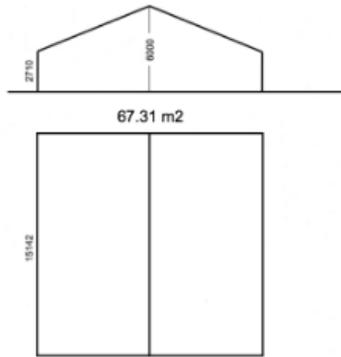
22/00331/LDP - Construction of a new storage building

Certificate of Lawfulness application 22/00331/LDP sought to erect a new 20m x 5m x 5m(h) storage building as below (Building D):

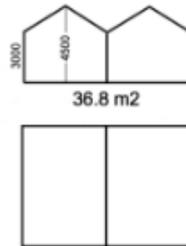


This building has now been erected adding to a significant built frontage to the site. See plan above This includes the other buildings on site specifically set put below (A, B and

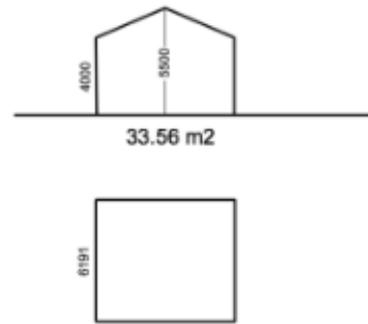
C):



Volume (67.31 x 15.14) = 1019.05 m3
Building A



Volume (36.8 x 7.044) = 259.22 m3
Building B



Volume (33.56 x 6.19) = 207.73 m3
Building C

At 6m, 5.5m and 4.5m in height with the new storage building D (5m in height) they represent a wall of development, and a larger footprint than the proposed development.

Pre-application Advice

Policy and Principle

Green Belt

The application is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Government attaches great importance (S. I. C.) to the Green Belt. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their (S. I. C.) permanence. The concept of "openness" is a broad policy concept understood to have a spatial and visual aspect, relevant to the underlying aims of the green belt policy is "to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open" and wider five purposes outlined in NPPF paragraph 138. It is not necessarily a statement about the visual qualities of the land, though in some cases that might be an aspect of the planning judgement involved. It is held to mean a general absence from inappropriate forms of development.

Paragraph 147 of the NPPF advises that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except unless very special circumstances exist.

Paragraph 149 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt, but then goes on to list a number of exceptions. Of relevance is paragraph 149 (g):

"limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:

- not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development;*

Previously developed land is defined in Annex 2 (Glossary) of the NPPF as follows:

Previously developed land: *Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the*

whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. This excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill, where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures; land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.

Policy CS5 of the Dacorum Core Strategy (2013) states that the Council will apply national Green Belt policy to protect the openness and character of the Green Belt, local distinctiveness and the physical separation of settlements.

Policy CS5 clarifies that small-scale development – such as the redevelopment of previously developed sites – are acceptable provided that:

- *It has no significant impact on the character and appearance of the countryside; and*

- It supports the rural economy and maintenance of the wider countryside.

The site is currently considered previously developed land given the existing and historical use of the site and existing structures. No detail on the quantum of development has been put forward, just indicative designs of 2 storey dwellings. The principle of development would depend on the proposals not having a greater impact on openness of the Green Belt than existing development.

It is not known if the volume, floorspace, footprint, amount of hard landscaping and means of enclosure, height and scale of the proposed buildings and spread of development would be of greater than existing lawful permanent buildings of substantial construction (temporary or dilapidated structures do not count towards existing amount of development on site) as there is insufficient information to make that assessment at this time. However any future application should provide this detail and it is advised any future application should ensure that the provision of buildings has no greater impact of which these key metrics would be strong indicator that there is likely to be less or more harm to the spatial openness of the Green belt as well as potentially the visual openness. From the indicative site layout plan and house design there seems to be a considerable greater quantum,

height and spread of development than existing and this is considered contrary to the NPPF and Core Strategy policy CS5.

With regard to the LVIA the Pre-application advice is noteworthy in that:

1) It makes no specific need for a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;

2) With regard to Green Belt Policy it reproduces the NPPF guidance stating:

“limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
- not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development;

3) Further, with regard to local policy CS5 the council states that, with regard to previously developed land:

It has no significant impact on the character and appearance of the countryside; and

It supports the rural economy and maintenance of the wider countryside.

Whilst not strictly germane to a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment I will come back to these policy observations later in the report noting that they are addressed already by the agent in the Planning Statement.

Assessment Methodology

This assessment was undertaken in accordance with the principles of good practice set out in the aforementioned guidance, produced by relevant professional organisations concerned with LVIA; in order to seek consensus and minimise subjectivity in the assessment of the existing landscape.

