

development. These will help to further screen and soften the proposals creating a layered landscape effect, increase biodiversity within the site and help set it within the landscape context of the area.

- 4.3.4 The proposed buildings will sit well within the existing landscape and respond well to the existing built form within the area. The impact on the landscape character and visual amenity from this are discussed below.

## **5.0 Baseline Studies**

### **5.1 Landscape Character**

- 5.1.1 The following section describes the existing landscape character of the site and surroundings. GLVIA3 sets out that “*An assessment of landscape effects deals with the effects of change and development on landscape as a resource*”. The issue is how the proposal will affect the elements that make up the landscape and its character. The baseline landscape is described by referring to existing landscape character assessments (see below) and by a description of the site and its context.

A range of landscape effects can arise through implementation of a development. These can include:

- Change or loss of (i) elements and features or (ii) aesthetic or perceptual aspects that contribute to the character of distinctiveness of the landscape
- Addition of new elements that influence character and distinctiveness of the landscape; and
- Combined effects of these changes.

- 5.1.2 The characteristics of the existing landscape resource are considered in respect of the susceptibility of the landscape resource to the change arising from this development. The value of the existing landscape is also considered.

- 5.1.3 The effect on each landscape receptor is assessed in terms of its size or scale, the geographical extents of the area influenced and its duration and reversibility. In terms of size or scale, the judgement takes account of the extent of the existing landscape elements that will be lost or changed, and the degree to which the aesthetic or perceptual aspects or key characteristics of the landscape will be altered by removal or addition of new elements.

- 5.1.4 The general landscape effect is arrived at by considering the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and the magnitude of effect on the landscape. Effects may be either adverse or beneficial. A reasoned professional overview is then made of the individual assessments or effects to make an overall judgement.
- 5.1.5 The appraisal describes the nature of the landscape effects. The criteria used in the appraisal are set out in Appendix A.
- 5.1.6 National Character Area (NCA)  
These have been prepared by Natural England the UK government's advisors on the natural environment. They are a natural subdivision of England based on a combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and economic activity. There are 159 National Character Areas and they follow natural, rather than administrative, boundaries. They include a broad analysis of each areas characteristics.
- 5.1.7 The NCA identifies that The Site lies within Area 111 - Northern Thames Basin (see Appendix B). The adjacent NCAs are considered to be a significant distance away so as not to be affected by the proposals. The Northern Thames Basin is a diverse area which extends from Hertfordshire in the west to the Essex coast in the east. The NCA states that *'Urban expansion has been a feature of this area since the 16th century when wealthy merchants who were conducting business in London built homes on its outskirts, mainly in the Hertfordshire area. This trend increased dramatically from the mid-19th century as infrastructure improved and people could travel to work in London from the surrounding areas in an hour or less. This has put increased pressure on the area in terms of extra housing developments, schools and other necessities for expanding populations, with a consequential reduction in tranquility'*. These elements include the existing built environment, presence of the M1 and M25 and other road networks. The Campaign to Protect Rural England set out in their 'intrusion map' (2007) that 'only 13 per cent of the area (is) undisturbed' due to the network of towns, roads and other infrastructure that criss-cross this area.
- 5.1.8 As Area 111 covers such a large area the assessment can only provide a broad overview of the character of this area.

