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# Land South of Chiswell Green Lane Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Prepared on behalf of Alban Developments Limited  
and Alban Peter Pearson, CALA Homes (Chiltern)  
Ltd and Redington Capital Ltd

April 2022



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Site Appraisal Photographs (A-K)

Site Context Photographs (1-18)

## **Appendix**

Appendix 1: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Methodology

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Barton Willmore, now Stantec has been commissioned by Alban Developments Limited and Alban Peter Pearson, CALA Homes (Chiltern) Ltd and Redington Capital Ltd to prepare a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to consider the potential of land south of Chiswell Green Lane ('the Site') for Green Belt release and subsequent residential development ('the Proposed Development').
- 1.2 The Proposed Development comprises the demolition of existing structures and construction of up to 391 dwellings (Use Class C3), the provision of land for a new 2FE Primary School, open space provision and associated landscaping and new access arrangements. The Site is located on the western settlement edge of Chiswell Green, as shown on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**. The topography of the Site and wider area within which it sits is shown on **Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan**.
- 1.3 Development of the Site and its release from the Green Belt is considered within the context of its very localised visual envelope, coherent relationship to the existing settlement pattern, and existing defensible boundaries that could be strengthened through the implementation of an appropriate landscape strategy.
- 1.4 This report sets out the context to the Site and details the landscape character of the Site and its surroundings, its landscape value and the visual envelope of the Site.
- 1.5 This report also considers the effects of the Proposed Development on landscape elements, character, and visual amenity, within the Site and the surrounding area. The study has been undertaken with regard to best practice within the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) which states in paragraph 1.1 that ***"Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and amenity"***.
- 1.6 GLVIA3 also states in paragraph 1.17 that when identifying landscape and visual effects there is a ***"need for an approach that is in proportion to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of the likely effects. Judgement needs to be exercised at all stages in terms of the scale of investigation that is appropriate and proportional"***.
- 1.7 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal of the Site has been undertaken to establish the landscape and visual sensitivity of the Site and to identify likely landscape and visual impacts that may arise as a result of the Proposed Development.

1.8 The objectives of this study are to:

- Assess the landscape character and quality of the Site and its context and the function of the Site within the wider landscape, particularly in relation to existing landscape designations and policies;
- Assess the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of existing views towards the Site;
- Assess the likely effects upon landscape character and visual amenity that would arise as a result of the Proposed Development on the Site;
- Identify opportunities and constraints to development on the Site, from a landscape and visual perspective in relation to the potential development of the land; and
- Consider and identify a revised Green Belt boundary.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

### Assessment of Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- 2.1 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared in accordance with the current best practice guidelines, as set out in the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment's 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' Third Edition (3rd), 2013.
- 2.2 The purpose of LVIA is to identify the potential for, and assess the likely effects of, change resulting from development. Landscape and visual assessments are a separate, although linked, processes. A distinction is made between:
- landscape - landscape character and the elements and features that contribute to it (landscape receptors); and
  - visual - people who experience views within the landscape (visual receptors).
- 2.3 Landscape encompasses the whole of the external environment, whether within towns, villages or countryside. It is not only the visual perception of a combination of landform, vegetation cover and buildings, but also embodies the history, land use, human culture, wildlife and seasonal changes of an area. The landscape can be considered as a resource in its own right (providing food, cultural heritage, clean air etc.) and as a visual amenity (views, walks or recreational pursuits). As a result, landscape and visual impacts are assessed separately.
- 2.4 A baseline study is undertaken to record the existing landscape features, characteristics, the way the landscape is experienced and existing views of visual receptors likely to be affected by the Proposed Development. This is done through the examination of Ordnance Survey Maps, aerial photography and various scales of landscape character assessment. The desk and field surveys (undertaken from within the Site and publicly accessible locations) enable a study area to be derived in order to focus the assessment on likely significant effects. The study area is determined through consideration of landform, vegetation and likely extent of visibility, beyond which the Proposed Development would be unlikely to give rise to any significant effects.
- 2.5 The full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Methodology is set out in **Appendix 1: LVIA Methodology**.



### **Landscape Assessment**

- 2.6 The capacity (or susceptibility) of a landscape relates to the ability to accept change of the type and scale proposed and will be influenced by the likely ability of the landscape to accommodate the introduction of new features while retaining the essential characteristics that define it.
- 2.7 Landscape susceptibility is categorised as High, Medium or Low. The following criteria are taken into consideration in the assessment of landscape susceptibility: landform, pattern/complexity, composition, land-cover and relationship to existing settlements or developments. However, not all criteria are equally applicable or important within a given landscape / type of development proposed.
- 2.8 The value of a landscape resource is based on a combination of the importance of landscape-related planning designations and, as appropriate, such attributes as scenic quality, perceptual aspects, rarity, representativeness, recreation and association. The overall value for each landscape receptor is categorised as High, Medium or Low.
- 2.9 The sensitivity of a landscape receptor is a combination of the value of the landscape resource and the susceptibility of the landscape receptor to the type of change, or type of development proposed, and categorised as High, Medium or Low.
- 2.10 The magnitude of effect (change) affecting landscape receptors depends upon the nature, scale, extent and duration of the particular change within the landscape and any loss of, or change to, important features or characteristics. The magnitude of change for each landscape receptor is categorised as Large, Medium, Small, Very Small and None.

### **Visual Assessment**

- 2.11 The sensitivity of a visual receptor is a consideration of the value of the view and the susceptibility of the visual receptor to the type of change proposed.
- 2.12 The assessment of value is based upon the importance of the location of the view, its designations, cultural associations and the amount to which the view forms part of the experience in the location. The overall value for each visual receptor is categorised as High, Medium or Low.
- 2.13 Visual susceptibility to the type of change proposed is based upon the activity or expectation of the viewer. It is categorised as High, Medium or Low. Where people are in their homes or engaged in outdoor recreation focussed on the landscape visual receptors may have a high susceptibility, whilst it may be low for those engaged in work or travelling on major roads.

- 2.14 Based on the combination of value and susceptibility, an assessment of visual sensitivity with regards to accommodating development is reached, and categorised as High, Medium or Low.
- 2.15 The magnitude of effect (change) affecting visual receptors depends on the location of the view and the overall effect on a particular view. The angle of the view, duration of view, extent of view affected, distance from the development and character of the existing view all influence the magnitude of change. The magnitude of change for visual receptors is categorised as Large, Medium, Small, Very Small and None.

### **Significance of Effect**

- 2.16 In order to arrive at a measure of the significance of the overall effect, which can be beneficial or adverse, the sensitivity is combined with the magnitude of change for each landscape or visual receptor and are rated on a scale between Neutral, Negligible, Minor, Moderate and Major with effects of Moderate or Major significance deemed 'significant'.

### 3.0 SITE CONTEXT

3.1 **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** illustrates the boundary of Site. The Site adjoins the western edge of Chiswell Green, a settlement area to the south west of the city of St Albans, in the County of Hertfordshire. The Site is immediately adjacent to the settlement boundary and the inner Green Belt boundary.

#### **Landscape Setting, Location and Land Use**

3.2 The western settlement edge of Chiswell Green and an area of woodland adjacent to the settlement broadly forms the eastern boundary of the Site. The now closed Butterfly World, which was a leisure based development, forms the western boundary of the Site. The Royal National Rose Society's 'Gardens of the Rose' at Bone Hill, a large property surrounded by rose gardens with woodland edges, is located to the west of Butterfly World. A more rural landscape consisting of agricultural fields, boundary hedgerows and small woodland blocks, with scattered farms, smallholdings, stables and dwellings, extends to the north, west and south of the Site. A number of significant transport corridors dissect this landscape, with the A414 to the north, the M1 to the west and both the M25 and A405 (the North Orbital Road) to the south and south-east, with substantial interchanges between the M1 and A414, and M1 and M25, to the north-west and south-west respectively.

3.3 The key road transport routes are linked to smaller areas of settlement through a subordinate network of roads and country lanes including:

- Chiswell Green Lane, which runs broadly east/west adjacent to the northern Site boundary, and connects Watford Road (B4630) in Chiswell Green with Blunts Lane;
- Miriam Lane (a private road), which runs north/south adjacent to part of the western Site boundary, and connects the commercial estate at the former Butterfly World with Noke Lane; and
- Noke Lane, which runs broadly north-west/south-east to the west and south of the Site, and connects Chiswell Green Lane with the North Orbital Road (A405).

#### **Topography and Hydrology**

3.4 The Site is located on the valley sides of the River Ver, at an elevation of between 85m and over 100m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), as illustrated on **Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan**. The land continues to rise to a localised ridge to the immediate north of the Site, up to an elevation of above 105m AOD, beyond which land then rises further, to the north-west, to a series of high points at approximately 135m AOD. Woodland cover also increases significantly to the north and north-west of the Site. To the south, south-west and

south-east of the Site, the land drops down to the River Ver, to an elevation of approximately 65m AOD. The settlements of Park Street and How Wood are located on the lower western slopes of the River Ver valley, with Chiswell Green extending up the western valley side onto the higher elevated land to the north of the Site. The Site is therefore contained to the south, east and north-east by residential development which rises up the valley side, and onto the ridge above the Site.

### **Vegetation**

- 3.5 The vegetative structure of the local agricultural landscape context to the west of the Site is defined by a network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, with field boundaries varying from intact to gappy or denuded. However, as demonstrated by **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**, there are small, scattered blocks and belts of woodland, often associated with tracks and commercial or residential properties. However, to the north and north-west in particular there are substantial woodland blocks, with a good degree of connectivity, providing a high level of enclosure.
- 3.6 Large areas of tree cover are also present further from the Site within the wider study area, particularly to the north, south and west, and woodland belts are associated with transport routes such as the M1/M25 interchange. Locally, the network of country lanes exhibits a varying level of tree cover, with much of Chiswell Green Lane lined with mature hedgerow and hedgerow trees, and Noke Lane being less consistently vegetated.
- 3.7 Woodland blocks immediately adjacent or near to the site assist in enclosing the eastern half of the Site. Hedgerow trees along the western Site boundary also emphasise the containment of the Site in these directions.

### **Access and Rights of Way**

- 3.8 Whilst no Public Rights of Way cross the Site and there is no other public access to the Site, the study area is well served by a well-used network of PRoW as shown in **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**, notably including the following:
- PRoW St Stephen 082, a short distance local footpath which runs north/south to the north of the Site, and connects The Croft with Chiswell Green Lane;
  - PRoW St Stephen 068, a short distance local footpath which runs north/south to the north-east of the Site, and connects Chiswell Green Lane with Woodlea and Hammers Gate;
  - PRoW St Stephen 080, a short distance local footpath which runs east/west to the north of the Site, and connects Cherry Hill with Furzebushes Lane;

- PRoW St Stephen 021, a short distance local footpath which runs broadly north/south to the north-west of the Site, and connects PRoW St Stephen 080 with Chiswell Green Lane;
- PRoW St Stephen 028, a short distance local footpath which runs north/south to the west of the Site, and connects Chiswell Green Lane with Noke Lane;
- PRoW St Stephen 044, a short distance local footpath which runs east/west to the west of the Site, and connects PRoW St Stephen 028 with Noke Lane;
- PRoW St Stephen 022, a short distance local footpath which runs north-east/south-west to the south of the Site, and connects Noke Lane with PRoW 002;
- PRoW St Stephen 023, a short distance local footpath which runs north-east/south-west to the west of the Site, and connects Noke Lane with Chequers Lane; and
- PRoW St Michael Rural 012, a short distance local footpath which runs broadly north-west/south-east to the north-west of the Site, and connects Blunts Lane with Chiswell Green Lane.