Baseline Study

Baseline studies for assessing landscape effects require a mix of desk study and field work to identify and record the character of the landscape and the elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual factors which contribute to it. They should deal with the value attached to the landscape, the methods used should be appropriate to the context in to which the development proposal will be introduced and in line with the current guidance and terminology.¹

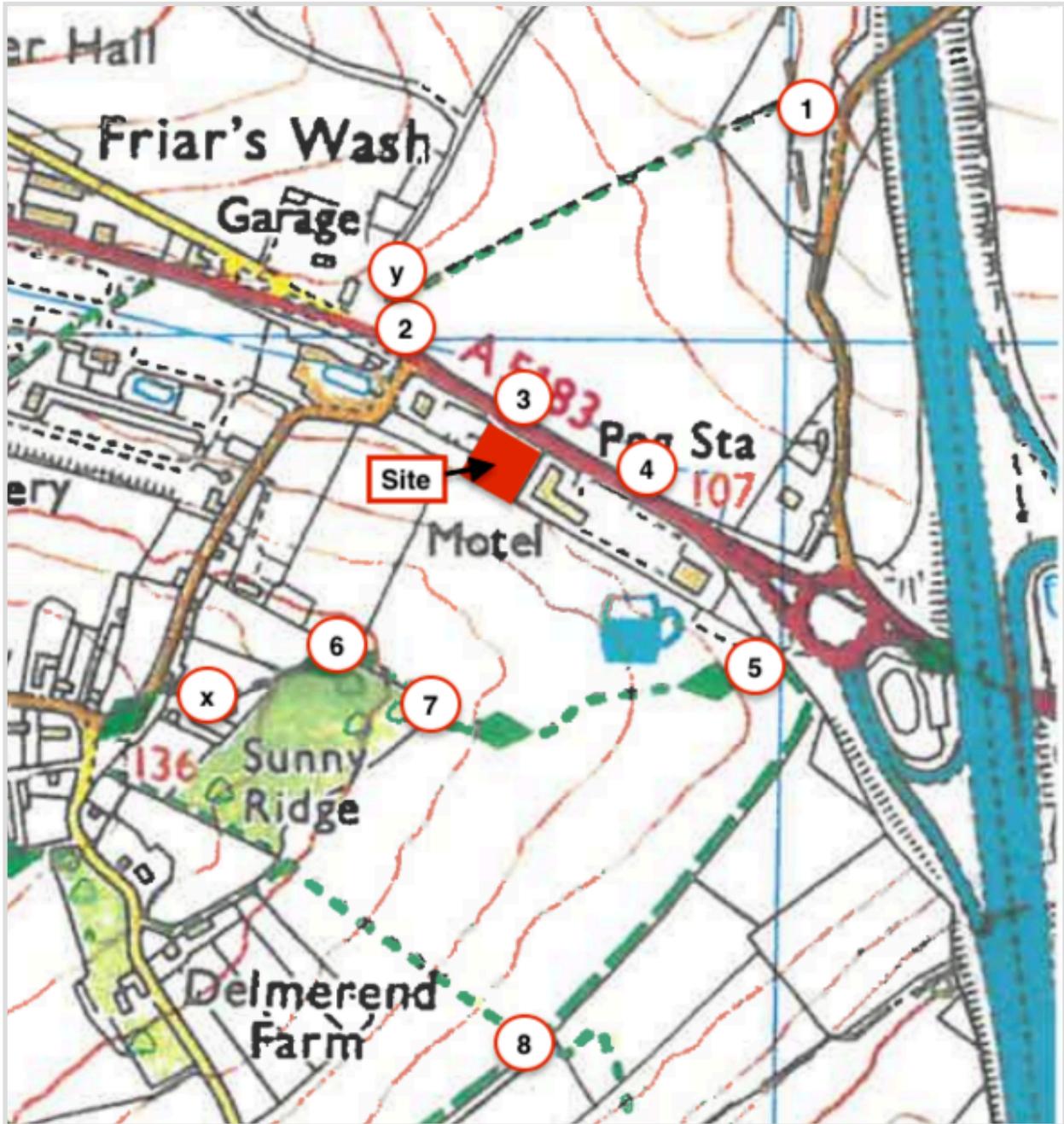
Baseline studies should be undertaken to determine the significance of the development site in the wider landscape, and provide a benchmark for which any potential changes could be measured against.

In order to capture a comprehensive description of the baseline position, information was collated using a desk study. The desk study identified potential landscape resources by reference to a OS Explorer Map 182 and a walk around the site using the existing highway and footpath network. Upon reviewing the approved LVIA site receptors were selected (see overleaf points 1-8) which show key public vantage points in the area. Two other observations (at x and y) were made regarding the state of the footpath network meant as an aide to the Highways Authority in maintaining the network.

A field survey was carried out on Thursday 8th December. As part of this field assessment, a photographic survey was carried out to record representative views of the site from a selection of the approved LVIA receptors (See plan overleaf). The receptor points used for the exercise were points 1-8. These photographs were taken

¹ Extract from 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition' pg. 70.

with a Canon EOS 100D camera using a 18-55mm Lens. All photographs were taken at 1.57m height.



Views

View 1 looking directly at the site. Note the site is barely visible from this viewpoint.



View 2 looking directly at the site. Note the site is not visible from this viewpoint.



View 3 looking directly at the site this is effectively the only public view into the site which, given the location along London Road, is only visible fleetingly by passing vehicles. Note large barn (Building A) to rear right of the site in the image. The development to the left is remaining.



View 4 looking directly at the site. Note the site is not visible from this viewpoint.



View 5 looking directly at the site. Note the site is not visible from this viewpoint.



View 6 looking directly at the site. Note the site is not visible from this viewpoint.



View 7 looking directly at the site. Note the hotel is visible to the right but buildings on the site are barely visible.



View 8 looking directly at the site. Note the site is not visible from this viewpoint.