- 5.1.9 The NCA includes 'Statements of Environmental Opportunity' (SEOs). Due to its relatively small size there are limited opportunities to enhance the overall environmental status of the NCA. However the landscape proposals for the site will form an important element in the site layout and will include enhancements at a local level.
- 5.1. 10 The East of England Landscape Framework provides a broad scale understanding of landscape, whilst local Landscape Character Assessments provide greater detail and understanding of local scale variations in landscape character.
- 5.1. Landscape Character Area (LCA)
- 11 Hertfordshire's landscape character assessment describes the variations in character between different types of landscape in the county. It provides more detail than the NCA. The LCA identifies that The Site lies within Area 102 – Ayres End Valleys and Ridges (see Appendix C). This area is bounded by the A1081 to the west, Harpenden and Wheathampstead to the north and Sandridge and St. Albans to the east and south. The Site is located to the south western edge of the LCA which is described as 'A network of dry interconnecting valleys with a sense of rural seclusion despite the close proximity of settlements on the higher ground to the rear of the smaller plateau areas on the fringes of this area. The visual containment is aided by the prominent small and medium sized woods located on the upper reaches of the valley sides. Narrow lanes and equestrian activities create a relatively relaxed feel. The plateau areas are more open, with large arable fields and intermittent clipped hedgerows. On the fringes of the adjacent urban settlements there is a greater emphasis on recreational activities, including playing fields, equestrian activity, golf and community woodland'. The LCA recognises that 'While the new playing fields on the A1081 represent a substantial development in the open countryside, the planting proposals include a number of copses, small woods and new hedges which respect the local pattern and native species mixes'.
- 5.1. 12 The LCA identifies the Key Characteristics of the area:
- open dry valleys overlooked by smaller areas of plateau on the fringes
  - quiet area with few visual detractors except the A1081 and mainline railway to the west
  - small woods on the upper slopes emphasize the valleys

- area served by narrow, winding roads lined by dense mixed hedgerows
- mixed arable, pasture and recreational land uses
- number of equestrian establishments associated with small country houses, including The Grove and Sandridgebury
- locally prominent built edges to adjacent settlements
- isolated properties or small clusters of dwellings, generally with strong vernacular architecture

5.1. The LCA confirms that the landscape type is frequent within the County

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5.1. The 'Strategy and Guidelines for Managing Change' are: Improve and Conserve.

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5.1. The site is not covered by any local or national landscape designations but is located within the Green Belt.

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#### 5.1. Comparing The Site Against Landscape Character Area

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An assessment of landscape character of The Site and its immediate context has been carried out, providing a more detailed appraisal than those of the published studies.

5.1. The Site is located to the rear of Harpenden Road with Sandridgebury Lane running along part of the southern boundary. It is an area of semi-improved grassland situated to the urban edge of St Albans. It has not been farmed for more than 20 years and is predominately open. Trees, shrubs and hedges form screening to the boundaries. Together with local gently undulating topography they help contain, screen or soften views to and from The Site. The landscape character of The Site is set by its management as grassland and the surrounding development. It is at odds with the landscape character around The Site which includes the built form of St Albans to the south and west, the Playing Fields to the north and agricultural fields to the east. However due to its relatively small size and contained nature The Site has a limited effect on the local area.

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5.1. The Site has no features which are key characteristics of the LCA. Its maintenance as a grass field gives it some similarity to a pasture but it is not used for this purpose and it therefore more regular and more formal in appearance. Within the localised area the

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presence of the A1081 and mainline railway (to the east of The Site) and locally prominent built edges to adjacent settlements are relevant to the LCA. Sandridgebury Lane - which runs to the south of The Site – resonates with the 'narrow, winding roads lined by dense mixed hedgerows' characteristic of the LCA. The relatively small size of The Site means that it does not contribute to the character of the LCA in its own right.

#### 5.1. Contribution to the Landscape Character Area

19 The Site is assessed to make the following contribution to the Landscape Character Area:

**Neutral Contribution:** Where the Area is not representative of the Local Landscape Character but includes some attractive features in its own right.

#### 5.1. Landscape Value

20 In terms of "landscape value" it is appropriate to examine the role of the site and its immediate context in terms of the range of local factors set out in the GLVIA3 (Box 5.1, page 84). This considers the landscape in terms of a range of aspects as set out below. As a starting point, landscape designations have been considered.

5.1. Landscape Designations: The site itself is not subject to any national, local or other  
21 landscape designations.

5.1. Landscape Quality (Condition): The landscape context of the application site is  
22 predominately of a grassland field with boundary trees, shrubs and hedgerows. The Site sits adjacent to the built footprint of St Albans to the west and south, open fields to the east and the Woollam Playing Fields to the north. The overall fabric of the landscape is considered to be poor-moderate and limited giving a landscape condition of low quality.

5.1. Scenic Quality: The site is contained by boundary vegetation and local topography.  
23 The Site is not especially distinctive and is not remarkable in terms of scenic quality.