### Designations

- 3.9 The Site is located within the Green Belt as identified in the St Albans City and District Local Plan (adopted 1994). **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** illustrates the extent of Green Belt within the surrounding landscape, demonstrating that the Green Belt is drawn tightly around the existing edges of settlement.
- 3.10 Whilst the Green Belt is the only relevant landscape policy designation, within the wider landscape setting of the Site, the following designations are also of note:
- Conservation Areas, including Potters Crouch (approximately 1.2km north-west); Sopwell (approximately 1.4km to the north-east); Park Street and Frogmore (approximately 1.4km to the east); St Albans (approximately 1.5km to the north); and Napsbury (approximately 2.8km to the east).
  - Listed Buildings, including 'Three Hammers Public House' (Grade II, approximately 160m to the north-east); 'Little Daneswick' (Grade II, approximately 710m to the west); 'Old Cuckmans' (Grade II, approximately 610m to the north-east); and five others within approximately 1km of the Site, all Grade II or Grade II\*.
  - Scheduled Monuments, the nearest of which is 'Verulamium, part of wall and ditch of Roman city' (approximately 1.9km to the north); and ten others also within and near to St Albans.
  - Registered Parks and Gardens, including 'Gorhambury' (Grade II, approximately 2.7km to the north-west); and 'Napsbury Hospital' (Grade II, approximately 2.8km to the east).
  - Watercress Wildlife Site Local Nature Reserve (approximately 2.6km to the north-east).

- Two woodland blocks covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) directly abut the Site, to the east and south; both are identified as Priority Habitat Traditional Orchards, with the greater part of the one to the east also identified as Priority Habitat Deciduous Woodland.

### **Summary**

- 3.11 The combination of rising topography and increasing woodland cover to the north and north-west of the Site, the settlement of Chiswell Green running up the valley side to the immediate south, east and north-east of the Site, and the commercial estate to the west of the Site, result in the Site being largely screened from the surrounding landscape. To the south-west, where the landscape is more open and there is more limited development, there are infrequent glimpses of the Site, set against the settlement edge of Chiswell Green, however these are limited through the combination of the lower elevation of the southern part of the Site and the intervening hedgerows and undulating topography.
- 3.12 Other than the woodland blocks immediately adjacent to the Site, all of the above designated features are at a sufficient distance from the Site, that their settings are unlikely to be affected by the development due to existing comprehensive screening. No intervisibility has been identified between the Site and any of the heritage assets, and due to the Site being located at some distance from them, it is unlikely that development of the Site would have any significant effects on their settings.

## 4.0 LANDSCAPE POLICY CONTEXT

### National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework, 2021<sup>1</sup>

- 4.1 The NPPF, first published in March 2012, was most recently revised in July 2021. The NPPF aims to provide one concise document which sets out the Government's planning policies for England by replacing previous Planning Policy Guidance and Planning Policy Statements. It aims to provide a planning framework within which the local community and local authorities can produce distinctive local plans which respond to local needs and priorities.
- 4.2 The NPPF promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, defined as **"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"**, providing it is in accordance with the relevant up-to-date Local Plan, and policies set out in the NPPF including those identifying restrictions with regard to designated areas, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Green Belt.
- 4.3 The NPPF states that **"the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development"**, with Paragraph 8 going on to state that to achieve this the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. The environmental objective is described as:

***"to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy"***.

- 4.4 Paragraph 120 of the NPPF 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; and recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production..."***.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021) 'National Planning Policy Framework'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

4.5 Paragraphs 126-136 focus on achieving well-designed places and promote good design of the built environment. This approach is enshrined in Paragraph 130, which states:

- a) ***"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:***
- b) ***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;***
- c) ***Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;***
- d) ***Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);***
- e) ***Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;***
- f) ***Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and***
- g) ***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 and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience".***

4.6 Section 15 relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, with Paragraph 174 setting out that planning policies and decisions should look to achieve the above by ***"protecting and enhancing valued landscapes"*** and ***"recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services"***.

4.7 Chapter 13 addresses issues of protecting the Green Belt, with Paragraph 137 stating ***"...the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open..."*** and that ***"...the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence"***.

4.8 Paragraph 138 subsequently sets out the following five purposes of the Green Belt:

- a) ***"To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;***
- b) ***To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;***
- c) ***To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;***
- d) ***To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and***
- e) ***To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land"***.



4.9 Paragraph 140 refers to the process by which Green Belt boundaries may be amended, and states:

***"Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period. Where a need for changes to Green Belt boundaries has been established through strategic policies, detailed amendments to those boundaries may be made through non-strategic policies, including neighbourhood plans".***

4.10 This continues into paragraph 142, which states:

***"When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land".***

4.11 On defining boundaries, Paragraph 143 states that local authorities should:

- ***"not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;***
- ***... be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period; and***
- ***define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent".***

4.12 Paragraph 145 highlights the beneficial uses of Green Belt, which local authorities should plan positively to enhance, including:

***"looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land".***

4.13 With regard to inappropriate development, Paragraph 147 states that it is:

***"by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances".***

4.14 Paragraph 148 further explains that:

***"When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations".***

Planning Practice Guidance<sup>2</sup>

4.15 To support the policies of the NPPF, the Government has produced Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) covering a number of topics.

4.16 Under the topic of Design: process and tools and sub-heading of Planning for well-designed places (Paragraph: 001) the PPG states that ***"permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions"***. This section of the PPG also introduces the National Design Guide<sup>3</sup> which sets out the 10 characteristics of good design, including:

- ***"Context (enhances the surroundings);***
- ***Identity (attractive and distinctive);***
- ***Built form (a coherent pattern of development);***
- ***Movement (accessible and easy to move around);***
- ***Nature (enhanced and optimised);***
- ***Public Spaces (safe, social and inclusive);***
- ***Uses (mixed and integrated);***
- ***Homes and Buildings (functional, healthy and sustainable);***
- ***Resources (efficient and resilient); and***
- ***Lifespan (made to last)".***

4.17 Under the topic of Natural Environment, the sub-heading of Green Infrastructure, Paragraph 5 focuses on the natural capital that green infrastructure can add to communities including ***"...enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes..."***. This approach to achieving biodiverse communities is enshrined in Paragraph 6, which states:

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021) 'Planning Practice Guidance'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (October 2021) 'National Design Guide'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

***"Green infrastructure can help in:***

- *Achieving well-designed places;*
- *Promoting healthy and safe communities;*
- *Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change;*  
*and*
- *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment".*

4.18 Under the sub-heading of Landscape, Paragraph 37 supports the use of LVIA to ***"demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on the landscape"***. The PPG also makes reference to Natural England's guidance<sup>4</sup> on undertaking landscape character assessment ***"to complement Natural England's National Character Area Profiles"***.

4.19 Under the topic of Green Belt, Paragraph 1 addresses the factors that can be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt:

***"Assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, where it is relevant to do so, requires a judgment based on the circumstances of the case. By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:***

- *openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;*
- *the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and*
- *the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation".*

### **Local Policy**

4.20 St Albans City and District Council (SACDC) are preparing a new Local Plan 2020-2038 which will replace the District Local Plan Review 1994. It will affect what can be built and where up to 2038 in the District. The draft Local Plan 2018 has been withdrawn, and the Regulation 18 Consultation for the new Local Plan is now scheduled for 2023, with adoption due in 2025/6. Therefore current local policy consists of saved policies from the 'District Local Plan Review 1994', with those policies not saved having expired with effect from 28th September 2007.

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<sup>4</sup> Natural England (2014) 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

4.21 As part of the process of adopting a new Local Plan, there is an acknowledgement that that release of land from Green Belt will be required to deliver the housing needs of the District, and as a result a number of supplementary documents have been prepared by independent consultants to identify land for potential Green Belt release, initially at the strategic level and subsequently at the more site specific level. An updated Green Belt Review is to be undertaken as part of the preparation of the new Local Plan. A 'Strategic Local Plan Technical Report - Development Site and Strategy Options Evaluation' was published in October 2014 by SACDC. The 'Strategic Local Plan 2011 - 2031 Publication Draft' was published in in January 2016.

*Saved Policies from St Albans District Local Plan (Adopted 30th November 1994)<sup>5</sup>*

4.22 On 14th September 2007, the Secretary of State issued a formal Direction to SACDC under Paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This Direction saves specified policies of the District Local Plan Review 1994, which are still formally recognised as part of the development plan for St Albans. The following saved policies are relevant to the Site:

- Policy 1 - Metropolitan Green Belt:

***"... New development within the Green Belt shall integrate with the existing landscape. Siting, design and external appearance are particularly important and additional landscaping will normally be required. Significant harm to the ecological value of the countryside must be avoided ..."***

- Policy 2 - Settlement Strategy:

***"The District Council will seek to protect and enhance the essential character of existing settlements. Proposals contrary to the policies in the design and environment ... chapters of this Plan will not normally be permitted. The Council will have regard not only to the impact of individual developments but also to the cumulative effect. In particular the Council will seek to safeguard:***

***i) The character of specified settlements and Green Belt settlements***

***ii) Green spaces within settlements ...***

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<sup>5</sup> St Albans City and District Council (1994) 'District Local Plan Review'. Available at: <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/current-local-plan> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

***The nature and intensity of development acceptable in particular locations will reflect the following settlement hierarchy ...***

- ***Specified Settlements: The following large villages are classified as Specified Settlements and are excluded from the Green Belt:***
- ***SS.2: Chiswell Green***

***...Proposals in specified settlements must be compatible with the maintenance and enhancement of their character and Green Belt boundaries. In particular, infill housing development will be permitted only where consistent with this approach..."***

- Policy 69 - General Design and Layout:

***"All development shall have an adequately high standard of design taking into account the following factors:***

***i) Context - The scale and character of its surroundings in terms of height, size, scale, density or plot to floorspace ratio ..."***

- Policy 70 - Design and Layout of New Housing:

***"The design of new housing development should have regard to its setting and the character of its surroundings and meet the objectives set out...below:***

***i) Design and layout - massing and siting of buildings shall create safe, attractive spaces of human scale...***

***v) Landscape - proposals shall comply with Policy 74..."***

- Policy 74 - Landscaping and Tree Preservation:

***"The Council will take account of the following landscaping factors when considering planning applications:***

***i) Retention of existing landscaping [see policy for full accompanying text]***

***ii) Provision of new landscaping" [see policy for full accompanying text]***

- Policy 102 - Loss of Agricultural Land:

***"Development which would result in the loss of agricultural land will be assessed against the following criteria:***

***Land quality [see policy for full accompanying text]***

***Farm Economics and Management" [see policy for full accompanying text]***

- Policy 104 - Landscape Conservation:

***"The Council will seek to preserve and enhance the quality of landscape throughout the District..."***

- Policy 105 - Landscape Development and Improvement:

***"The District Council will promote and seek to secure landscape creation, improvement and enhancement throughout the Green Belt countryside. Priority will be given to the urban fringe and particularly in the Landscape Development Area (LDA) shown on the Proposals Map..." (Note: the Site lies within the LDA)***

*Draft St Albans Local Plan<sup>6</sup>*

- 4.23 The Site has been promoted by Barton Willmore, now Stantec and Carter Jonas (formerly JB Planning) for housing-led regeneration for several years and has most recently been the subject of a strategic site allocation (Broad Location S6x) in the Publication Draft St Albans Local Plan (Sept 2018), which has subsequently been withdrawn due to 'soundness' test issues.
- 4.24 Although withdrawn, the Publication Local Plan 2020-2036 published in 2018 (the "Withdrawn Draft Local Plan") provided a clear strategic 'direction of travel' for future development within the St Albans District, and in particular:
- Highlighted the need for Green Belt release to meet the district's housing supply needs; and
  - Identified appropriate locations for development in the Green Belt at Chiswell Green.
- 4.25 This is a material consideration in the determination of this outline planning application.
- 4.26 A new emerging Local Plan is being prepared by SACDC but is at a very early stage. It is considered that the abovementioned direction of travel will continue and there is a very high probability that the broad location sites will be retained in the new emerging Local Plan when it progresses through the plan-making process towards adoption in 2025/26.

