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**Landscape and Visual Impact
Assessment**

at:

Land at and to rear of 126 Harpenden Road, St
Albans, Hertfordshire

in relation to an Outline Planning Application for:
‘Residential development of up to 132 dwellings,
together with all ancillary works’.

Compiled by:

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been carried out in relation to the potential development of land at 'Land at and to rear of 126 Harpenden Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire'. The purpose of this LVIA study is to provide an assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposed development of this area of land (see Plan 1).
- 1.2 This report has been prepared on behalf of Hunston Properties Ltd. It accompanies an Outline Planning Application for 'Residential development of up to 132 dwellings, together with all ancillary works'.
- 1.3 I am David Clarke, I have a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Landscape Management from Reading University and I am a Chartered Landscape Architect and Chartered Member of the Chartered Landscape Institute. I hold the Professional Diploma in Arboriculture (RFS) and I am a Professional Member of the Arboricultural Association. I have 29 years experience of working in both the private and public sector in relation to arboricultural and landscape issues.
- 1.4 During my career I have produced and commented on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) for a variety of planning applications. This includes the development and ratification of 6 no. Areas of Search (unpublished) within Borehamwood and Potters Bar in Hertfordshire between 2009 and 2010 and at potential development sites including Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and East Sussex to date. I have also prepared and presented LVIAs for Public Inquiries and commented upon LVIAs at Public Inquiries. Where relevant these have been prepared as part of developing a design philosophy and landscape strategy for proposed developments.



Plan 1 – showing 'Land at and to rear of 126 Harpenden Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire' (The Site).

2.0 **Scope of Study**

2.1 This study is concerned specifically with the landscape and visual aspects of the proposed development of The Site. It will relate to The Site and the local area and will focus on the following key issues:

- An analysis of the context, landscape character and condition of the existing site.
- The visual prominence of the site within the landscape with particular reference to public vantage points.
- The potential impacts of the proposed development on landscape character and visual amenity and the nature of this change.

- The ability of the landscape setting and visual environment to accommodate the proposed change(s) the appropriateness of the proposals and the effectiveness of the landscape strategy and mitigation measures proposed.

2.2 A number of plans, drawings or photographs have been prepared to illustrate the character and visual environment of the site and localised setting. These accompany this report. These may not be reproduced without written consent. All copyrights are reserved.

2.3 Structure of the Report

2.4 This report is structured as follows:

2.5 Section 1.0 sets out the brief and instruction from my client with regard to the proposals. It also briefly outlines the qualifications of the author of the report.

2.6 Section 2.0 sets out the scope of the study and the structure of the report.

2.7 Section 3.0 sets out the methodology used as part of the landscape and visual appraisal of The Site, local area and the proposed development.

2.8 Section 4.0 describes the context within which The Site sits – including the planning context. It describes The Site itself and the proposed planning application which forms the basis for this assessment.

2.9 Section 5.0 sets out the baseline studies for the existing Application Site (The Site). This includes both the Landscape Character and Visual Baseline. It describes the existing landscape character of the site and surroundings and presents a visual analysis of the application site which is assessed in relationship to the proposed development.

2.10 Section 6.0 describes the landscape strategy and philosophy for the development following the landscape and visual assessment.

2.11 Section 7.0 describes the nature of the change including an assessment of the sites capacity to absorb change and the potential impact (Landscape and Visual effects) of the development on the site and the area.

2.12 Section 8.0 provides the conclusions of the report.

3.0 **Methodology**

- 3.1 The following methodology has been used in relation to this application. It has been carried out based on guidance offered by the Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment publication *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition 2013* (The Guidelines). In summary the GLVIA3 states: “Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people’s views and visual amenity”
- 3.2 The level of detail provided within the LVIA is appropriate to the scale and type of development, the sensitivity of the receptors and the potential for adverse (negative) or beneficial (positive) effects to occur. As this is a relatively moderate scale, simple and localised scheme a comparatively brief overall assessment of the effects on the landscape and visual amenity has been undertaken.
- 3.3 The methodology relates to both a landscape and a visual appraisal of The Site and surrounding area. A distinction is normally drawn between landscape and visual effects:
- Landscape Effects – assessing effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right. These effects derive from changes in the physical landscape, which may give rise to changes in its character and how this is experienced. This may, or may not, affect the perceived value given to a landscape. Due to the inherently dynamic nature of the landscape, change arising from a development may not necessarily be significant.
 - Visual Effects – assessing effects of the proposed development on specific views and on the general visual amenity of the area as experienced by people. These visual effects may be from private properties, rights of way or other areas of public access such as roads.
- 3.4 The appraisal includes a Baseline Study of the site which collates background material (including National and Local Planning Policy). This also includes desktop based studies and mapping exercises that establish the key features and baseline data of the existing landscape. The Baseline Study was supplemented by fieldwork within the site and the surrounding area with site visits being undertaken in March and April 2021.