5.1. Rarity and Representativeness: The site has no features which are representative of  
24 the local landscape character type within which it is located. There are no special or rare features within the site.

- 5.1. Conservation Interest: the site is not covered by any designations for ecological, archaeological or cultural heritage interest; Therefore it is not considered to have notable conservation interest.
- 5.1. Recreational Value: There are no public rights of way through The Site and no footpaths run immediately adjacent to The Site. Views of The Site from other public footpaths are generally partially or fully contained by the local topography, built form and existing vegetation in the area. There is a direct view from Sandridgebury Lane immediately outside (to the south) of The Site through a gap created for an existing field gate access.
- 5.1. Perpetual Aspects: The site has an urban edge character due to the presence of the adjacent built form of St Albans. It is influenced by these urbanising elements including the local road and train network. It is not noted for its wildness. The area is not tranquil.
- 5.1. Associations: It is understood that the site has no notable associations with artists, writers or other people of interest or with significant events in history.
- 5.1. It is concluded therefore that – having appraised the factors set out above – that The Site is of **Low Value**.
- 5.1. Susceptibility to Change
- This refers to the capacity of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without “undue consequence” for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies. The appraisal has set out that The Site is not distinctive in its own right and has no features which are characteristic of the LCA. The main change will be that the area of grassland will change to a residential use with the presence of dwellings and associated infrastructure. Though some low quality trees will be removed within the garden area of 126 Harpenden Road the majority of trees will be retained. This includes the better quality trees to the boundaries. Trees and hedges within the wider landscape will also be retained. The development will be designed to a high standard. Where possible and relevant the site layout and landscape proposals for the site will address planning policies set out within St Albans City and District Councils Local Plan (1994). It also reflects any relevant strategies and guidelines set out in the NCA and LCA. Overall The Site is assessed to have the following capacity to absorb change:

5.1. **Medium capacity:** An established landscape where change of an appropriate nature  
31 could be absorbed without loss of landscape character

5.1. Sensitivity of the Landscape Receptors

32 Landscape receptors need to be assessed in terms of their sensitivity, combining judgements of the susceptibility to the types of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape. In relation to this application The Site is assessed to have **Low Sensitivity** as this is an ordinary landscape of low value and scenic quality and limited valued characteristics. It will be tolerant of the change brought about by an appropriate development.

5.1. Full detailed analysis of the potential effects on landscape receptors can be found at  
33 Appendix E 'The Landscape Effects Table'.



Photograph D – looking east from Harpenden Road towards proposed pedestrian access to The Site. The Petrol Station is located to the south of this access.



Photograph E – looking east from Harpenden Road towards the entrance to Petersfield.

## **5.2 Visual Baseline**

- 5.2.1 Fieldwork has been conducted to establish the role of the existing site in views from the surrounding area and to identify key representative views. It has identified the site's general visibility within the surrounding landscape (the visual envelope), who the key visual receptors are going to be and their degree of sensitivity to the existing views and the proposed changes. Photographs of representative views in the direction of the site from the surrounding area have been selected to support this analysis. These are set out in Appendix D. The location of the viewpoints and the extent of the roads and footpaths surveyed are shown on Aerial Photo - Photo Viewpoints.
- 5.2.2 The photographs have been taken to show a view from a specific vantage point, or to demonstrate a representative view for those receptors that are passing through the landscape – such as those on public rights of way. The photographs may establish varying degrees of visibility and include both short, medium and long range views. The photographs were taken in March and April 2021 and the effect of potential seasonal changes in the landscape have been taken into account when analysing the visual effects on these views and potential receptors.