Other photographs; x and y².

This area (y) of the footpath is blocked by fallen trees / bushes and requires clearing



The stile at point x is in a very poor state and in need of repair. It appears that the farmers boundary is electrified (though I did not test this). There is a considerable step down at this point also rendering the footpath access at this point almost useless. It is noteworthy (at the nearby roadside tea van) that the owners couldn't remember anyone using the access which is unsurprising!



² Included as best practice and in order to assist the Highways Authority but not part of the LVIA assessment process.

Policy Justification

This section provides a summary of the planning policy that is potentially relevant to the landscape and visual issues and establishes whether, in landscape and visual impact terms, the development is justified in principle.

National

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraph 11 - Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Paragraph 15 - The planning system should be genuinely plan-led. Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.

Paragraph 54 - Local planning authorities should consider whether otherwise unacceptable development could be made acceptable through the use of conditions or planning obligations. Planning obligations should only be used where it is not possible to address unacceptable impacts through a planning condition.

Paragraph 78 - In rural areas, planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs. Local planning authorities should support opportunities to bring forward rural exception sites that will provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs, and consider whether allowing some market housing on these sites would help to facilitate this.

Paragraph 85 - Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by

improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

Paragraph 117 - Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously developed or 'brownfield' land.

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

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (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*

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

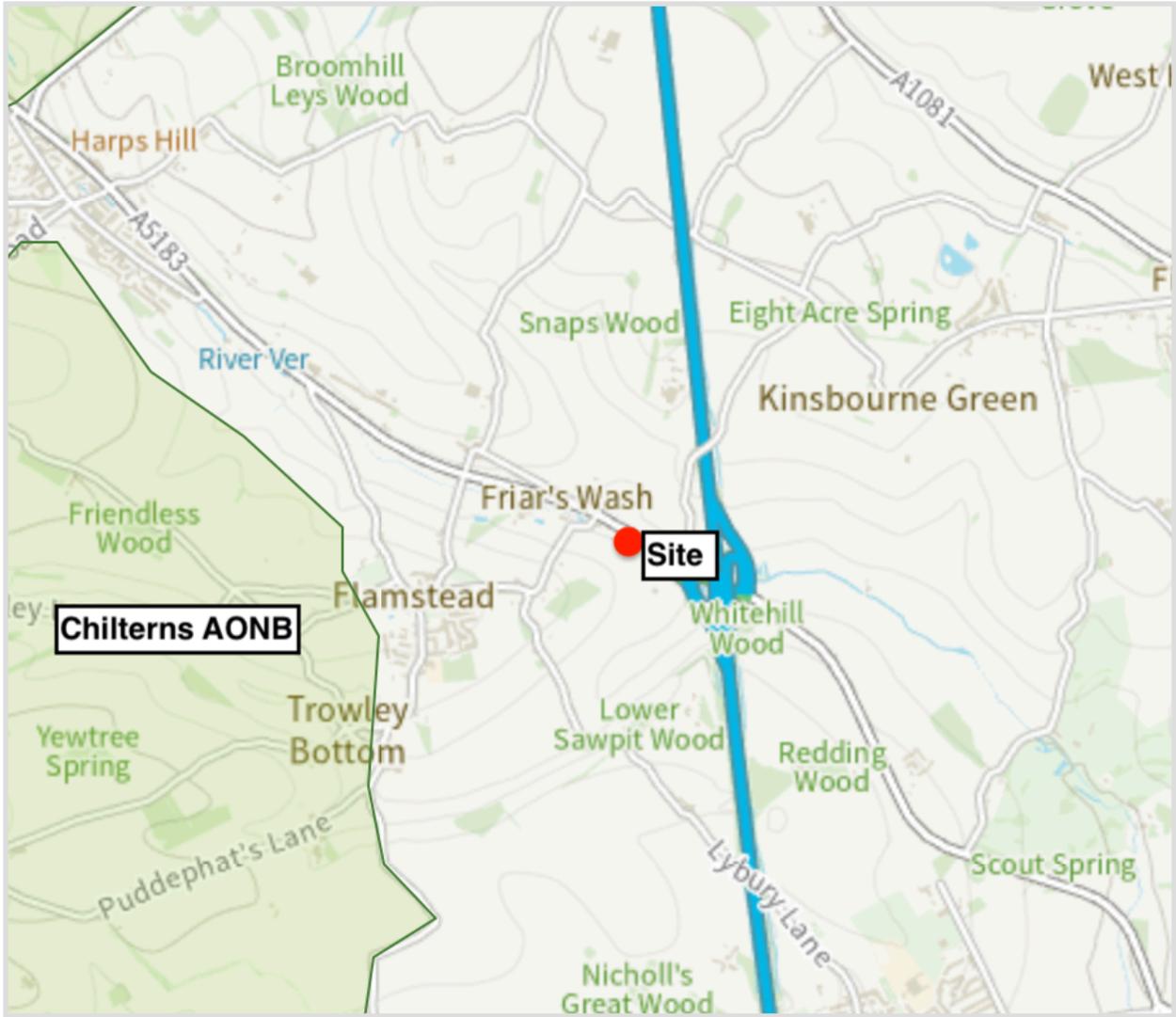
Paragraph 176 - Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all 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.