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<sup>6</sup> St Albans City and District Council (2016) 'Strategic Local Plan 2011 - 2031 Publication Draft January 2016'. Available at: [https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/planning-building-control/planning-policy/examination-library/CD%2014%20St%20Albans%20Strategic%20Local%20Plan%202016\\_tcm15-67032.pdf](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/planning-building-control/planning-policy/examination-library/CD%2014%20St%20Albans%20Strategic%20Local%20Plan%202016_tcm15-67032.pdf) (Accessed 13 February 2022).

- 4.27 The Applicants will continue to promote the Site as an allocation and offer SACDC its full support in progressing this. However, the delays in a local plan coming forward means the Applicants wish to bring a planning application forward now to enable housing delivery. Therefore, the Applicants have submitted this planning application, rather than continuing to wait patiently for the development plan process to be completed.

*Strategic Local Plan Technical Report - Development Site and Strategy Options Evaluation<sup>7</sup>*

- 4.28 SACDC published their Strategic Local Plan Technical Report - Development Site and Strategy Options Evaluation (SLPTR) in October 2014. This document reviews the development site and strategy options set out in the Green Belt Review and evaluates them against a series of sustainability criteria, based on the objectives identified in the Draft SLP. The SLPTR notes that the Green Belt Review **"clearly gives priority to Green Belt policy, and specifically an analysis of contribution of parcels of Green Belt land to Green Belt purposes"**.

- 4.29 Section 2.1 Site Evaluation Results of the SLPTR states:

***"2.1.2 The Green Belt Review ranking ... prioritised physical Green Belt and landscape impact factors and also gave some initial consideration to ease in delivery of development (likely planning and infrastructure lead times). The site preferences arising from this ranking reflect an overriding consideration of 'least impact' on Green Belt purposes and ease of assimilation of development into the landscape. Inevitably smaller sites, such as that at Chiswell Green (S8), attain a higher ranking than the larger Green Belt releases, such as at East Hemel Hempstead (S1/2).***

***2.1.3 Decisions on the components of the Plan development strategy could legitimately be taken on this basis alone. ..."***

- 4.30 However, the SLPTR considers a wide range of sustainability factors, including transport accessibility and socio-economic benefits due to scale and location. The resulting different weighing of factors provides a different ranking (compared to the Green Belt Review), which prioritises development of larger sites at Hemel Hempstead which lie beyond the St Albans District area.

- 4.31 The Site lies within the eastern extents of Sub-Area S8, as shown on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**. The SLPTR notes within its summary evaluation of this sub-area – Enclosed land at Chiswell Green Lane at Chiswell Green:

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<sup>7</sup> St Albans City and District Council (2014) 'Strategic Local Plan Technical Report - Development Site and Strategy Options Evaluation'. Available at: [https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/SP\\_Development\\_Site\\_Strategy\\_OptionsEvaluationDraftTechnicalReport\\_tcm15-45213.pdf](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/SP_Development_Site_Strategy_OptionsEvaluationDraftTechnicalReport_tcm15-45213.pdf) (Accessed 13 February 2022).

***"... The area fits well with the configuration of the existing settlement edge, thus minimising Green Belt and landscape impacts. The urban design and access relationship with adjoining leisure uses would need to be carefully planned".***

- 4.32 The SLPTR sets out a more detailed evaluation of this Sub-Area S8. With regard to a Sustainable Location, the report states:

***"...The sub-area has an urban fringe character is fairly well related to the existing settlement.***

***Residential development exists to the east, Butterfly World and access road to the west, residential/agricultural to the north and residential/employment/hotel to the south"***

- 4.33 With regard to Settlement Hierarchy, the report concludes for Sub-Area 8:

***"... The sub-area is well related to the settlement of Chiswell Green which is excluded from the Green Belt ..."***

- 4.34 With regard to Urban Design, the SLPTR states that Sub-Area S8:

***"The land parcel is well related to existing development at Chiswell Green and design integration of new development can readily be achieved. Access, including foot and cycle connections could be made from Chiswell Green Lane and at a number of points from residential areas east of the land parcel".***

- 4.35 In terms of relationship with existing adjacent land uses and Sub-Area 8:

***"There are no conflicts as adjoining uses are residential, with the exception of Butterfly World, which already has a clear separation with its access road and parking (with landscaping)  
..."***

***The sub-area is well related to the existing residential development to the east and opportunities exist to create designed connections with benefits for social cohesion. The residential development of the sub-area would have a positive relationship with the existing land uses".***

- 4.36 With the regard to Environmental Constraints:

***"...There are no significant environmental constraints that would prevent the residential development of the site".***

- 4.37 With regard to Landscape quality / surrounding area characteristics:

***"St Stephen's Plateau landscape character area. Condition assessed as moderate and robustness as weak.***



***The residential development of the sub-area would reduce the openness of landscape to the west of the settlement. However, the landform and vegetation provide a degree of enclosure. The sub-area shares a connection with the countryside to the west beyond the Butterfly World site, however, the existing access road creates strong separation and additional planting could increase the screening of the sub-area.***

***The land parcel raises to the north and is visually prominent in parts when approaching Chiswell Green from the south***

***The greatest visual impacts will be at a local level, specifically those views of residents in the western edge of Chiswell Green and the dispersed residential properties".***

*St Albans District Green Infrastructure Plan - Final Report (March 2011)<sup>8</sup>*

- 4.38 This report, prepared by Land Use Consultants, is a ***"high level Green Infrastructure Plan which identifies further work which will be needed in future to deliver green infrastructure"***. The report formed part of the evidence base for the Withdrawn Local Plan, and aims to, inter alia:

***"Sets out an assessment of the ability of green infrastructure to provide multiple environmental and social and in some cases economic functions;***

***Considers opportunities for enhancement and creation of green infrastructure".***

- 4.39 In section 4, 'Linking the Green Infrastructure Proposals to Local Spatial Planning and Development Management', the key green infrastructure points for emerging planning policy documents to consider are:

***"Increased green links to the countryside from high density settlements in particular St Albans and Harpenden ...;***

***Using green infrastructure to contribute positively to ... landscape character enhancement, restoration and linkage....;***

***Context, sense of place and local distinctiveness; Recognition, conservation and enhancement of the key assets of river valleys, woodlands, heathland and commons".***

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<sup>8</sup> St Albans City and District Council (2011) 'St Albans District Green Infrastructure Plan'. Available at: [https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/planning-building-control/planning-policy/examination-library/SP\\_GreenInfrastructurePlan\\_March2011\\_tcm15-46531.pdf](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/planning-building-control/planning-policy/examination-library/SP_GreenInfrastructurePlan_March2011_tcm15-46531.pdf) (Accessed 13 February 2022).

- 4.40 In section 3, under the 'GI projects and cross authority connections' sub section, the following is stated under 'Project 2: St Albans Radial Greenway':

***"Enhancing greenspace links/spokes - Ver Valley to Chiswell Green and Butterfly World".***

- 4.41 The text goes onto say in regard to Project 2 and 'Policies':

***"Additional links to assets such as Verulamium Park, Chiswell Green and Butterfly World would also add to the objectives of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) by linking areas across the County with strategic assets (e.g. GI as a destination)".***

*St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan (2021)<sup>9</sup>*

- 4.42 The Site is located within the northern extents of St Stephen Parish which is bounded by St Albans to the north and Watford to the south. Consultation on the Submission (Regulation 16) Version of the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan, published in February 2021, closed in July 2021, with the final version expected to go to a Parish wide referendum in May 2022. The Regulation 16 version contained draft development objectives and policies for the Neighbourhood Plan boundary area, with relevant extracts set out below.

- 4.43 Policy S1 Location of Development states:

***"1. Development which meets either the exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt as set out in paragraphs 145 and 146 of the National Planning Policy Framework, or demonstrates very special circumstances, as set out in paragraph 147 of the National Planning Policy Framework, will be supported. Where very special circumstances can be demonstrated, development should make additional provision for:***

***i. affordable housing; or***

***ii. smaller units for younger people; or***

***iii. properties tailored to the ageing population; or***

***iv. provision of additional community benefit".***

- 4.44 Policy S3 Character of Development states:

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<sup>9</sup> St Stephen Parish Council (2021) 'St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2019 to 2036 – Submission (Regulation 16) Version'. Available at: <https://ststephen-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/1.-St-Stephen-Neighbourhood-Plan-Submission-Regulation-16-Version.pdf> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

**"1. Development should conserve and where practicable enhance the character area in which it is located (as described in the Conservation Area Character Statements and in Section 2 of this Neighbourhood Plan). The design of new development should demonstrate how it has taken account of the local context and has reflected the character and vernacular of the area...**

**2. Where development sites abut open countryside, development on the rural boundary edge should mitigate any detrimental visual impacts on the countryside. As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, this should be achieved through the siting of lower density development at the rural boundary of the site in order to provide a gradual transition from the built form to open countryside, or by other means such as through a layout that clearly minimises the visual impact of any larger buildings".**

4.45 Policy S5 Design of Development states:

**"1. Development proposals should incorporate a high quality of design, which responds and integrates well with its surroundings, meets the needs of the population of the neighbourhood area and minimises the impact on the natural environment ... development proposals should demonstrate how they have sought to address the following matters as they are appropriate to their scale, nature and location:**

**i. High quality design that is in keeping with the character and scale of existing buildings in the area;**

**iii. Provides high quality boundary treatment and green landscaping;**

**iv. Provides pedestrian and cycle connections (and where possible bridleways) to community facilities, local services and transport modes within the Parish, as well as to the surrounding countryside;**

**vi. Does not result in an unacceptable loss of amenity for neighbouring properties through the loss of privacy, loss of light or visual intrusion;**

**viii. Contributes to the provision, extension and maintenance of accessible green space, including green space for sport and children's play areas, in accordance with St Albans open space provision and Hertfordshire County Council's Planning Obligations Guidance".**

4.46 Policy S6 Minimising The Environmental Impact of Development states:

**"1. Development proposals should maintain and where practicable enhance the natural environment, landscape**

***features and the rural character and setting of the Neighbourhood area, for instance woodland and chalk streams. Development proposals that would achieve a net gain in biodiversity will be particularly supported.***