- 5.2.3 It is important to remember that visual receptors are all people. For each affected viewpoint the assessment considers both susceptibility to change in views and the value attached to views. The visual receptors most susceptible to change are generally likely to include:
- residents at home;
  - people engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way whose attention or interest is likely to be focus on the landscape or particular views;
  - visitors to heritage assets or other attractions, where views of surroundings are an important contributor to the experience;
  - communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area.
- 5.2.4 Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes tend to fall into an intermediate category of susceptibility to change. Where travel involves recognised scenic routes awareness of views is likely to be particularly high.
- 5.2.5 Visual receptors likely to be less sensitive to change include:
- people engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape
  - people at their place of work or school whose attention may be focused on their work or activity, not on their surroundings.
- 5.2.6 The following visual receptors have been identified as being those that may experience the effects of the proposed development. Full detailed analysis of the potential effects on visual receptors can be found at Appendix E 'The Visual Effects Table'.
- **Receptor A** - Residents of Residential Development adjacent to The Site (Harpenden Road, Petersfield and Sandridgebury Lane;
  - **Receptor B** – Users of Woollam Playing Fields;
  - **Receptor C** - Users of New Greens Avenue, Harpenden Road, Valley Road and Sandridgebury Lane (Ref: Photo Viewpoint 1, 3-4 and 6-8);

- **Receptor D - PRow Users – Footpaths 9, 17, 94 and 96 (Ref: Photo Viewpoints 2, 5 and 9-12).**

5.2.7 Each of the visual effects is evaluated in terms of its size or scale, the geographical extent of the area influenced and its duration or reversibility.

5.2.8 In terms of scale or size, the magnitude of visual effects takes account of:

- the scale of the change in the views with respect to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition, including proportion of the view occupied by the proposed development;
- the degree of contrast or integration of any new features or changes in the landscape with the existing or remaining landscape elements and characteristics in terms of form, scale and mass, ridge heights, colour and texture;
- the nature of the view of the proposed development, in terms of the relative amount of time over which it will be experienced and whether views will be full, partial or glimpsed.

5.2.9 The geographical extent of the visual effect in each viewpoint is likely to reflect:

- the angle of view in relation to the main activity of the receptor
- the distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development
- the extent of the area over which the changes would be visible.

5.2.10 As with landscape effects, the duration of the effect could be short to long term or permanent and the same definitions apply. The visual criteria used in the appraisal are set out in Appendix A.

#### 5.2.11 Photographs and Visualisation

Where possible the photographs and visualisation used in this report have been taken following advice set out in Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note: 'TGN 06/19 Visual Representation of development proposals'. Photographs were taken in March-April 2021. Weather conditions on the day of the assessment were generally dry with periods of overcast and sunny weather. Deciduous vegetation was not in leaf though some evergreen vegetation was present.

5.2.12 The view-points are set out as:

- Local Views (0 m - 750 m from the site)
- Medium Range Views (750 m - 1500 m from the site)
- Long Range Views (over 1500 m from the site)

5.2.13 In relation to this assessment all measurements are taken from the approximate centre of the existing site but it is stated if the viewpoint is adjacent to The Site boundary. These viewpoints are assessed below in relation to the existing and proposed site layout.

5.2.14 Owing to existing vegetation screening, local topography and built form the majority of views towards The Site are Local Views from the road and public footpath network around The Site. There are no reasonable public views from the north of The Site (as there are no public vantage points here. Private views are limited to properties immediately adjacent to The Site and the Woollam Playing Fields.

5.2.15 Local Views

Photo Viewpoint 1 (approximately 250 m from the centre of The Site)

This photograph is taken from the junction of New Greens Avenue and Carnegie Road. The existing vegetation – including trees and hedging – within the green space along New Greens Avenue and the existing built form set the context for this view. The existing dwellings along Harpenden Road and the movement of vehicles along Harpenden Road are visible but these are screened and softened by existing vegetation. These will be more prominent when vegetation is out of leaf but will still act to break up views towards The Site. The noise from the adjacent road network – form part of the experience of this view. It is relative natural for users moving east along Carnegie Road to look towards The Site but other users will be concentrating on their direction of travel to the north and south along New Greens Avenue. The elements within this view will predominately be retained as part of the proposed development. The only significant change will be the demolition of 126 Harpenden Road and the introduction of the vehicular access to The Site. This is to the north-east of this viewpoint and will not be readily visible from this point due to the existing vegetation within the area of green space.