Paragraph 177 - When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.*

With regard to the protections under the National Planning Policy Framework and specifically AONB it should be noted that neither the site, nor the surrounding area, are within an AONB and notwithstanding Natural Englands comments made post application AONB considering asking (it is not in their power) to designate an area as AONB is not a policy consideration. (See plan overleaf).

However the council may as a matter of due diligence, consider this a material consideration although one with very little weight.



Local

Policy CS5, as set out in the councils pre-application response seeks with regard to previously developed land allows development of that land if:

It has no significant impact on the character and appearance of the countryside; and

It supports the rural economy and maintenance of the wider countryside.

Policy Conclusions

The National Planning Policy Framework is careful to extol the value of the countryside and especially so in AONB whilst promoting sustainable development opportunities in the rural economy.

There is no specific provision against minor development as proposed especially where this is on an already consented 'brownfield' site or on previously developed land.

Development on Green Belt land is permitted on previously developed land is permitted:

“limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
- *not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development;*

In order to assess the impact visually on the openness of the Green Belt and effect on the character of the area we have worked up two indicative illustrations (see overleaf). The first 'before' - images show the position of the existing barn and permitted development buildings. It does not show the other buildings remaining at Acorn Lodge to save confusion. The second image 'after' shows the development without the barn (demolished) and with the houses in place of the permitted development barn. Some evergreen planting has been added to the screen at the front (it is presently deciduous). Whilst illustrative the building have been drawn to scale.



Acorn Lodge 'before'



Acorn Lodge 'after'

Clearly there is no additional impact on the openness of the Green Belt or character of the area from the development of houses rather than the barn / storage units. This is a factor of the smaller footprint (if higher ridge height) and additional planting.

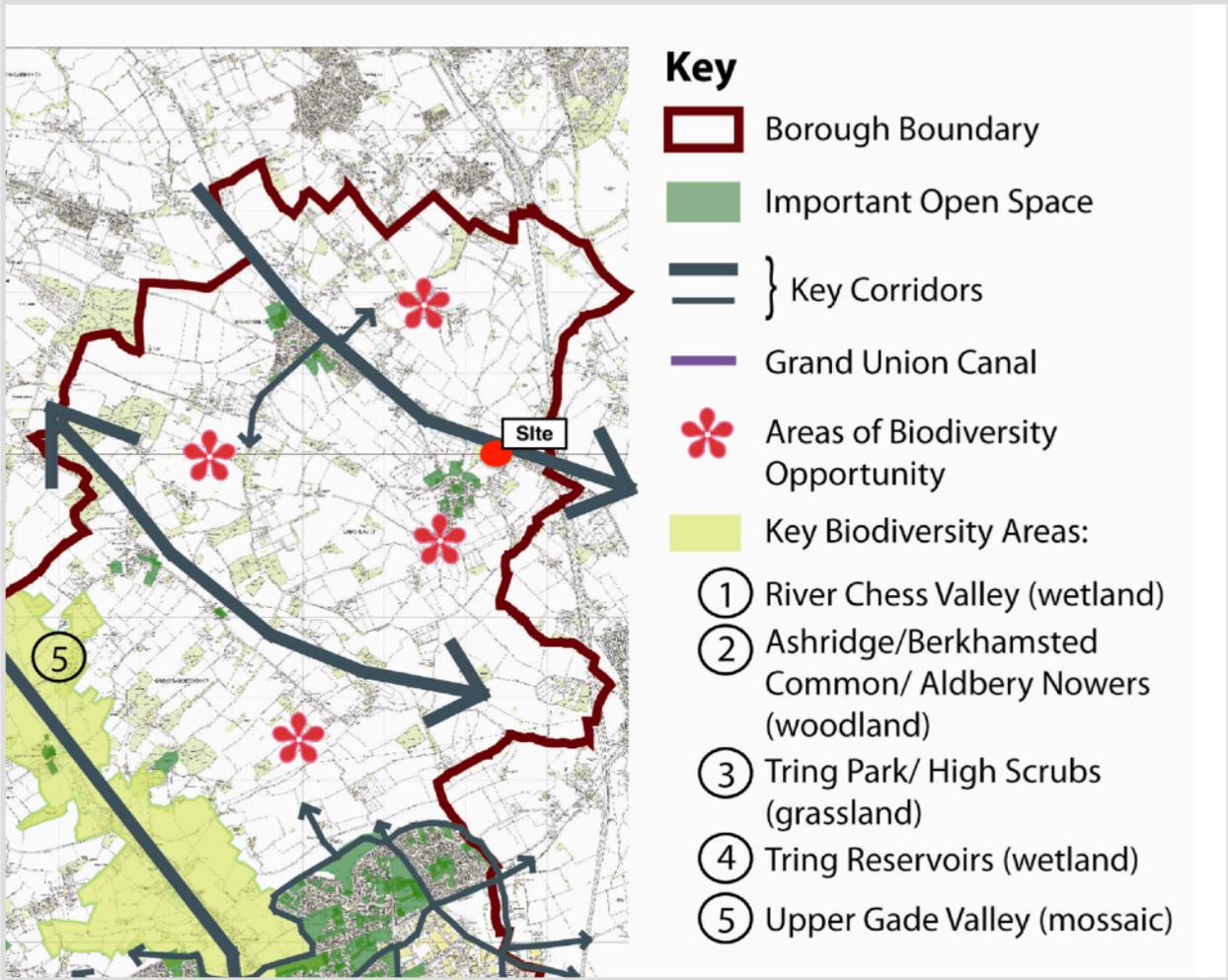
The illustrations serve to show that there will be no impact on the character and appearance of the countryside thus rendering the proposed development compliant with policy CS5.