***2. As they are appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should demonstrate that they address the following matters:***

***i. Contribute to the objectives of both the Watling Chase Community Forest Plan and the Charter for Trees, Woods and People, by supporting the planting of additional trees and woodlands;***

***ii. Employ sustainable husbandry of land and wild flower planting/meadows;***

***iii. Maintain existing green verges and hedgerows...;***

***iv. Provide wildlife corridors and buffer zones (in line with Environment Agency recommendations) to protect species and habitats;***

***vii. Mitigate the effects of carbon dioxide emissions, climate change and environmental noise by the planting of small to medium scale plantations of native mixed species of UK sourced and grown trees and shrubs to screen developments... [and] all schools. Replacement of roadside hedgerows where appropriate”.***

4.47 Policy S10 Green Infrastructure and Development states:

***“Proposals should be designed from inception to create, conserve, enhance and manage green spaces and connective chains of green infrastructure ... with the aim of delivering a net environmental benefit for local people and wildlife. Proposals that seek to improve the connectivity between wildlife areas and green spaces will be encouraged in order to enhance the green infrastructure of the Neighbourhood area”.***

4.48 Policy S14 Provision For Walking and Cycling and Horse-Riding states

***“1. To help ensure that residents can walk safely to the village centres, public transport facilities, schools and other important facilities, all new developments must incorporate safe, accessible (including for those with disabilities) pedestrian access with links from the development to existing foot- and, where feasible, cycleways.***

***2. Development proposals that enable delivery of the recommendations in Hertfordshire County Council’s Rights of Way Improvement Plan (part 10) for St Stephen Parish, focusing***

***on the rights of way network and its improvements, will be supported, subject to being in conformity with other policies in this Neighbourhood Plan”.***

#### Summary of Planning Policy Context

- 4.49 A number of policies reiterate that development proposals should retain existing landscape features where possible, provide new landscape features such as grassland and verges, hedgerows, woodland and tree/shrub planting in order to strengthen the landscape structure and link existing green infrastructure. In addition, design of new development should respect and where possible enhance landscape character, helping to integrate built form with the existing surroundings and minimise adverse landscape and visual effects.
- 4.50 In the Planning Committee Report (paragraph 8.1.3) for the Land to Rear of 112-156b Harpenden Road ('Sewell Park'), SACDC state that it may still be appropriate to attach some weight to the evidence base prepared in support of the withdrawn Local Plan, and to other work carried out pursuant to that plan, depending on the precise circumstances. The evidence considered relevant in this case is summarised in the Planning Statement.

## 5.0 PUBLISHED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER CONTEXT

5.1 The landscape character assessment approach is a descriptive approach that seeks to identify and define the distinct character of landscapes that make up the country. This approach recognises the intrinsic value of all landscapes, not just 'special' landscapes, as contributing factors in people's quality of life, in accordance with the European Landscape Convention. It also ensures that account is taken of the different roles and character of different areas, in accordance with the NPPF Core Principles. The description of each landscape is used as a basis for evaluation, in order to make judgements to guide, for example, development or landscape management. The various levels of Landscape Character Assessment are shown on **Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan.**

### National Landscape Character

5.2 As part of Natural England's responsibilities in delivering the Natural Environment White Paper, Biodiversity 2020 and the European Landscape Convention, Natural England has developed a series of National Character Area (NCA) profiles. These NCA profiles include an outline of the key characteristics that define broad landscape character areas. The Site is located within NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin<sup>10</sup>, which sets out four Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) as well as identifying the key characteristics of the area. SEO 1 aims to manage rivers and river valleys and conserve the riparian landscapes and habitats; SEO 2 aims to manage the agricultural landscape for food provision, water availability and biodiversity; SEO 3 aims to protect and manage the historic environment to contribute to local character, habitat restoration, sustainable development and green infrastructure; and SEO 4 aims to manage and expand broadleaf woodland and woodpasture, and increase tree cover within urban areas.

5.3 The profile describes the key characteristics of the NCA, including the following:

- *"The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys...;*
- *Characteristic of the area is a layer of thick clay producing heavy, acidic soils, resulting in retention of considerable areas of ancient woodland;*
- *A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea...;*
- *The pattern of woodlands is varied across the area and includes considerable ancient semi-natural woodland. Hertfordshire is heavily wooded in some areas as are parts of Essex... Significant areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are also present;*

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<sup>10</sup> Natural England (2013) 'NCA Profile: 111 Northern Thames Basin NE466'. Available at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4721112340496384> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

- *The field pattern is very varied across the basin reflecting historical activity;*
- *Mixed farming, with arable land predominating in the Hertfordshire plateaux;*
- *The diverse range of semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, lowland heath and floodplain grazing marsh and provide important habitats for a wide range of species including great crested newt, water vole, dormouse and otter;*
- *Rich archaeology including sites related to Roman occupation, with the Roman capital at Colchester and City of St Albans (Verulamium) and links to London. Landscape parklands surrounding 16th- and 17th-century rural estates and country houses built for London merchants are a particular feature in Hertfordshire; and*
- *The medieval pattern of small villages and dispersed farming settlement remains central to the character of parts of Hertfordshire and Essex. Market towns have expanded over time as have the London suburbs and commuter settlements... "*

5.4 The profile divides the NCA into four distinct areas, shaped by their geology, topography and land use. Of these, the Site falls within the 'Hertfordshire plateaux and river valleys, which the profile describes as follows:

***"The Hertfordshire plateaux and river valleys to the north-west of the NCA are high, broad arable plateaux divided by wooded and pastured valleys which have a mainly rural feel with, on the whole, small developments ... The area is underlain by extensive Chalk beds ...***

***While the plateaux are predominantly in arable use, the valleys by contrast contain areas of pasture and have a more intimate character, although some have been heavily modified by reservoirs ... The valleys contain all the main settlements within the area. Field boundaries are dominated by informal enclosure patterns of the 18th century, with thorn hedges relating to rationalisation and amalgamation of this pattern in the 18th and 19th centuries ... There is good survival of medieval timber-framed houses and barns, moated sites and small medieval castles ... The area merges with the outer London suburbs of Enfield, Barnet, Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow. It also contains many large towns including Watford, Hatfield, Hertford and St Albans ... Road and rail routes plus utility infrastructure are now dominant features of some parts of the area".***

## County Landscape Character

Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (Undertaken between 2000 & 2005)<sup>11</sup>

5.5 The Site sits within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 10: 'St Stephen's Plateau' and the summary of 'Landscape Character' states the following:

***"A working farmed landscape of predominantly open arable fields which slopes from north-west to south-east. To the north several large mixed woodlands create a local sense of enclosure. Elsewhere hedgerows are sparse with few individual field trees. The settlement pattern is dispersed, connected by a series of narrow winding lanes. The historic land-use pattern is overlaid by a strong network of motorways and junctions. Wooded horizons are common to the north, west and south, whilst to the east the built edge of St Albans and Chiswell Green is prominent".***

5.6 The key characteristics of the LCA are as follows:

- ***"undulating plateau to north, gently sloping to south east***
- ***Medium/large open arable fields throughout***
- ***Visually interlocking mixed woodlands to north***
- ***Significant extent of motorways and interchanges with associated earthworks, lights and traffic***
- ***Narrow winding lanes with sparse clipped hedgerows***
- ***Built edge of urban settlements to east***
- ***Dispersed settlement with scattered farmsteads"***

5.7 Under the 'Visual and Sensory Perception' section, the following passages are of relevance to the Site:

***"The area is widely visible from outside, including open views from the urban areas to the east. The scale of the landscape is medium to large. To the north the woodland provides a stronger sense of enclosure. The noise of the motorways is relentless and discordant. The landscape type is relatively common in the county. The most distinctive feature is the wooded farmland to the north on the plateau".***

5.8 Under the 'Visual Impact' section, the following passages are of relevance to the Site:

***"The raw built edges of Chiswell Green and How Wood represent significant suburban impact".***

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<sup>11</sup> Hertfordshire County Council (2003) 'St Stephen's Plateau'. Available at: <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/environment-and-planning/landscape/landscape-character-assessments/area010.pdf> (Accessed 13 February 2022).



5.9 The assessment summarises the 'Condition' of the character area as Moderate and the 'Robustness' of the character areas as Weak, leading to a recommendation that the 'Strategy and Guidelines for Managing Change' should 'Improve and Reinforce'. The key elements relating to this recommendation are as follows:

- *"promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible*
- *promote the creation of a network of new woodlands in the open arable landscape, particularly with a view to visually integrating the intrusive motorways and existing urban fringe development. Develop a mix of medium to large woods near the motorways and urban areas (developing the existing pattern to the north) and also smaller copses linking with hedgerow restoration on the open arable areas, emphasising topographical variation*
- *promote appropriate woodland management for existing plantation woodlands*
- *improve public access arrangements to woodlands with attention to car park design and safety*
- *broaden the range of recreational opportunities"*

#### District and Local Level Landscape Character Assessment

5.10 There are no specific district or local level landscape character assessments that cover the Site. However, the key landscape characteristics, as identified in the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment, that influence the context of the Site are:

- *"The undulating plateau to north, gently sloping to south east [down towards] the River Ver;*
- *The landscape type is relatively common in the county.*
- *The built edge of urban settlements to east;*
- *The immediately adjoining prominent settlement edge of Chiswell Green;*
- *Visually interlocking mixed woodlands to north; and*
- *Significant extent of motorways and interchanges with associated earthworks, lights and traffic, and with the noise of the motorways being relentless and discordant".*

#### **Published Landscape Character Receptors**

5.11 On the basis of a comprehensive review of published landscape character assessments and analysis of the landscape character of the Site and its context, the following published LCAs have been identified against which effects resulting from the Proposed Development have been assessed.

5.12 An assessment of the value, susceptibility and resultant sensitivity of the landscape receptors to development of the type proposed has also been set out below:

NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin

- 5.13 The large scale NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin is considered to have a **Medium** value as it contains no World Heritage Sites, National Parks or AONB, other than a small portion of the southern extent of the Dedham Vale AONB in the north of Essex. It contains two National Nature Reserves, one of which is in Hertfordshire, and six Ramsar sites (all in Essex). All of the Ramsar sites are also Special Areas of Conservation, and some are also Special Protection Areas. The NCA has 72 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 43 of which are within Hertfordshire. The large scale landscape is considered to have a **Low** susceptibility to the type of change proposed due to the presence of existing landscape detractors such as the communication corridors that carry roads (such as the M25, M11, M1 A1/A1(M) A10, A12 and A127) and railways (notably the West Coast Main Line, East Coast Main Line, Midlands Main Line and Great Eastern Main Line). It is also considered to have this level of susceptibility as a result of the fact that settlement is already a highly characteristic component of the NCA, such that the type of change proposed would be in keeping with the existing landscape and settlement pattern. As a result of this, on balance the NCA is considered to have a **Low** sensitivity to change.

