

here. There are other urbanising elements in this view including the presence of telegraph poles which cross the agricultural field. Looking towards The Site the agricultural field forms the main element of the view. The existing built edge of St Albans is visible as a line of development along the horizon. This includes dwellings on Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane, St Albans Girls School and infrastructure within Woollam Playing Fields. The communication mast at Porters Wood Industrial Estate is readily visible due to its size. Floodlights proposed within the St Albans Girls School (to 15.0 m height) may also become visible in this view once constructed.

5.2.24 Photo Viewpoint 10 (approximately 700 m from centre of The Site)

This view is taken from Footpath 96 where it turns west to run along or through Long Spring Wood. The existing built edge of St Albans is visible as a line of development along the horizon. This includes dwellings on Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane and infrastructure within Woollam Playing Fields. These are significantly screened by intervening vegetation and topography. The agricultural fields and Long Spring Wood form the main elements in this view. However the noise and movement of trains along the adjacent railway line and the noise associated with the operation of Porters Wood Industrial Estate to the south are an important backdrop to users of this footpath and forms part of their experience of using this footpath. Car movements and noise take place along Sandridgebury Lane

5.2.25 Photo Viewpoint 11 (approximately 450 m from centre of The Site)

The main route for the footpath is through the wood but an alternative route runs on its outer edge. There are no realistic views towards The Site from the wood so the outer route was used for these viewpoints. The built edge of St Albans is more prominent in this view when compared to Photo Viewpoint 10 but still screened and softened by intervening vegetation and topography. The noise and movement of trains along the adjacent railway line and the noise associated with the operation of Porters Wood Industrial Estate to the south are an important backdrop to users of this footpath and forms part of their experience of using this footpath. Car movements and noise take place along Sandridgebury Lane

5.2.26 Medium Range Views

Photo Viewpoint 12 (approximately 1200 m from centre of The Site)

This view is taken from the bridge over the main line railway. This forms part of Footpath 9. The railway runs in a cutting here and the bridge is sunk below the level of the surrounding land to the west. There are no views of The Site from this viewpoint.

5.2.27 Long Range Views

There are no reasonable long range public views towards the site.

5.2.28 Summary of Visual Baseline

Due to the adjacent built form, local topography and blocks of vegetation – including trees and hedgerows – public views are limited to areas within relatively close proximity to the application site. This landscape is ostensibly bounded by areas of public access:

- Footpaths 17, 94 and 96 and footpaths along Harpenden Road;
- New Green Avenue, Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane

Footpath 96 is unlit except where it passes close to areas of existing development. Sandridgebury Lane is unlit once it passes beyond the built footprint of St Albans. Private views are limited to dwellings to the northern, southern and western site boundaries. Any private views from the wider countryside – including those on higher ground – are blocked or significantly screened by retained vegetation and the separation to the proposed development. See Aerial Photo – Site Context Plan.

5.2.29 The built form and vegetation screening around The Site and the road network and its use form important elements within the visual envelope. The landform, buildings, trees and hedgerows within the wider landscape block or screen views towards The Site. All these elements – both man-made and natural - help contain the space and restrict views of The Site.

5.2.30 Overall it is assessed that the localised area has:

Low Sensitivity: Locations where the view is incidental but not important to the receptors and the nature of the view is of limited value or poorly composed with numerous detracting features and is tolerant of a large degree of change. The development will cause very minor changes to the view over a wide area or minor changes over a limited area.

6.0 **Landscape Strategy and Design Philosophy**

(see Landscape Master Plan – LMP/126HRSAH/030 A)