The provision of four additional housing units will also help to support rural enterprises in accordance with policy CS5.

Local policy requires development in the countryside to be carefully landscaped and the applicant has offered to provide a Landscape plan as part of the conditions process.

Evaluation of existing Landscape

The area of the site is not designated by the council, in Landscape terms, in any way.
³See excerpt plan (with site marked) below. The site is alongside a 'key corridor' but does not interfere with this in any way. More specifically the site is not in or next to an Important Open Space, Biodiversity Area, AONB, SSSI, Wildlife Site or Nature Reserve. It is has no greater designation than much of the countryside, or indeed urban areas.



³ Core Strategy 2013

Dacorum Borough Landscape Sensitivity Study (2020)

Dacorum Borough Council commissioned a Borough Landscape Sensitivity Study from Arup. This was completed in 2020.

The site area, and surrounding area, was not included in this report see plan from the report below showing the site in red.



Accordingly one cannot use this report as a guide to sensitivity but given the absence of this being in the remit of the report one can be confident that the site is, at least, not in an especially sensitive area.

Dacorum Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment (2004)

The area is within the Markyate Ridges and Valleys Landscape Character Assessment Area (see below).

LOCATION

Centred around the village of Markyate and on the border with Bedfordshire the ridges and valleys run in a north west, south east direction. The area includes the upper reaches of the Ver Valley and the hamlets of Aley Green and Kensworth Common to the north, the parkland of Markyate Cell to the centre and the settlements of Trowley Bottom and Flamsted to the south. The area comprises two sub areas of 'ridges' and 'valleys'.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The area comprises a 'hand-shaped' pattern of narrow ridges and valleys, of predominantly mixed arable and pasture farmland with some common land, woodland and parkland, converging upon the M1 corridor to the east. The River Ver marks the central valley, although neither the watercourse or the associated vegetation read strongly in the landscape. Caddington Hall with its distinctive designed woodlands and exotic ornamentals and Markyate Cell with its large parkland trees and estate architecture both have a significant local influence on the character of the area. Woodland cover, where it occurs, is largely coniferous plantation, with semi natural edges/ margins. Views are framed by hawthorn hedgerows with large oak hedgerow trees. The landscape at the convergence of the valleys, near Junction 9 of the M1 is notably disturbed and the constant presence of large lorries and the influence of the transport system in this area is strong.

Relict common land at Kensworth and Caddington are valuable amenity resources and small ponds on the uplands are locally apparent.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- narrow upland ridges and valleys*
- **gently undulating open arable land***
- **medium sized irregular shaped fields***

- **isolated settlements and farms**

- open views across surrounding valleys
- ribbon development adjacent to A5/Ver valley
- sunken lanes and hedgebanks on valley slopes
- **pockets of pasture in the valleys and close to settlement • disturbed landscape in the east close to the M1**

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- historic parklands at Markyate Cell and Caddington • reservoir, water and sewage works
- common land
- Watling Street Roman Road - A5

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. On the higher ground, the Upper Chalk bedrock is capped with variable depths of free draining clay-with-flints and thin deposits of peri-glacial brick earth. In the valleys there are variable deposits of alluvium and fluvo-glacial gravels. The soils are predominantly fine silty and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging, (Batcombe association). To the main Ver valley the soils are well drained, calcareous fine silty soils, deep at the valley bottom and shallow to chalk on valley sides in places, with slight risk of water erosion, (Combe 1 association).

Topography. The area covers a series of narrow, gently undulating ridges, above the glacial dry valleys of Markyate that meet at Friars Wash in the upper Ver valley.

Degree of slope. The average gradient along the ridges is 1 in 78 however the land drops away steeply into the valleys at an average gradient of 1 in 15.

Altitude range. Varies from 185m at Kensworth Ridge to 107m at Junction 9 of the M1.

Hydrology. On the ridges, there is little standing water apparent apart from village ponds near Flamstead. Water becomes more visible on the valley floor and the course of the River Ver runs through the central valley in which the village of Markyate is sited. The River Ver is a characteristic chalk stream that has its historic source at Kensworth Lynch and which has reappeared in recent years. The river is also supplemented from chalk

rock springs further downstream. In addition, the area is characterised by a number of springs and the ornamental ponds in the parklands of Markyate Cell, and Caddington Hall. A bund/dam is being built in Markyate Cell as a flood prevention measure.

Land cover and land use. Land cover is predominantly open arable farmland with isolated pockets of wooded pasture and ornamental parkland. Patches of light industrial development and lorry parks border Watling Street in the east. Patches of pasture and horticulture can be found close to residential settlements, predominantly on the ridges. Vegetation and wildlife. There are substantial blocks of ancient mainly acidic oak/beech or oak/hornbeam woodland at Broomhill Leys, Friendless Wood, and especially Dedmansey Wood in Bedfordshire (although this is largely re-planted) and Limekiln Plantation (partly ancient). There are also old wooded hedgerows along Half Moon Lane. Calcareous, but rather poor beech/ash woodland occurs at Babies Wood. In the Ver valley the former calcareous valley floor meadows have almost entirely been ploughed, except for the vestiges at Friars Wash and the improved grasslands at Friars Gate Cell. No other semi-natural habitats of any note remain in the sub area. The River Ver has recently been established as a flowing stream through the area following reductions in abstraction but has very little remaining associated habitat. Old grassland is limited, but there are remnants of calcareous grassland at Jack's Dell, Flamstead, and old neutral grassland survives at Cheverells Green.