St Stephen's Plateau LCA

- 5.14 The LCA does not encompass any areas designated for landscape value or scenic beauty. It falls partly within an area of Community Forest, and contains some Ancient Replanted Woodland and pockets of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, as well as features listed on the Priority Habitat Inventory, such as Deciduous Woodland and Traditional Orchards. It also exhibits some cultural associations due to the presence of heritage features, particularly listed buildings. Whilst its sense of tranquillity or remoteness is limited due to the influence of extensive areas of settlement to the immediate north-east, east, south and north-west, the presence of a well-connected network of short distance local PRow indicates a level of recreational value. On this basis the LCA is considered to have **Medium** value.
- 5.15 The LCA has a strong relationship with adjacent existing settlement, including extensive residential areas on the boundaries of Chiswell Green, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead and Watford, as well as the transport corridors of the M1, M25, A414 and A405. The LCA also directly contains agricultural and commercial recreational use in the form of the many farmsteads and the Centurion Club golf course. The landscape is fairly open and variously undulating and sloping, with the topography and woodland blocks and belts providing moderate containment. There is a high potential for the incorporation of landscape mitigation as set out in the LCA management guidelines, and since the Proposed Development would be located within the existing landscape pattern, the LCA is judged to have **Low** susceptibility

to development of the type proposed. The combination of the above value and susceptibility is judged to result in a **Medium** overall sensitivity to development of the type proposed.

**Table 5.1: Summary of Sensitivity of Published Landscape Receptors**

<b>Receptor</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Susceptibility</b>	<b>Sensitivity</b>
NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin	Medium	Low	Low
St Stephen's Plateau LCA	Medium	Low	Medium

## 6.0 SITE APPRAISAL AND VISUAL CONTEXT

### Site Appraisal

- 6.1 As shown on **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**, the Site comprises agricultural grazing land containing some hedgerows and small woodlands, set between the prominent western settlement edge of Chiswell Green and development associated with the recently closed Butterfly World and Gardens of the Rose to the immediate west. The location of **Site Appraisal Photographs A to K** are shown on **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**, and **Site Appraisal Photographs A to K** illustrate the Site.
- 6.2 The Site covers approximately 14.66 Ha, and is very gently sloping, ranging from levels of approximately 104m AOD at the north western corner, gently sloping down to around 85m AOD in the southern part of the Site.
- 6.3 The Site comprises distinct areas of grazed grassland, identified as Fields 1, 2, 3 and 4 on **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**, which are divided by a hedgerow with trees. The Site also encompasses the following land uses: a livery in the north western corner of Field 2; Chiswell Green farmhouse, the associated yard and garden located in the north eastern corner of Field 1; and a builder's yard covering part of the south western area of the Site, although this is currently not in active use.
- 6.4 The grassland area and vegetation pattern within and around Field 1, and also the presence of residential properties along the northern and eastern boundaries of the Site are illustrated by **Site Appraisal Photographs A and B**. These views also demonstrate the enclosed nature of the Site with long distance views somewhat restricted by intervening surrounding development and vegetation.
- 6.5 The enclosed character of Field 1 is further illustrated by **Site Appraisal Photographs C and D**, with residential properties along the northern and eastern boundaries again clearly evident. As shown by **Site Appraisal Photographs E, F and G**, the larger Field 2 is similar in character to Field 1 in that views across it are effectively curtailed by boundary vegetation and existing development is noticeable on the edge of Chiswell Green. The subtle influence of landform is shown by **Site Appraisal Photograph H** which shows the view looking northwards up the gently sloping land, with visibility again restricted at the field boundary.
- 6.6 The remainder of the Site extends over Fields 3 and 4 to the south, separated by a small woodland block, identified as W1 on **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**, along the southern edge of Field 1 and also a hedgerow with trees along the southern edge of Field 2. These areas are similar to Fields 1 and 2 in that views across the grassland are restricted by boundary

vegetation and a number of properties along Forge End and Long Fallow are clearly visible, demarcating the eastern edge of the Site. **Site Appraisal Photograph I** illustrates the character of Field 3. **Site Appraisal Photograph J** illustrates both Field 3 and Field 4, together with properties on the edge of Chiswell Green, adjoining the eastern boundary, and which screen views beyond the Site. **Site Appraisal Photograph K** illustrates Field 4, which is slightly less enclosed than Field 3 due to more limited boundary vegetation, although again properties on the edge of Chiswell Green, adjoining the eastern boundary, combined with boundary vegetation screen views beyond the Site.

- 6.7 Where there is some partial intervisibility between the Site and the landscape to the south-west, these views are affected by the detracting influences of energy infrastructure (the pylons that cross the landscape to the west of Noke Lane) and residential and agricultural built form, as shown in **Site Appraisal Photographs F and K**.
- 6.8 There are no PRoW running through or along the boundaries of the Site, and the nearest footpath (PRoW St Stephen 082) runs north from the other side of Chiswell Green Lane and has views only of the northern Site boundary. Also nearby, PRoW St Stephen 068 lies approximately 55m to the east running from Chiswell Green Lane southwards between houses and gardens to Woodlea and Hammers Gate, although views of the Site are curtailed by the intervening residential properties.
- 6.9 The Site is partially representative of Landscape Character Area 10: St Stephen's Plateau, defined in the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment, in that it comprises medium scale fields, with the settlement edge of Chiswell Green prominent on the southern, eastern and north eastern edges of the Site. As noted in the 'Visual Impact' section of the character area description, ***"the raw built edges of Chiswell Green and How Wood represent significant suburban impact"***, and this strongly influences the character of the Site. In contrast to the character area description, the visually enclosed fields are not used for arable farming but, at the time of the Site visit, were used as pony paddocks. The surrounding landform and vegetation combine to limit the visibility of the Site from the wider area, and this is in contrast to the more open landscape to the west of the Site.

#### Landscape Receptors

- 6.10 On the basis of the Site Appraisal the following landscape features have been identified as receptors for the assessment of effects arising from the Proposed Development, including an assessment of their value, susceptibility, and resultant sensitivity to development of the type proposed.

*Open Fields*

- 6.11 The open fields are not designated and are common features in the wider landscape, and they exhibit only limited scenic qualities as their openness can be perceived from very limited locations within the local landscape, including from Chiswell Green Lane and residential properties immediately adjacent to the Site. This landscape feature makes a limited positive contribution to the character of the landscape. On this basis, the value of the feature is considered to be **Low**.
- 6.12 This landscape feature does not have the capacity to accommodate development of the type proposed without fundamental or permanent alterations to the feature as a whole. It therefore has a **High** susceptibility to development of the type proposed. On the basis of the above, the receptor is judged to have a **Medium** overall sensitivity.

*Native Hedgerow*

- 6.13 The hedgerows on the Site are neither designated nor rare and are unlikely to have any wider recognition of value. To an extent they are also poorly maintained, with frequent gaps particularly along the western Site boundary. On this basis they are considered to have **Low** value.
- 6.14 In general hedgerows are considered to have high potential for retention and enhancement as part of development of the type proposed, and are readily replaced, resulting in **Low** susceptibility. In combination, these factors give rise to a **Low** sensitivity.

*Canopy Trees*

- 6.15 The majority of trees within the Site appear to be overgrown hedgerow or boundary trees. The majority of larger canopy trees within the context of the Site are located outside the Site boundary. They are not rare but in some cases they do exhibit some scenic qualities by virtue of their maturity. They are therefore considered to have **Medium** value.
- 6.16 There is a high potential for the retention of the existing trees as part of development of the type proposed. However, should any trees be removed, their replacement would take considerable time. On this basis, the susceptibility of the receptor is judged to be **Medium**. Therefore, the overall sensitivity of the receptor is **Medium**.

*The Character of the Site and its Immediate Vicinity*

- 6.17 The Site and its immediate context are not designated for scenic beauty and comprise relatively common components and characteristics. The character of the Site is affected by the detracting influence of the western settlement edge of Chiswell Green which adjoins the

Site to the north, east and south. There are some positive perceptual aspects, particularly with respect to partial views towards the landscape to the south-west, although these positive aspects are often overridden by negative influences resulting from detracting features, such as the pylons that cross the landscape to the west of Noke Lane. However, the Site is not publicly accessible, and as such it does not contribute to recreation. The perception of remoteness and tranquillity experienced within the Site is limited due to its rural-urban fringe location, as well as the limited availability of long distance views. On this basis, the receptor is deemed to have **Low** value.

6.18 The Site and its immediate context sit within an urban fringe landscape with a strong relationship with the settlement edge. The Site interior is partially vegetated, as is the western boundary although it is denuded in places. However, there is strong potential for the improvement of the landscape through mitigation as part of the Proposed Development. It has a simple, sparse and somewhat fragmented landscape character influenced by its urban fringe location, with existing energy infrastructure (particularly the many nearby pylons) also exerting urbanising influences. On balance, the receptor is considered likely to be able to accommodate the type of development proposed with moderate consequences upon its overall integrity, resulting in **Medium** susceptibility. On this basis, the overall sensitivity is judged to be **Medium**.

**Table 6.1: Summary of Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors**

Receptor	Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity
Open Fields	Low	High	Medium
Native Hedgerow	Low	Low	Low
Canopy Trees	Medium	Medium	Medium
The Character of the Site and its Immediate Vicinity	Low	Medium	Medium

**Visual Context**

6.19 The visual context of the Site is illustrated by **Site Context Photographs 1-18**, the locations of which are identified on **Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan**. As described above, the Site sits between the edge of Chiswell Green and development of Butterfly World and the Gardens of the Rose, with well-defined boundaries provided by the gardens of residential properties, to the east and south; and Chiswell Green Lane and Miriam Lane, to the north and west. The Site is visually enclosed within its immediate setting by the combination of existing vegetation and development on or immediately adjoining these boundaries, with the exception of a short section of the northern boundary, where the Site is open to Chiswell Green Lane, as shown

- in **Site Context Photograph 4**, which also shows the location of Chiswell Green Farm immediately to the north-east of the Site.
- 6.20 Longer distance views from the north, towards the Site, are screened by extensive intervening woodland between the Site and the A414; with intervening vegetation and rising landform restricting views from the majority of locations to the more immediate north and west of the Site, as indicated by **Site Context Photographs 5-8** and **13-18**. In particular, Photographs 5 and 16 illustrate that, as the Site is located at a lower elevation to the south, the combination of relatively subtle changes in intervening landform and hedgerow and tree belt cover effectively screens views to the Site.
- 6.21 The majority of views from the east and south-east are curtailed by the residential development along the eastern and south-eastern boundaries of the Site, with views being limited to properties directly overlooking the Site. **Site Context Photograph 3** illustrates the views westwards towards the Site from Woodlea largely curtailed by residential properties, with open and partial views only available from the back of properties or rear gardens immediately adjacent to the Site. **Site Context Photograph 1** demonstrates the glimpsed to partial views of very limited portions of the Site that are available from very occasional openings along Long Fallow and Forge End. As shown by **Site Context Photograph 2**, views of the Site from locations in Chiswell Green other than on the very boundary of the settlement are entirely curtailed by the intervening built form.
- 6.22 Views from the west indicate how the landscape in this area is more open, with more limited vegetation cover and existing development. As a result there are partial and glimpsed views across the southern part of the Site, where topography and breaks in intervening vegetation allow views. However, these views are seen in the context of views of Chiswell Green, interspersed with vegetation, adjoining the Site to the east and south-east, seen across the more open agricultural land to the west of the Site, as illustrated by **Site Context Photograph 10**.
- 6.23 **Site Context Photograph 14** also indicates the rural, relatively open nature of land slightly further to the west of the Site illustrating land rising up towards Butterfly World, which combined with intervening vegetation result in the Site (and adjoining properties), located at a lower elevation, being screened from view.
- 6.24 Views from the lower land to the south-west of the Site are illustrated by **Site Context Photograph 11**, from Noke Lane adjacent to the A405 (North Orbital Road). Intervening small holdings, scattered development and existing vegetation combined with the flatter topography curtail views of not only the Site, but also Chiswell Green.