3.5 An analysis was then undertaken to:

- establish the landscape character and visual amenities of The Site;
- its interaction with the surrounding landscape and its condition and value
- the existing role of The Site
- the views and viewers likely to be affected by the proposals on the site and the nature of the views.
- identify and describe the likely effects arising from the proposed development
- assess the significance of these effects.
- set out any mitigation measures which are proposed as part of the development.

3.6 The magnitude of change will generally decrease with distance from its source, until a point is reached where there is no discernible change or screening prevents views towards the site. Similarly as any landscape mitigation measures establish and develop they will help to provide future screening towards the site. The extent of this screening will depend on the level of landscaping proposed.

4.0 Site and Planning Context

4.1 The Site Context (see 'Aerial Photo – Site Context Plan' below)

4.1.1 The Site is located on the northern edge of the town of St Albans, on the A1081 Harpenden Road, a significant link into the town from the north. It is bound by development to the north – dwellings and Woollam Playing Fields – and to the south and west - properties along Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane. The Site is located to the rear of the Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane properties. There are agricultural fields to the east. There is no standard building design or use of materials in the area. It is essentially rectangular in shape with 2 no. parcels of land that extend to Harpenden Road. These are:

- the curtilage of 126 Harpenden Road. This large detached, pitched roof property is the southernmost of five houses served by a lay-by, with a separate ingress and egress from Harpenden Road.

- To the north, the parcel of land joins Harpenden Road adjacent to a Petrol Filling Station.

- 4.1.2 The Site comprises a single field of 5.136 ha semi-improved grassland. It was formerly agricultural land but has not been farmed for more than 20 years. It has an open character but is contained and defined by trees, hedges and the boundary treatments of private gardens. The hedges to the northern and eastern site boundaries have established to above 4-6 m with trees growing above this height. There are minor gaps within the eastern hedge where it has failed. The site slopes gently from the north down to the centre, rising again to the south. There is a small pond located within the central part of the site which is assumed is a seasonal water body. There is an existing gated access to the site from Sandridgebury Lane to the south-east corner.
- 4.1.3 The topography of the local area is gently undulating with shallow ridges and valleys. The localised ridge is located to the north of The Site at 120-125 AOD and descends down to The Site with the northern boundary being at approximately 118 AOD and the southern boundary of The Site at 114 AOD. The centre of The Site – around the existing pond area is 111.0 AOD. The Site is largely contained by the ridgeline to the north. There are significant tree and vegetation belts along Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane which help to contain and soften the existing development. These include Childwick Bury to the west of Harpenden Road and Woollam Playing Fields to the north of The Site in addition to the built form of St Albans. To the west – along Harpenden Road – are the houses and garden areas abutting the western site boundary. This includes a row of houses running perpendicular to Harpenden Road and the development of Petersfield which extend past the general built line of Harpenden Road. To the majority of the southern boundary are properties running along Sandridgebury Lane.
- 4.1.4 Within the wider landscape the existing field network is defined by hedgerows which are maintained to a variety of heights. These help present a rural character and enclose some views through the area with only glimpsed views to the adjacent fields from Sandridgebury Lane. The main railway line runs approximately 750 m to the east of The Site. This is a major transport corridor which is prominent in the area where it runs on an embankment. A vehicle and pedestrian bridge crosses the railway to the north-east of The Site. It is located within a cutting. Porters Wood Industrial Estate is located approximately 600 m to the south-east. Due to the existing topography and the wooded area (Long Spring Wood) to the northern boundary of the Industrial Estate it is effectively screened from The Site and contained within the landscape. The only exception to this is the large communication mast located adjacent to the northern

boundary. St Albans Girls School is located to the south of Sandridgebury Lane. Their playing fields extend to the east up to Valley Road and there is a pedestrian access here. Beech Bottom Dyke – an ancient earth works site - is located 600-800 m to the south and south-east of The Site. It is separated both visually and physically by the built form of St Albans.