Although Kensworth Common has superficial clay-with- flints, the habitats are generally calcareous. Ancient woodland is limited, the largest being Slough Wood, supporting ash/hazel over Dog's Mercury; and Kensworth Gorse, with acidic oak. Degraded calcareous grassland remnants occur on road verges, and at Codling Bank near Kensworth, in Bedfordshire.

In terms of notable species in the area, the Chiltern Gentian occurred fairly recently at Jack's Dell.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is little evidence of a long settled cultural pattern in the area (Flamstead, despite its early origins, has been heavily infilled with a range of early twentieth century buildings). Other settlements also reflect this degraded character i.e. Trowley Bottom and Caddington (largely outside the county). The few exceptions are

Markyate village and Markyate Cell.

Markyate Cell was originally an Augustinian Nunnery, whose buildings, grounds and farms were incorporated into a substantial country house by the Ferrers family after the dissolution of the monasteries. In the mid seventeenth century it was home to the notorious 'Wicked Lady', Katherine Ferrers, a highwaywoman shot down on nearby Nomansland Common. Markyate Cell was largely rebuilt in the 19th century. With its ancient parkland breaking up the essentially arable Ver Valley and its diversity of estate architecture, its influence is strong. Caddington Hall dated from 1804 and was built of light and dark chequer brickwork with seven bays. It was demolished in 1975. Field Patterns. Fields are predominantly laid out in an irregular pattern throughout the valleys and ridges. The fields to the east of the area are predominantly of 20th century origin with some earlier organic forms. Further to the west, larger prairie fields have eroded the historic patterns. The field pattern is disturbed where the valleys and ridges converge, close to the M1 corridor in the east. There is a small pocket of fields in a regular pattern around Foxdell Farm in the north of the area.

Transport pattern. Watling Street (A5) is a fast and straight road that forms the spine of the character area, connecting Junction 9 of the M1 to Dunstable in the north west. 'B' roads branch off this spine at right angles. Verges vary between wide along Watling Street to almost non-existent on the more minor roads. Luton road that links Markyate with Slip End is direct and straight, perpendicular to the ridges and valleys, therefore undulating significantly. Settlements and built form. Settlement is somewhat isolated and irregular in its occurrence. Scattered farms and hamlets offer few examples of a vernacular building style, and are rarely of note or distinguishable.

The small coaching village of Markyate used to lie on the turnpike road but the centre is now bypassed by the A5. Flamstead lies on one of the ridges and the Parish church of St Leonard is a prominent landmark within the character area. The village also contains some 17th century brick almshouses.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Due to the nature of the landform and the generally wooded boundaries, the area is essentially concealed from view from outside the character area. However, this varies around Flamstead ridge and Kensworth ridge and valley, although the area is no more than locally visible throughout. Within the area views are framed and filtered by

landform and overgrown hedgerows and woodland belts, although this is again subject to variation, as views at Kensworth (outside the county) are extensive. Generally, the scale of landscape elements is medium to large, with a clear sense of enclosure in many parts. However again this is not consistent across the entire character area. For example the arable areas around Trowley Bottom, Kensworth and Flamstead are quite open.

Visual unity is coherent throughout the character area. Noise from the A5 and the M1 is generally distant, with the exception of the Ver valley, in which Markyate is sited. Rarity and distinctiveness. The rarity and distinctiveness needs to be considered in the context of the sub areas of which the character area is composed. At Markyate Cell, the landscape is strongly influenced by the historic parkland and the estate and, as such, is relatively unusual.

In the Trowley Bottom valley, the pattern of degraded commercial arable agriculture and the resultant near total erosion of historical and cultural integrity make this landscape more frequent in its occurrence.

At Kensworth, the influence of the strongly linear village, sited on the top of the ridge rather than the more normal valley floor makes the sub area sufficiently distinct as to be regarded unusual.

VISUAL IMPACT

This is subject to variation across the sub areas. In the Trowley Bottom Valley, the pylons are strong detracting features with a high visual impact. Built development, at the settlement fringes of Flamstead and Kensworth is characterized by modest late 20th century housing and, which generally has a low impact.

ACCESSIBILITY

Access to the countryside is possible through a number of footpaths, bridleways and minor roads. There are a number of public footpaths around Flamstead and linking other settlements. There is some common land at Caddington and a village green at Cheverells.

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	over mature
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	scattered
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	not obvious
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	moderate
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	moderate

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	apparent
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	partial
<i>Visual unity:</i>	coherent
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	unusual

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
		STRENGTH OF CHARACTER		

The assessment is dated (over 18 years old now) and does not assess in the same manner as today Landscape sensitivity. Overall the area is considered to be of ‘moderate’ condition and character.