- 6.1 The existing site predominately consists of a large grass field with trees and boundary hedging to the northern and eastern boundaries and more formal (urban) boundary treatments associated with the development along Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane. The land gently falls from the northern boundary to the centre of The Site then gently rises to the southern boundary. The trees and hedges to the boundaries help to screen and soften both The Site and the existing development and the majority of this will be retained as part of the proposed development. They offer an instant sense of scale and maturity to the proposed development. The proposed dwellings will have ridge heights which correlate to the existing dwellings on Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane. They will be set back from the eastern boundary.
- 6.2 As set out above the visibility of The Site to the general public is contained by the local topography, local built form and vegetation. However landscaping has been considered as an important part of the design of the development. This will help to set and integrate the proposals within the existing landscape and the planting of significant vegetation is proposed. The landscape proposals are set out below but the final proposals will be produced as part of a full planning application and in consultation with the Local Planning Authority as required. They will comply with Policy 74 of the St Albans City and District Local Plan (1994) and retain trees and hedgerows whilst providing a net increase in biodiversity through enhancement of existing features. These measures ensure that the development provides at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity post-development in line with the NPPF.

6.3 Existing trees and hedges within The Site will be retained and incorporated into the design to offer maturity, continuity, wildlife and biodiversity benefits to the layout. The trees that will need to be removed to implement the development will be mitigated by the planting of native trees. The planting of additional native trees, hedgerows, shrubs and wildflower grassland will provide visual and wildlife connectivity (Green Corridors) within the landscape and add age diversity to the tree stock. These corridors will be robust elements allowing movement of wildlife between populations and helping to improve biodiversity. They will be structural elements within the landscape. Some of the existing and proposed trees are (or will be) above 10.0 m in height. This will be above the height of the proposed dwellings. Overall this vegetation will provide screening to the boundaries and help to set the proposed development in the landscape.

6.4 There will be more formal planting areas directly around the buildings. A variety of trees, hedges, shrubs and herbaceous species will be used. Plants will be chosen with care so that they will provide an attractive landscape setting for the development, screen the development and be beneficial to wildlife in the form of nectar (flowers), fruit (berries and nuts) and by providing shelter and nesting sites. Plant lists - such as the RHS 'Plants for Pollinators' and research such as RHS 'Plants for Bugs' - will help form the basis of the species proposed. The range of species and plant heights will create a variety of habitats which will help increase biodiversity within the development.

- Tree species would include native species such as Oak, Beech and Hawthorn as well as suitable non-native species such as Crab Apple (*Malus* spp), Cherry (*Prunus* spp) and Maple (*Acer* spp).
- Shrub species will include: native species such as Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) and Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*) with non-native species such as *Berberis* spp, *Buxus* spp, *Ceanothus* spp, *Cornus* spp, *Escallonia* spp, *Lavendula* spp and *Viburnum* spp.
- Hedgerows will include native species including Hawthorn, Beech, Privet, *Elaeagnus* and *Viburnum*.
- Herbaceous species to include: *Bergenia* 'Beethoven', *Erysimum* 'Bowles Mauve', *Geranium* 'Johnsons Blue', *Geranium macrorrhizum* 'Bevans Variety' and *Pulmonaria* 'Sissinghurst White'.

- 6.5 Central to the site is an area of open space accommodating the existing pond, which has been a major influence on the layout of the development, and forms key focal landscape feature. In this location, the open space experiences natural surveillance from the surrounding residential properties. Public open space runs through the site associated with the new footpaths and green corridors.
- 6.6 New roosting opportunities for birds and bats could be created on the site by installing bird and bat boxes or bat tubes on retained mature trees or attached to structures. Gaps within boundary fencing of 130x130 mm will be created to allow movement of small mammals - such as hedgehogs - and amphibians around the site and into the wider landscape.

7.0 The Nature of the Change

- 7.1 To assess the nature of the change as a result of the proposals, it is appropriate to appraise the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development upon the existing landscape character and visual environment within which the site is set. These are set out below. See Appendix A for definitions of terms used below for Landscape and Visual Assessment

7.2 Effect Upon Landscape Character

(see Table One – Criteria for Significance for Landscape Effects)

7.2.1 Construction

All construction works would be carried out in accordance with best practice procedures to minimise any adverse impact on landscape character. These will include working hours and other methods of working, operation of the site and phasing of the site development. Appropriate methods will be adopted to protect retained trees and vegetation. These will include BS 5837:2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction. Recommendations' or subsequent revisions.