- 4.1.5 The site and the wider landscape setting is designated as Green Belt. It is understood that there are no landscape designations on the Application Site and that none of the trees on the site are protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) or by being located within a Conservation Area.



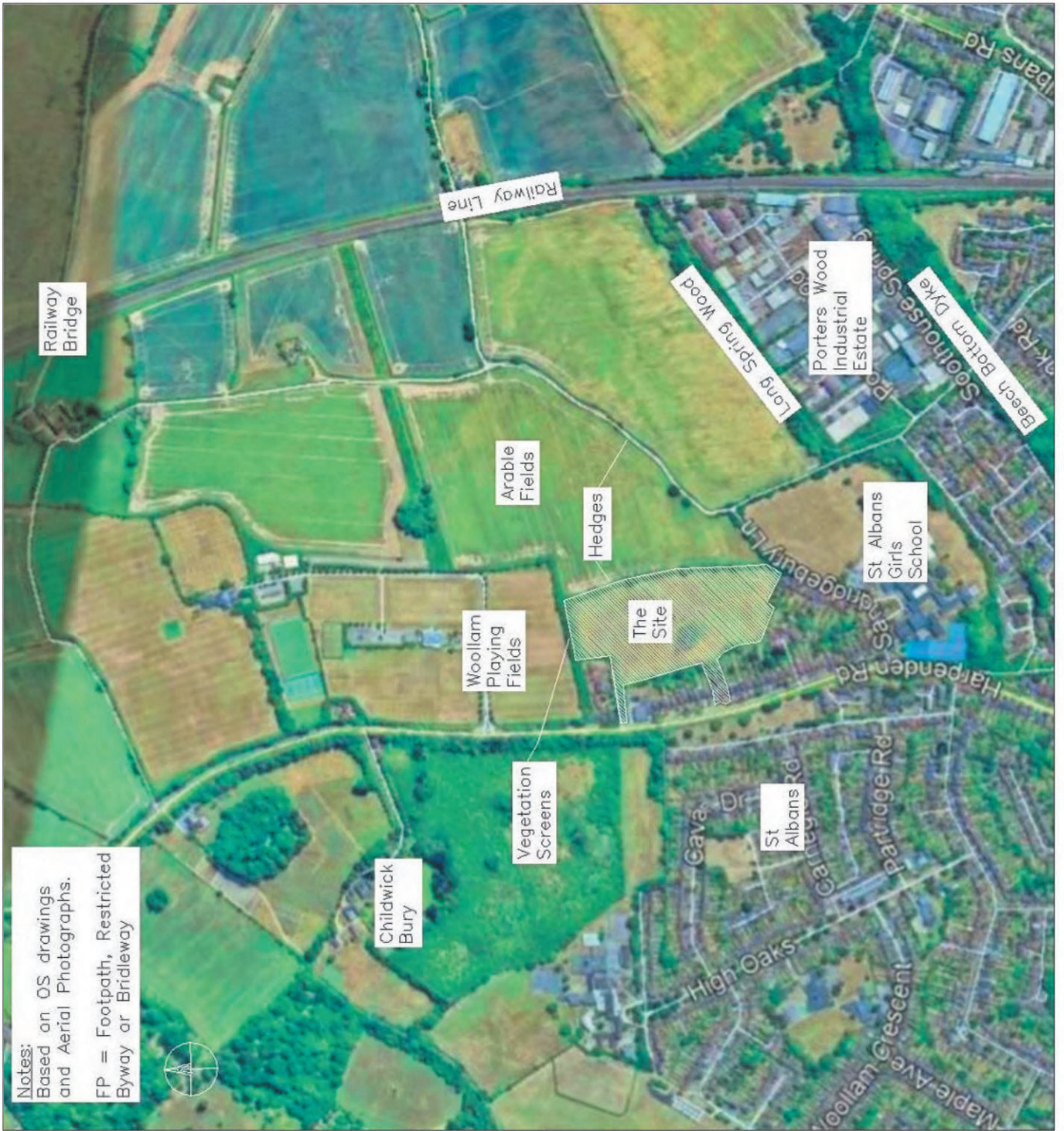
Photograph A – from Harpenden Road looking towards 126 Harpenden Road.