6.25 Further to the south-west, as the land begins to rise, views across the lower lying land toward Butterfly World and the Site are obtained. However, as a result of the combination of distance and intervening vegetation, and more prominent development in the middle ground, the Site, and the western edge of Chiswell Green are barely perceptible and very difficult to discern, as illustrated by **Site Context Photograph 12**.

6.26 Therefore, the northern part of the Site is visible in open close range views from Chiswell Green Lane immediately adjacent to the Site as well as from residential properties that lie in close proximity to the Site. However, due to a combination of vegetation, containing settlement pattern and gently undulating topography, the visual envelope of the Site is restricted to the immediate landscape in which it is located, with glimpses available from very limited locations to the south and west.

#### Visual Receptors

6.27 On the basis of the visual appraisal, a series of visual receptors have been identified, against which the effects of the Proposed Development on visual amenity have been assessed. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, as any visual receptors considered unlikely to experience visual effects have been scoped out based on Site assessment and professional expertise. The visual receptors, together with their susceptibility, value of views, and resultant overall sensitivity of receptor to development of the type proposed are set out below:

#### *Residents of properties on the settlement edge of Chiswell Green*

6.28 Views are from a location that is not designated and has minimal cultural associations, therefore their value is considered to be **Low**. Receptors are people at their place of residence who have a **High** susceptibility to development of the type proposed. On balance, their sensitivity is judged to be **Medium**.

#### *Users of Chiswell Green Lane*

6.29 Views are from a location that is not designated and has minimal cultural associations, with a resultant **Low** value. Receptors in this location are people travelling along a country lane who have a **Medium** susceptibility to development. On this basis, their overall sensitivity is considered to be **Medium**.

#### *Users of Long Fallow, Forge End and Woodlea*

6.30 Views are from a location that is not designated and has minimal cultural associations, with a resultant **Low** value. Receptors in this location are people travelling along suburban cul-de-sac who have a **Low** susceptibility to development. On this basis, their overall sensitivity is considered to be **Low**.

*Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 082*

- 6.31 Views are from a location that is not designated and has minimal cultural associations, therefore the value is considered to be **Low**. Receptors are people using a PRow who have a **High** susceptibility to development of the type proposed, resulting in a **Medium** overall sensitivity.

*Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 028*

- 6.32 Views are from a location that is not designated and has minimal cultural associations, therefore the value is considered to be **Low**. Receptors are people using a PRow who have a **High** susceptibility to development of the type proposed, resulting in a **Medium** overall sensitivity.

*Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 022*

- 6.33 Views are from a location that is not designated and has minimal cultural associations, therefore the value is considered to be **Low**. Receptors are people using a PRow who have a **High** susceptibility to development of the type proposed, resulting in a **Medium** overall sensitivity.

*Workers at the commercial estate on Miriam Lane*

- 6.34 Views are from locations that are not designated and have minimal cultural associations, therefore their value is considered to be **Low**. Receptors are people in their place of work whose susceptibility is judged to be **Low**, resulting in an overall sensitivity that is **Low**.

**Table 6.2: Summary of Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors**

<b>Receptor</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Susceptibility</b>	<b>Sensitivity</b>
Residents of properties on the settlement edge of Chiswell Green	Low	High	Medium
Users of Chiswell Green Lane	Low	Medium	Medium
Users of Long Fallow, Forge End and Woodlea	Low	Low	Low
Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 082	Low	High	Medium
Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 028	Low	High	Medium
Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 022	Low	High	Medium
Workers at the commercial estate on Miriam Lane	Low	Low	Low

## 7.0 DESIGN RATIONALE AND LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

7.1 The baseline landscape and visual appraisal of the Site has identified a number of opportunities and constraints, as shown in **Figure 6: Landscape Opportunities and Constraints Plan**. These have allowed the following Landscape and Visual design considerations to be incorporated into the Proposed Development and which would underpin the rationale of the scheme layout, demonstrated on **Figure 7: Landscape Framework Plan**.

### Site Opportunities and Constraints

7.2 Opportunities for development within the Site include:

- Other than the landscape policy designation of Green Belt, the Site is not covered by any national landscape designations or policies such as AONB or National Parks;
- Development of the Site offers the opportunity for improving access to the remaining Green Belt through the creation of meaningful publicly accessible green space along a green spine through the Site to connect Forge End with Chiswell Green Lane and the PRow to the north of the Site;
- A new Green Belt boundary on the southern and western edge of the Site would round off the settlement morphology of Chiswell Green in a rational way, creating a defensible and permanent boundary through the reinforcement of existing structural vegetation;
- The Site relates well to the existing built form of the settlement edge to the east; and
- The established vegetation in the vicinity of the Site provides both visual and physical containment, as well as making a strong contribution to existing green infrastructure. The Proposed Development will reinforce this green infrastructure and strengthen its connections through the Site.

7.3 Constraints to development within the Site include:

- Existing field boundaries of hedgerows and hedgerow trees are in places intact and provide much of the Site with an element of enclosure, as do the areas of woodland to the east and south of the Site;
- There is intervisibility between the Site and the settlement edge of Chiswell Green; and
- There is limited intervisibility between the Site and its landscape context.

7.4 Following the appraisal of the existing landscape and visual context, and in considering the Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints, it is considered that the Site provides

the opportunity to sensitively accommodate residential development, reflecting the distribution of existing settlement in the west of Chiswell Green to create a coherent urban edge set in and contained by a robust vegetated western boundary, and delivering a central green spine connecting publicly accessible green space that would relate strongly to the wider landscape context as well as increasing access to the remaining Green Belt.

### **Description of the Proposed Development**

7.5 The Proposed Development includes:

- Up to 391 homes (of which 40% will be affordable);
- 3% Self-Build Plots;
- Land to enable HCC to construct a 2FE Primary School;
- Green infrastructure;
- Publicly accessible open space;
- Publicly accessible children's play space; and
- A sustainable form of development.

7.6 The residential component of the Proposed Development will be divided into two residential parcels separated by a Green Core at its centre. It is currently proposed to provide three vehicular accesses into the site. Two of these will be on Chiswell Green Lane and will predominantly serve the northern parcel residential development and the future primary school.

7.7 The access to the southern parcel will connect with the northern end of the existing Forge End cul-de-sac which in turn will provide access to Watford Road. A secondary pedestrian/cycle/emergency access will be provided on Long Fallow.

7.8 Proposed housing on the Site would be set within the existing landscape framework of retained boundary vegetation, supplemented and enhanced by additional structure planting and public spaces. The new publicly accessible spaces would include the creation of a central green spine of canopy trees forming an avenue along the main route through the Site. Feature trees will be utilised at the entrances to the site to highlight arrival points, and to act as informal wayfinders. Narrow canopy trees will be used along the northern and southern extents of the spine to reflect the hierarchy of movement. Broad canopy trees will be utilised at the Green Core of the Site to reflect the change in character associated with this area. The open space will contain a variety of parkland trees, native and ornamental, to reflect the change in character from built form to open space, and to provide ecological benefits. A wide variety of species will be used, to maximise longevity and adaptability to climate change as well as disease resilience. Tree planting locations will be designed around the site constraints,

such as services, and the design requirements of the adoptable highway, such as visibility splays and lighting.

- 7.9 The green spine would connect a series of publicly accessible green spaces, including the Green Core, community play areas, and an orchard, with these spaces associated with swales and attenuation ponds, large trees and deep planting.
- 7.10 Additional structural vegetation will be implemented to reinforce and enhance existing boundary vegetation to form a defined settlement edge and new Green Belt boundary that would be recognisable on the ground.
- 7.11 Development of the Site would contribute to the existing network of Green Infrastructure and has the potential to expand the existing levels of public access in the vicinity of the Site and increase accessibility to the remaining Green Belt.

### **Landscape Strategy**

- 7.12 The following mitigation proposals have been included within the design rationale for the Site, in order to allow development to relate sensitively to the existing landscape:
- Retention of the existing field boundary vegetation, strengthened and enhanced through planting on the internal edges, which would form the new Green Belt boundary and a strong settlement edge;
  - Creation of accessible wildflower grassland and woodland areas;
  - Creation and establishment of a green spine through the Site, linking to existing landscape features;
  - Enhancements to the local ecology and Site wide biodiversity as well as public accessibility of the remaining Green Belt; and
  - Provision of attenuation features within the open spaces of the Site.
- 7.13 These overarching principles for the landscape strategy would provide a framework for development on the Site that reflects the local characteristics and responds to the guidance set out in the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment for the St Stephen's Plateau LCA, including through hedgerow restoration following the pattern of historic field boundaries, providing visual and ecological links between existing woodland areas; creation of smaller copses linking with hedgerow restoration on the open arable areas, emphasising topographical variation; and broadening the range of recreational opportunities.

### **Response to Landscape Policy**

- 7.14 The delivery of publicly accessible green spaces along the central green spine through the Site, as well as the planting strategy and reinforcement of the western Site boundary would

enable the landscape strategy to ensure that the Proposed Development would be in line with key objectives of adopted and emerging local policy.

7.15 The new development will:

- Integrate with the existing landscape, in particular through high quality boundary treatment and green landscaping that will help to mitigate any detrimental visual impacts on the countryside. This includes the proposed boundary buffer which is combined with that of the commercial estate to the west, notably its landscape bunds and mature boundary trees which will integrate and filter views of the development (the St Albans District adopted Local Plan, Policy 1; and the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan, Policies S3 and S5);
- Protect and enhance the landscape character of the area in which it is located as well as the character of existing adjacent settlements, by taking account of the local context and reflecting the landscape features and character and setting of the local area (the St Albans District adopted Local Plan, Policies 2 and 101; and the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan, Policies S3 and S6);
- Create safe, attractive spaces of human scale, in particular on the urban fringe, through the provision of accessible green space, including green space for children's play areas (the St Albans District adopted Local Plan, Policies 70, 74 and 105; and the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan, Policies S5 and S10);
- Avoid significant harm to the ecological value of the countryside, and instead maintain and enhance the natural environment and its landscape character, through the creation of connective chains of green infrastructure which will achieve a net gain in biodiversity, including through planting of additional trees, creation of wildflower planting, and restoration, reinforcement and maintenance of existing hedgerows (the St Albans District adopted Local Plan, Policy 1; the St Albans District Green Infrastructure Plan, Section 4; and the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan, Policies S6 and S10); and
- Create new green recreation routes that provide safe and accessible pedestrian and cycle links from settlements to the District's Green Infrastructure network within the surrounding countryside (the St Albans District Green Infrastructure Plan, Section 4; and the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan, Policies S5 and S14).

## 8.0 LANDSCAPE & VISUAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

### Landscape and Visual Assessment

- 8.1 A comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been undertaken to determine the landscape and visual effects of the proposed residential houses and associated infrastructure set within a landscape strategy for the Site.