Evaluation of Landscape and Visual Impacts

Landscape Impact Assessment

Landscape Sensitivity

Whilst the landscape character assesses the whole area as having a moderate 'character' the immediate area of the site is considered to be a degraded landscape. Looking at the LVIA guidance (appendix C) the area of the site has:

Elements that make a negative contribution to the overall character of the area, and

Degraded landscapes with detracting, uncharacteristic features.

Accordingly the landscape sensitivity is considered to be negligible.

Landscape Magnitude of Change

With regard to magnitude of change (See appendix B) a low magnitude of change is considered to :

Result in temporary or minor loss or alteration of landscape elements and features and/or reduce their setting; Introduce some uncharacteristic components alongside characteristic features or elements; Not quite fit with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape; Be a discernible change, although not uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape; Result in a minor deterioration of landscape character and/or condition; Not fulfil landscape objectives and policy guidelines for the area; and Be capable of mitigation that maintains existing scenario.

Given the site is already developed, there would be a smaller footprint of development and improved landscaping one could consider magnitude of change to be negligible. However housing here would not quite fit with the landscape and ridge height being higher than existing development it would be more cautious to say the magnitude of

change is low rather than negligible.

Magnitude of Landscape Change = Insignificant.

See Appendix A

Visual Impact Assessment

Visual Sensitivity

Visual sensitivity is considered to be low (see advice below and appendix E). Whilst the footpaths are well used (to the south) the site is not visible from most viewpoints. From the north there is every indication the footpath is unusable / not used. Therefore the main view will just be from moving traffic which would be fleeting and to be mitigated from with better landscaping.

Views which are not recognised or have limited value, such as footpaths which are not well used. Areas of average to low visual amenity.

Detracting features may be clearly apparent.

Attention is focussed upon the activity and not the wider landscape to include;

- *Receptors engaged in sports or*
- *Users of main roads travelling at speed, or local roads where the focus is on the road ahead owing to level of traffic and/or the composition of views.*
- *Places of work/study.*

Visual Magnitude of Change

The site is not visible from most sites and only fleetingly from the London Road. Visible change from those viewpoints where the site is visible would be minor and only noticeable if studied. The site is already developed and from viewpoints the difference between the existing development would be barely discernible and would be subservient to the views of the wider landscape. Accordingly as per the advice below (appendix D) the magnitude of change should be considered negligible.

Proposal perceived as a background component in view or is subservient to other elements within it.

The development would barely be discernible.

Magnitude of Visual Change = Insignificant

See Appendix A

Mitigation & Monitoring

A landscape plan is proposed to be a condition of the application.

Summary and Conclusions

This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has concluded that there is an insignificant effect on the Landscape or Visual amenity of the area resulting from the proposed development.

Appendix A: Landscape / Visual Change Matrix of significance

	Magnitude of Change				
		Negligible	Low	Medium	High
Sensitivity	Negligible	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant
	Low	Insignificant	Minor	Minor	Minor to Moderate
	Medium	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Moderate to Major
	High	Insignificant	Minor to Moderate	Moderate to Major	Major

Appendix B: Magnitude Criteria - Landscape Change

Magnitude	Criteria
High	<p>Result in the permanent loss of characteristic landscape elements and features and/or their setting; Introduce uncharacteristic or dominant elements; Be at complete variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape; Substantially erode the landscape character and/or condition of the area; Undermine any designation or the nature of a vulnerable landscape; Be at complete variance with the landscape objectives and policy guidelines for the area; and Be incapable of mitigation.</p> <p>Retain the majority of existing landscape components and/or enable the full restoration and/or replacement of characteristic landscape elements and features; Introduce new landscape elements and features that through good design enables a sense of place to be fully restored; Have a strong contextual fit within the scale, landform and pattern of landscape; Substantially enhance the landscape character and/or condition of the area; Deliver substantial landscape objectives and policy guidelines for the area; and Be fully capable of mitigation.</p>

Magnitude	Criteria
Medium	<p>Result in the partial loss or alteration of characteristic landscape elements and features and/or reduce or remove their setting; Introduce uncharacteristic components alongside characteristic features or elements; Be at odds with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape; Be a noticeable change, although not necessarily uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape; Result in a deterioration of landscape objectives and policy guidelines for the area; and Be capable of some mitigation.</p> <p>Retain existing key features and/or enable partial restoration of characteristic landscape elements and features; Introduce new landscape elements and features that through good design enables sense of place to be restored; Fits well with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape; Enhance the landscape character and/or condition of the area; Deliver some landscape objectives and policy guidelines for the area; and Be capable of mitigation to deliver local benefits.</p>

Magnitude	Criteria
Low	<p>Result in temporary or minor loss or alteration of landscape elements and features and/or reduce their setting; Introduce some uncharacteristic components alongside characteristic features or elements; Not quite fit with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape; Be a discernible change, although not uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape; Result in a minor deterioration of landscape character and/or condition; Not fulfil landscape objectives and policy guidelines for the area; and Be capable of mitigation that maintains existing scenario.</p> <p>Retain existing key features and/or allow limited restoration of characteristic landscape elements and features; Introduce new landscape elements and features that through good design enables some sense of place; Respect the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape; Enables limited enhancement of the landscape character and/or condition of the area; Deliver limited landscape objectives and policy guidelines for the area; and Be capable of mitigation to ensure that the proposals would blend in well with the surrounding landscape.</p>
Negligible/None	<p>The development would introduce barely discernible elements or physical change to the landscape.</p> <p>Key characteristics of the landscape and its integrity are unaffected.</p>