Photograph B – From within The Site looking south. The existing development to the south and west is visible though softened and screened by existing vegetation.



Photograph C – From within The Site looking south-east. The trees and hedgerows along the eastern site boundary are visible as is the communication mast within the Porters Wood Industrial Estate.



Aerial Photo – Site Context Plan

4.2 Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance

4.2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF (revised February 2019) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart of the NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 7 states: *'The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development'*. This can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

4.2.2 The three overarching objectives to delivering sustainable development are: economic, social and environmental. They are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

a) **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

4.2.3 Paragraph 9 states *'These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this Framework; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area'*.

4.2.4 The NPPF (Paragraph 170-172) seeks to conserve and enhance the natural environment – protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and affording great weight to the protection of areas of natural and scenic beauty, such as National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. However, plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites and allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value. They should take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plan for the enhancement of natural capital.

4.2.5 Paragraph 170 also states that "*Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

- *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan).*
- *minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*

4.2.6 The NPPF sets out that Strategic Policies should make out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for:

- conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation (Paragraph 20d).

4.2.7 The NPPF supports good design to enhance the quality of the built and natural environment and it is seen as fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. "Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities". Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*

- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) 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;*
- e) 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*
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.*

4.2.8 Local Planning Policy

St Albans City and District Council are the Local Planning Authority. The Council's policies for its long term vision and the direction of future development are set out in:

- Local Plan 1994

There are policies within this existing document which is relevant to this submission. These will include:

- 4.2.9 • Policy 1 - Metropolitan Green Belt
- Policy 69 – General Design and Layout
- Policy 70 – Design and Layout of New Housing
- Policy 74 – Landscaping and Tree Preservation

- 4.2. 10 All development shall have an adequately high standard of design taking into account factors such as:

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

Materials - Shall normally relate to adjoining buildings. Large, isolated buildings in rural or settlement edge settings shall be clad in materials that take account of the general colour and tonal value of their background;

4.2. The design of new housing development should have regard to its setting and the character of its surroundings. Significant healthy trees and other important landscape features, such as hedgerows, ponds and watercourses shall normally be retained unless it can be shown that retention is incompatible with overall design quality and/or economic use of the site.

4.3 **Development Proposal**

4.3.1 The proposal forming this outline planning application is for 'Residential development of up to 132 dwellings, together with all ancillary works'. It will be medium density and a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced dwellings is envisaged, with a limited number of apartments. It is proposed that the units will be of compact, pitched roof form with materials reflecting those already used within the area. The residential accommodation would be provided in 2.5-3.0 storey dwellings with ridge heights which correlate with the existing dwellings along Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane. The 2.5 storey dwellings will be accommodated to the eastern boundary with the 3.0 storey dwellings set further within The Site. An open courtyard, block layout will be used with linear active frontages proposed to the common boundaries of the Harpenden Road / Petersfield / Sandridgebury Lane properties. Vehicular access will be from Harpenden Road with a pedestrian link to Harpenden Road to the northern end of The Site adjacent to the Petrol Station. A permeable network of open courtyards and footpaths will be created prioritising walking and cycling across the Site from both west to east and south to north.

4.3.2 The Site has a gentle fall from north to south, such that the north-eastern corner - which as noted is not contained by built development - is the highest and most visually prominent element of the Site. No development is proposed in this area and it will instead be utilised for a Children's Plan Area and Community Growing Spaces.

4.3.3 The Site is contained by existing residential development along its entire western boundary, the majority of the southern boundary and along the western section of its northern boundary. There is generally screening to the boundaries and the adjacent existing properties generally have deep rear gardens to allow for the creation of a positive interface and relationship. The proposals will retain and enhance (where possible) existing trees, shrubs and hedges within The Site. Planting of native trees, shrubs and hedging to the site boundaries will be included within the design of the