### Landscape Assessment

Effects on Landscape Character

*NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin – Low Sensitivity*

- 8.2 The Proposed Development on the western edge of Chiswell Green would occupy a very small area of undeveloped land immediately adjacent to the existing settlement edge within the much larger NCA, where the additional residential development would cause a **Very Small** magnitude of change upon the large scale NCA, though this would be at the lowest end of very small. The Proposed Development would represent the expansion of an existing settlement with the capacity to absorb growth with the delivery of accessible natural greenspace, as set out within the NCA profile. The Proposed Development would result in a **Negligible Adverse** effect upon the Northern Thames Basin NCA at Year 1, since the change will be from one characteristic component to another.
- 8.3 By Year 15, the adverse effects of the expansion of the existing settlement would be absorbed within a mature landscape framework delivered by the comprehensive landscape strategy for the Site, including the tree planting throughout the Site and the reinforcement of the existing field pattern and western Site boundary. This would result in a **Neutral Adverse** effect at Year 15.

*St Stephen's Plateau LCA – Medium Sensitivity*

- 8.4 Development of the Site with housing and a comprehensive landscape strategy would respect the existing landscape pattern and enhance the structure of the existing intact to denuded hedgerows. While the residential housing would cause a permanent loss of a relatively small area of pasture, the housing would be delivered within a comprehensive landscape strategy that reflects the landscape context by introducing substantial tree planting and accessible green space, as well as reinforcing the existing field pattern to create a western boundary that would represent a robust and recognisable settlement edge. The Proposed Development would cause a **Small** magnitude of change, albeit at the low end of small, upon St Stephen's Plateau

as it would extend built form to the west in a way that would round off the settlement morphology with a rational settlement boundary and provide a sensitive transition between development and the wider landscape. The Site occupies less than one percent of the total area of the LCA, in an area already influenced by the existing settlement edge. Since the receptor would be subjected to an effect over a very limited extent, on balance this would result in a **Minor Adverse** effect at Year 1.

- 8.5 The landscape framework delivered through the comprehensive landscape strategy proposed for the Site will have become established by Year 15, providing a robust boundary to the west, mature trees throughout the Site, and a strong sense of place as a result of the varied publicly accessible spaces linked by the green spine. This would result in a **Negligible Adverse** effect at Year 15.

*The Character of The Site and its Immediate Vicinity – Medium Sensitivity*

- 8.6 The Proposed Development will result in a substantial increase in built form on the Site, although this will be experienced from very limited locations in the local landscape. The Proposed Development includes the retention of the overall existing structure of the landscape, with a comprehensive reinforcement and improvement of the landscape features that contribute to the rural aspects of the Site's otherwise urban fringe character through the implementation of **Figure 8: Publicly Accessible Green Space Strategy Plan**. Furthermore, the Proposed Development will be perceived in the context of its strong relationship with the existing settlement edge as well as existing infrastructure (notably the nearby pylons). On balance, the Proposed Development is anticipated to give rise to a **Large** magnitude of effect, which in combination with the receptor sensitivity, will give rise to a **Major Adverse** effect at Year 1.

- 8.7 At Year 15, the proposed comprehensive landscape strategy set out in **Figure 8: Publicly Accessible Green Space Strategy Plan** will result in the establishment of positive characteristic features throughout the Site, responding to the published landscape guidance and policy and mitigating the adverse effects relating to the Proposed Development itself. The Site will have assimilated into the existing settlement edge of Chiswell Green, which along with the positive benefits of the proposals would, on balance, reduce the effect to **Neutral** at Year 15.

Effects on Landscape Features

*Open Fields – Medium Sensitivity*

- 8.8 The existing fields will be subject to a pronounced and irreversible change from open pasture to residential development, such that the overall integrity of this landscape component will be



lost. On this basis, the magnitude of effect is considered to be **Large**, since it affects a high proportion of the area of the Site and represents a permanent change. This will result in a **Major Adverse** effect at Year 1.

- 8.9 The publicly accessible green space however will remain open and whilst these areas will no longer be agricultural, the biodiversity and landscape value of these spaces will be substantially improved by Year 15 as a result of the proposed landscape strategy. This will substantially mitigate the adverse effects, leading to a **Minor Adverse** effect at Year 15.

*Native Hedgerow – Low Sensitivity*

- 8.10 The majority of the hedgerows are to be retained and protected, with only a small proportion to be removed for construction purposes. Some will be replanted following construction, and those currently in a poor condition along the western boundary will be reinforced. Whilst the contribution of new planting to the overall value of the receptor is considered to be limited at Year 1, there would still be a measurable improvement due to the extent of planting and the immediate contribution to infilling of gaps in the existing hedgerows. Overall, this receptor would be subject to a **Small** magnitude of effect at Year 1, and the effect is considered to be **Negligible Adverse**.

- 8.11 Following the restoration and reinforcement of the existing hedgerow along the western boundary and its successful establishment, there will be a marked improvement to the overall structure and cohesiveness of the receptor as well as to its extent and overall quality. As a result, this receptor would be subject to a partial improvement. The effect on this receptor at Year 15 is judged to be **Moderate Beneficial**.

*Canopy Trees – Medium Sensitivity*

- 8.12 The majority of the existing trees are to be retained and protected, and the introduction of built form on the Site will require the removal of only a small proportion of the trees currently on Site, particularly in order to facilitate access. The design of the Proposed Development has been sensitively developed with the aim of reducing the impact on existing canopy trees, and all retained trees will be protected in accordance with British Standards. The proposals for tree planting represent a substantial increase in the quantity of this landscape feature on the Site, with a high proportion of native species, which is deemed to be a highly characteristic feature which will contribute positively to local character. However, newly planted trees have limited potential for beneficial effects due to their relatively small size (albeit some large stock would be planted as part of the Proposed Development). The magnitude of change is expected to be **Small** at Year 1, and on balance, a **Neutral** effect is anticipated.

- 8.13 The establishment of a substantial number of canopy trees, including a high proportion of native species, would lead to a considerable increase in the extent and quality of this landscape resource on the Site, leading to substantial beneficial effects once these trees have matured and established. Enhanced management and maintenance of existing canopy trees would also lead to beneficial effects. On balance, this landscape feature would be subject to a pronounced improvement on a long term basis, resulting in a **Major Beneficial** effect by Year 15.

#### Summary of Landscape Effects

- 8.14 The Proposed Development within the Site would introduce housing to an area of land on the western edge of Chiswell Green, which would result in the loss of a small area of pasture of limited ecological value and a pronounced change to the character of the Site. However, the Proposed Development would directly relate to the existing settlement edge, and reinforce the settlement pattern by rationally rounding it off. It would also provide an opportunity to create a robust and permanent boundary to the settlement, and thus assimilate it into the immediate and wider context.
- 8.15 The Proposed Development includes a central green spine connecting publicly accessible green spaces, as well as the restoration and reinforcement of the western boundary, enabling the creation of a strong settlement edge with a clear transition to the countryside to the west. All these elements would improve the connectivity of existing landscape features, increase the accessibility of the landscape and strengthen the amenity value of the Site. The delivery of a comprehensive landscape framework on the Site would help to improve the Site's contribution to the local sense of place and reinforce local identity.

#### Visual Assessment

Residents of properties on the settlement edge of Chiswell Green – Medium Sensitivity – Site Appraisal Photographs A-E and I-K, and Site Context Photographs 1, 3, 4, 19 and 20

- 8.16 Residents of houses on the settlement edge of Chiswell Green will have open, close range, frontal views of the northern and eastern parts of the Proposed Development, with some limited filtering from the vegetation within the curtilage of these residences and near to or within the Site. Where proposed built form is seen, it would occupy a partial extent of the view, although the sensitive design, based on extensive analysis of local context, would reinforce local settlement character. Furthermore, views of residential development would not be uncharacteristic for receptors in this location. Nonetheless, where the Proposed Development is seen, it would be in the place of views of an open field, resulting in a **Large** magnitude of change, but with the comprehensive landscape framework mitigating the level of adverse effects. Therefore there will be a noticeable deterioration in visual amenity, such that the effects will be **Moderate Adverse** at Year 1.

8.17 Whilst the built form will remain prominent within the view, the comprehensive landscape framework will soften the development within its rural context. Following establishment of this planting, views of proposed built form would be further softened and filtered. Where visible, new built form would be more assimilated and integrated within the landscape. Whilst a pronounced change to the view would still be experienced, the balance of positive and negative effects is such that a **Negligible Adverse** effect is anticipated on the visual amenity of this receptor by Year 15.

Users of Chiswell Green Lane – Medium Sensitivity – Site Appraisal Photographs A, and E and Site Context Photograph 4

8.18 Receptors travelling along this country lane would have open, close range, frontal views of the northern part of the Proposed Development including highway alterations, although this is limited to a small proportion of the total length of the lane, where it is immediately adjacent to the northern Site boundary. Due to the sensitive design of the Proposed Development, new built form would reinforce local settlement character and the existing residential context of the lane is such that the introduced elements of built form are not uncharacteristic in views experienced by these receptors. Therefore, whilst the magnitude of effect will be **Large**, there will be a **Moderate Adverse** effect on receptors at Year 1 due to the very limited length of the lane from which the Site will be visible.

8.19 Following the establishment of extensive planting, including the maturing of canopy trees along the new streetscape, new built form would be further assimilated within the landscape and would not be perceived as an incongruous feature. Whilst the magnitude of effect would remain **Large** due to the change from an open field to a residential area, as a result of the positive elements outlined above, and the establishment of extensive landscape proposals, the balance of adverse and beneficial effects would result in a barely perceptible deterioration of visual amenity. Therefore, the effects at Year 15 will be **Negligible Adverse**.

Users of Long Fallow, Forge End and Woodlea – Low Sensitivity – Site Context Photographs 1 and 3

8.20 Receptors travelling along these culs-de-sac would have glimpsed to partial, close range, frontal views of the eastern part of the Proposed Development including highway alterations, although this is limited to three locations where there are existing openings, and only a limited proportion of the view will be affected. New built form would reinforce local settlement character as a result of the sensitive design of the Proposed Development. The existing residential context of these locations is such that the introduced elements of built form are entirely characteristic in views experienced by these receptors. Therefore, whilst the magnitude of effect will be **Small**, there will be an overall **Neutral** effect on receptors at Year 1 as a

result of the positive effects of the nature of the change, which will be from glimpses to partial views of fields and trees across security fencing to glimpses to partial views residential built form with both mature and recently planted trees.

- 8.21 By Year 15 the Proposed Development will have been further softened as the landscape strategy has become established and the proposed tree planting has matured. The limited change in the views will remain, though the positive features will have a greater effect such that there will be a **Minor Beneficial** effect by Year 15.

Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 082 – Medium Sensitivity – Site Appraisal Photograph A and Site Context Photograph 4

- 8.22 Pedestrians on travelling PRow St Stephen 082 would have glimpsed, close range, frontal views of the northern part of the Proposed Development including highway alterations, although this is limited to the point at which the southern end of the route meets Chiswell Green Lane, as further to the north along this footpath views of the Site are entirely curtailed by intervening built form. The existing residential context of this location is such that the introduced elements of built form are not uncharacteristic in views experienced by these receptors, and this new built form would reinforce local settlement character as a result of the sensitive design of the Proposed Development. Therefore, whilst the magnitude of effect will be **Very Small**, there will be an overall **Negligible Adverse** effect on receptors at Year 1.