5.2.16 Photo Viewpoint 2 (approximately 200 m from centre of The Site)

This photograph is taken from the junction of Footpath 17 and Harpenden Road. The built form along Harpenden Road – including the Petrol Station – and the movement of vehicles along this road form the main context of this view. Other elements such as road barriers and signage are also prominent here. There are no reasonable views of the main area of the development due to the presence of the existing dwellings and vegetation within the garden areas. There may be glimpsed views of roofs beyond the existing built development. The proposed pedestrian access – to the north – will be introduced beyond the Petrol Station but will not be a dominant feature in the street scene. The existing boundary treatment to the Petrol Station will be retained.

5.2.17 Photo Viewpoint 3 (opposite proposed pedestrian access to The Site)

This photograph is taken from the footpath along Harpenden Road opposite the proposed pedestrian access to The Site. The existing Petrol Station and the movement of vehicles along Harpenden Road form the dominant elements of this view. Users will be moving north-south along Harpenden Road and their focus will be on their direction of travel. The access will be a change to the current situation as the existing fence and self-set trees will be replaced by the access surface and proposed boundary vegetation. The use of this access will be sporadic.

5.2.18 Photo Viewpoint 4 (opposite proposed vehicular access to The Site)

This viewpoint is taken from the footpath along Harpenden Road opposite 126 Harpenden Road. The movement of vehicles along Harpenden Road and the existing built form are the main elements of this view. No. 126 will be demolished to make way for the proposed vehicular access which will be similar to the access point at Petersfield to the south. The existing trees and other vegetation will be removed and replaced with landscaping along the access road. This will frame views through The Site to the proposed areas of open space.

5.2.19 Photo Viewpoint 5 (approximately 250 m from centre of The Site)

This photograph is taken from the junction of Footpath 94 and Harpenden Road. The built form along Harpenden Road and the movement of vehicles along the road form the main context of this view. The Site is located to the north-east of this viewpoint. The presence of the existing built form (including Petersfield) and vegetation within the garden areas blocks views towards The Site.

5.2.20 Photo Viewpoint 6 (opposite proposed pedestrian access to The Site)

This view is taken from Sandridgebury Lane opposite the existing field gate access to The Site. This is formed of a small break in the existing boundary vegetation. There are views of the existing development along Harpenden Road including dwellings and the Petrol Station. There is no public footpath here but this would be a natural view for pedestrians walking here to look through the `gap` and possibly take refuge from passing vehicles. Those using cycles or vehicles will have less inclination to look through the `gap` due to their higher speeds of travel and because this is away from any direction of travel. The view would be more fleeting for these users and the view is filtered by the presence of boundary vegetation.

5.2.21 Photo Viewpoint 7 (approximately 215 m from centre of The Site)

This view is taken from the junction of Sandridgebury Lane and Valley Road looking approximately north-west towards The Site. There is no public footpath along these roads and this is not a natural view for users as it is away from any direction of travel and the views are blocked or heavily filtered by the presence of boundary vegetation. There are glimpsed views of the development along Harpenden Road.

5.2.22 Photo Viewpoint 8 (approximately 550 m from centre of The Site)

This view is taken from the bend in the road on Sandridgebury Lane where it joins a private access which leads to farms and properties to the north. There are views towards The Site through gaps in the existing boundary hedge and – at the time of the assessment – due to the hedge being out of leaf. There are therefore glimpsed and filtered views of the development along Harpenden Road, Sandridgebury Lane and St Albans Girls School. The communication mast in Porters Wood Industrial Estate can also be seen from this position. There will be more screening to these views when the hedges are in full leaf. This is not a natural viewpoint as vehicles moving west along Sandridgebury Lane are most likely to be concentrating on their direction of travel and the winding lane ahead. There are no public footpaths here though some pedestrian use may occur. These pedestrians may stop to rest briefly at this point but there are no obvious reasons to look towards The Site.

5.2.23 Photo Viewpoint 9 (approximately 750 m from centre of The Site)

This is taken from the end of Footpath 96 in close proximity to Sandridgebury Lane. It is at the bottom of the embankment to the main line railway. The railway forms an important context of this view both due to the presence of the embankment and associated railway infrastructure but also due to the noise and movement of trains