Appendix C: Criteria for Sensitivity of Landscape Receptor

Sensitivity	Criteria
High	<p>Features, of good to excellent condition, which are dominant within the landscape and are fundamental in defining the distinct landscape character of an area.</p> <p>Important characteristics and features recognised as forming an intrinsic part of the landscape, giving rise to a strong unique character and sense of place.</p> <p>Distinctive individual or rare features, which are likely, but not necessarily subject to statutory protection e.g. TPO's or Listed Buildings and/or given significant protection by planning policy.</p> <p>A landscape of strong positive and distinctive character with limited capacity to accommodate the development / change without affecting the baseline situation. These are likely, but not necessarily, statutory protected landscapes e.g. AONB, National Park, Registered Parks and Gardens recognised for their quality or cultural associations.</p> <p>Generally none or few detracting or uncharacteristic features. Low potential for replacement or for mitigation.</p>

Sensitivity	Criteria
Medium	<p>Locally important and notable features, in good to average condition with some evidence of erosion, that contribute to the overall character of the area.</p> <p>Features and elements protected by local policy.</p> <p>A landscape of positive character and recognisable sense of place, with some capacity to accommodate the development / change without affecting the baseline situation. May include local landscape designations, or other designations indicating local cultural or historic value.</p> <p>Some detracting features may be present. Specific opportunities for restoration or enhancement.</p>
Low	<p>Elements of average to poor condition, that make a limited contribution to the overall character of the area.</p> <p>Features or elements that are uncharacteristic and detract from the landscape character of the area.</p> <p>A landscape of ordinary character with some evidence of erosion and limited sense of place. Capacity to accommodate the development / change without affecting the baseline situation. Designations unlikely.</p> <p>Detracting features or elements are notable. Good opportunities for restoration and enhancement.</p>

Sensitivity	Criteria
Negligible/None	<p>Elements that make a negative contribution to the overall character of the area.</p> <p>Degraded landscapes with detracting, uncharacteristic features.</p> <p>Capacity for development will provide opportunities for restoration and enhancement.</p>

Appendix D: Magnitude Criteria - Visual Change

Magnitude	Criteria
High	<p>Proposal results in the total, permanent loss of a highly valued view; Proposal introduces dominant or discordant elements altering the composition or balance of the view; Proposal introduces features not already present on / or part of the skyline.</p> <p>Proposal removes substantial visual detractors; Proposal introduces positive elements that substantially enhance the composition of the view; Development introduces an immediately apparent landmark or feature.</p>
Medium	<p>Proposal is clearly visible and recognisable but not prominent in views; Proposal introduces elements that are not necessarily already characteristic and/or are incongruous; Development may form skyline features amongst existing development and/or vegetation.</p> <p>Proposal removes limited visual detractors; Proposal is a visible but characteristic element complementing the composition of the view.</p>
Low	<p>Proposal is only a minor component or slightly uncharacteristic part of the view and does not introduce incongruous features; Proposal does not alter the overall composition of the view or dominance or balance of elements within it and therefore might be missed by a casual observer.</p> <p>Proposal removes limited visual detractors; Proposal is only a minor component of the view and compliments the composition and balance of existing elements.</p>



Magnitude	Criteria
Negligible/None	Proposal perceived as a background component in view or is subservient to other elements within it. The development would barely be discernible.



Appendix E: Criteria for Sensitivity of Visual Receptor

Sensitivity	Criteria
High	<p>Recognised or important views, including those identified within and protected by policy. Visual amenity assessed as good to excellent, an area of high scenic value. These views may include tourist destinations and those marked on maps.</p> <p>Designed views particularly from within and to historic landscapes/ heritage assets.</p> <p>Observers whose attention or interest may be focussed on the landscape to include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Residential properties with views from rooms occupied during daylight / waking hours (predominantly ground floor). ○ Users of rights of way and recreation trails. ○ Users of land with public access including Open Access.

Sensitivity	Criteria
Medium	<p>Views which are locally recognised including those protected by local policy such as visually important open space or special landscape area. Visual amenity assessed as average to good. These views may include local destinations and well used footpath routes.</p> <p>Views to or from locally important heritage assets.</p> <p>Views of the landscape are part of, but not the sole purpose of activity to include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Residential properties with views from rooms unoccupied during daylight / waking hours (predominantly first floor rooms) ○ Those playing or spectating at outdoor sports or undertaking formal outdoor recreation. ○ Users of local roads where there are clear / open views across the landscape and low levels of traffic, generally travelling at a low speed.



Sensitivity	Criteria
Low	<p>Views which are not recognised or have limited value, such as footpaths which are not well used. Areas of average to low visual amenity.</p> <p>Detracting features may be clearly apparent.</p> <p>Attention is focussed upon the activity and not the wider landscape to include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Receptors engaged in sports or○ Users of main roads travelling at speed, or local roads where the focus is on the road ahead owing to level of traffic and/or the composition of views. ○○ Places of work/study.
Negligible/None	<p>Attention is not focussed upon the landscape at all.</p> <p>Within urban areas where the landscape is not a feature of the view.</p>