- 8.23 The comprehensive landscape strategy will have become established by Year 15, helping to soften, filter and integrate the Proposed Development within its context. Given the limited extent of the route from which the introduced built form will be visible, the change in views will remain barely perceptible, and positive features will by this time reduce the overall effect at Year 15 to **Neutral**.

Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 028 – Medium Sensitivity – Site Context Photographs 10 and 18

- 8.24 Pedestrians on travelling PRow St Stephen 028 would have glimpsed to partial medium distance views across the southern part of the Proposed Development, where topography and breaks in intervening vegetation allow. Where available at all, for the most part only rooftops are likely to be seen, and will make up only a very limited proportion of the extent of views. The Proposed Development will be seen from only a small proportion of the length of this footpath, and it will be seen in the context of other residential and agricultural built form within the field of view, such that it will not be an uncharacteristic feature in views experienced by these receptors. The magnitude of effect will be **Very Small**, resulting in a **Negligible Adverse** effect.

- 8.25 The proposed landscape strategy, in particular the restoration and reinforcement of the western Site boundary, will have become established by Year 15, substantially softening and integrating the introduced built form into its landscape context, reducing the effect by Year 15 to **Neutral**.

Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 022 – Medium Sensitivity – Site Context Photograph 12

- 8.26 Pedestrians on travelling PRow St Stephen 022 would have at most glimpsed long distance views of the Proposed Development. Where seen at all, the built form would likely be perceived only indistinctly through the winter tracery of intervening mature trees to the south of the Site. Residential, agricultural and commercial development are already common features in the vicinity of the Site in views from this location, such that any visibility of the Proposed Development would amount to the introduction of entirely characteristic elements. The magnitude of effect will be **Very Small**, and the very limited extent of the view affected will lead in this case to a **Negligible Adverse** effect.

- 8.27 By Year 15, the establishment of a substantial number of canopy trees, including a high proportion of native species, will have the effect of further reducing the perceptibility of the Proposed Development within views from this footpath, reducing the overall effect on visual amenity to **Neutral**.

Workers at the commercial estate on Miriam Lane – Low Sensitivity – Site Appraisal Photographs F-H

- 8.28 Workers at the commercial estate on Miriam Lane will have partial, close range, frontal views of the western parts of the Proposed Development. These will be transient views as they enter and leave their workplace via Miriam Lane. Fixed views of the Proposed Development from the commercial estate will be glimpsed to partial, filtered by the vegetation within the curtilage of commercial estate and within the Site. Where proposed built form is seen, in many places this would not be uncharacteristic for receptors in this location, given the existing residential and commercial built form in these views. Nonetheless, where the Proposed Development is seen, it would be in the place of views of an open field, on balance resulting in a **Small** magnitude of change. Therefore there will be a limited deterioration in visual amenity, such that the effects will be **Minor Adverse** at Year 1.

- 8.29 By Year 15, the proposed landscape strategy will have become established, such that views from the commercial estate will benefit in particular from the restoration and reinforcement of the western Site boundary. This will substantially soften and integrate the introduced built form into its landscape context, reducing the effect by Year 15 to **Negligible Adverse**.

### Summary of Visual Effects

- 8.30 The local topographical variation and vegetation in the vicinity of the Site provides it with a high level of physical and visual screening that would limit visibility of the Proposed Development to those locations immediately adjacent to the Site, and only two locations have been identified that would have medium range or long distance glimpsed to partial and filtered views of the Proposed Development.
- 8.31 Where the Site is visible, including from residential properties and roads to the north and east of the Site, from footpaths to the north, west and south of the Site, and from commercial and agricultural properties to the north-east and west of the Site, the Proposed Development would be partially visible, predominantly in filtered views through intervening vegetation. However, it would be supplemented by the comprehensive but sympathetic landscape strategy which would deliver substantial tree planting throughout and a restored and reinforced western boundary of the Site to create a robust settlement edge.

**Table 8.1: Summary of Landscape and Visual Effects**

Receptor	Sensitivity	Significance of Effect (Year 1)	Significance of Effect (Year 15)
Landscape Receptors			
NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin	Low	Negligible Adverse	Neutral
St Stephen's Plateau LCA	Medium	Minor Adverse	Negligible Adverse
The Character of the Site and its Immediate Vicinity	Medium	Major Adverse	Neutral
Open Fields	Medium	Major Adverse	Minor Adverse
Native Hedgerow	Low	Negligible Adverse	Moderate Beneficial
Canopy Trees	Medium	Neutral	Major Beneficial
Visual Receptors			
Residents of properties on the settlement edge of Chiswell Green	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Negligible Adverse
Users of Chiswell Green Lane	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Negligible Adverse
Users of Long Fallow, Forge End and Woodlea	Low	Neutral	Minor Beneficial
Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 082	Medium	Negligible Adverse	Neutral
Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 028	Medium	Negligible Adverse	Neutral
Pedestrians on PRow St Stephen 022	Medium	Negligible Adverse	Neutral
Workers at the commercial estate on Miriam Lane	Low	Minor Adverse	Negligible Adverse

## 9.0 SUMMARY

- 9.1 An assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development has been undertaken in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition.
- 9.2 The Site is located on the western edge of the existing settlement of Chiswell Green. It is bound by existing housing to the east and south-east, Chiswell Green Lane to the north and Miriam Lane to the west.
- 9.3 Review and analysis of national and borough level published landscape character assessments has been carried out. They describe undulating to gently sloping topography, with visually interlocking woodlands and a transport network ranging from a significant extent of motorways and interchanges to narrow winding lanes with sparse clipped hedgerows.
- 9.4 The Site is a gently sloping landscape, predominantly pasture, that is influenced by existing built form both internally and on the settlement edge of Chiswell Green, leading to a limited rural character that is strongly affected by its urban fringe setting.
- 9.5 A visual appraisal has been undertaken which demonstrated that whilst the Site is visible in glimpsed to partial close-range views from a limited number of roads, PRoW and residential properties that lie in close proximity to the Site, due to a combination of vegetation and containing settlement pattern, the visual envelope of the Site is restricted to these close range views and very few medium range and long distance views from vantage points within the wider landscape to the west and south.
- 9.6 A comprehensive series of mitigation measures has been embedded in the design of the Proposed Development from the outset, with the aim of reducing adverse effects resulting from its introduction. The design of the Proposed Development has evolved as part of an iterative process and has been informed by the findings of the baseline landscape and visual amenity conditions.
- 9.7 The Proposed Development would result in the loss of pasture within the Site, but would deliver a comprehensive landscape strategy that reflects and responds to the landscape objectives and associated actions set out within the relevant landscape character assessments.
- 9.8 The hedgerow vegetation around the periphery of the Site would be retained, where it provides varying levels of enclosure, with the proposals including substantial restoration and reinforcement of this boundary feature, which would improve the ecological functionality of the Site and wider area and help to create a strong settlement edge.



- 9.9 The Proposed Development within the Site would introduce housing to an area of land on the western edge of Chiswell Green, where the existing settlement edge and Green Belt boundary is weakly defined. Development of the Site would result in the loss of a small area of pasture that currently has limited ecological value.
- 9.10 The proposed green spine and linked publicly accessible green spaces would improve the connectivity of existing landscape features, increase the accessibility of the landscape and strengthen the amenity value of the Site. The delivery of strong landscape features within the Site would help to improve the Site's contribution to the local sense of place and define the Green Belt boundary.
- 9.11 The Proposed Development would not cause any substantial changes to the character of the landscape within the Site or the wider area but would extend the existing settlement edge into the Site. The new residential development would be at an appropriate location and of an appropriate scale to be successfully assimilated into the existing settlement of Chiswell Green, with limited effect on the wider landscape to the west.
- 9.12 Views of the Proposed Development would largely be limited to close range filtered views where it appears in the immediate foreground for visual receptors on roads and at residential and commercial properties to the north and east of the Site as well as very limited medium to long distance views from footpaths to the west and south of the Site. Where the Proposed Development appears, it would be filtered by retained, proposed and intervening vegetation and would not appear out of character, reflecting components and characteristics of existing views from within the existing residential edge or towards it. As the landscape strategy for the Proposed Development matures, this would further soften and integrate it within its context. The landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development would be further mitigated by the delivery of the green spine and linked publicly accessible green spaces throughout the Site.
- 9.13 An assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development has been undertaken at Years 1 and 15 of operation.
- 9.14 At Year 1, two landscape receptors will be subject to significant (in these cases major) adverse effects, with the remaining four receptors experiencing minor adverse, negligible adverse or neutral effects as a result of the design principles of the Proposed Development and the introduction of positive landscape features.
- 9.15 At Year 15 following establishment of proposed planting on the Site, no landscape receptors will be subject to significant adverse effects. Two receptors will be subject to minor or negligible adverse effects, and two will be subject to neutral effects. The remaining two receptors will be subject to significant (i.e. major or moderate) beneficial effects.

- 9.16 With respect to visual receptors, two of these will experience significant (in these cases moderate) adverse effects at Year 1, with the remaining five receptors likely to experience minor adverse, negligible adverse or neutral effects. At Year 15, following the establishment of proposed planting within the Proposed Development no significant (i.e. major or moderate) adverse effects will remain for any visual receptors. Three will be experiencing negligible adverse effects, with three experiencing neutral effects, and one experiencing minor beneficial effects.
- 9.17 In summary, while the Proposed Development will result in some significant adverse landscape and visual effects, these relate only to Year 1, with the level of adverse effect significance typically diminishing rapidly as the landscape proposals become established. No significant (i.e. major or moderate) adverse residual effects will remain following establishment of the planting, and there will be residual beneficial effects that are significant for two receptors.
- 9.18 The Proposed Development is considered to comply with national planning policy in that it secures multiple benefits from urban and rural land, enables habitat creation and improves public access to the countryside. It will be visually attractive and sympathetic to the character of the area, establish a strong sense of place and provide a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.
- 9.19 The Proposed Development is also considered to comply with local planning policy in that it will integrate with the existing landscape through high quality boundary treatment; protect and enhance the local landscape character; create safe attractive spaces of human scale; enhance the natural environment through green infrastructure and a net gain in biodiversity; and improve green recreation routes and access to the countryside.
- 9.20 In terms of published landscape character, the Proposed Development will result in the introduction of characteristic features in accordance with guidance for NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin, including by: enhancing and increasing access between rural and urban areas through good green infrastructure links to allow local communities recreational, health and wellbeing benefits; and increasing tree cover within urban area, and providing green infrastructure links, important habitats and a sense of tranquillity
- 9.21 The Proposed Development will be read as a logical extension to the existing settlement pattern. It will provide a greater level of pedestrian and cycle permeability and create new areas for play and exercise, and substantially increase the level of vegetation on the Site. It will be softened and integrated within the landscape through the establishment of substantial areas of new tree planting, and the provision of a more well-defined and sheltered streetscape, reinforcing sense of place and local identity.

9.22 On the basis of the above, and the findings of this assessment, it is considered that the Site has the capacity to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue harm to the landscape character and visual amenity of the Site and the wider area. It is further considered that the Proposed Development would lead to tangible long term benefits on the landscape features of the Site and the character and general amenity of the local area.