- 7.2.2 The landscape effects during construction are of a transient nature and, given that the timescales involved are relatively short, this is considered to be of limited significance overall. Inevitably there will be some disruption to the site landscape and its immediate surroundings during this phase of the works. However it will be localised

and limited in extent, resulting in a **Minor Adverse Effect** upon the site and its immediate context during the Construction Phase. Effects upon the wider landscape are considered to have a **Negligible Effect**.

7.2.3 The Site is not covered by any designation for its landscape features or quality. It is not within, or close to, an international or national protected site such as a 'National Park' or 'Area of Outstanding National Beauty' nor does it comprise a 'valued landscape'. Direct effects upon the landscape fabric of The Site are considered to be of localised and of limited significance. There are some landscape features – trees and hedgerows - within, and adjacent to, The Site which will be retained as part of the proposals.

7.2.4 Northern Thames Basin (111) – National Character Area (NCA)

The proposed development will result in direct changes to The Site. However the potential effects upon the wider landscape will be very limited. The new buildings will occur within a very small area of 'Northern Thames Basin' NCA. The landscape strategy will increase the variety of habitats and structural landscape features within The Site. Biodiversity will be increased. The development will have a relatively limited influence upon the surrounding landscape given the sites level of physical and visual containment which is offered by the existing local topography, existing built form and intervening and proposed vegetation. The resultant effect upon the NCA is assessed to be **Negligible**.

7.2.5 'Ayres End Valleys and Ridges' (102) – Landscape Character Area (LCA)

The site occupies a small area of the 'Ayres End Valleys and Ridges' LCA. The most notable change will be replacement of the existing grassland with new dwellings and associated infrastructure – such as the access. There will be additional landscape enhancements to The Site. The new development is considered to result in a **Negligible** effect upon the LCA as although there will be a change in built form in the landscape there will also be beneficial improvements to the landscape through the appropriate landscape proposals to be provided and these are considered and weighted within the relatively large scale of the LCA.

7.2.6 Site and Immediate Context

In terms of The Site itself and its immediate context, the landscape effects will be similarly limited. Inevitable there will be some initial disruption to the local landscape (as there is with any development) as the proposed development changes the layout

and form of the land from grassland to residential use. However existing trees and vegetation to The Site boundaries will be retained and landscape enhancement will take place through the provision of additional vegetation to the development boundaries and within the development.

- 7.2.7 The replacement of the existing grassland with the proposed site layout will not have a notable effect on The Site. The development will be designed and laid out to a high standard. It will introduce beneficial landscape elements and offset any short term adverse effect. As part of the assessment carried out for the Landscape Character Baseline it was established that The Site makes a Neutral Contribution to the Landscape Character Area, is of Low Value and has a Medium Capacity to absorb appropriate change without loss of landscape character. It has a Low Sensitivity.
- 7.2.8 Considering the above points it is considered that there will be a **Low** magnitude of change resulting in a **Negligible** landscape effect overall in the long term. The overall significance of effects can be deduced from the matrix set out in Appendix A (J).

7.3 Effect Upon Visual Environment

(see Table Two – Criteria for Significance for Visual Effects)

- 7.3.1 As set out above fieldwork has established the site's general visibility within the surrounding landscape (the visual envelope) - see Aerial Photo - Photo Viewpoints. Visibility within this visual envelope will vary due to various elements within it such as topography, built form and existing vegetation which will individually or collectively provide localised screening and/or filtering of the view.
- 7.3.2 There may be further opportunities for views of the proposed development from outside this visual envelope though the overall distances involved would significantly reduce visibility and intervening screening elements would reduce perceptibility to an insignificant level. It is therefore assessed that these views – within the overall LVIA process - would not give rise to any major or significant changes such that it would result in any marked adverse effects on these visual receptors.
- 7.3.3 As set out above the visual envelope of the proposed development is generally restricted to adjacent to The Site and immediate surroundings and from Public Rights of Way to the east, south and west and along Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane. All these views will be in the context of the existing features: the development

adjacent to The Site and surrounding agricultural land, landform and vegetation such as trees and hedgerows. This includes movement along the adjacent road and railway networks and the influence of the adjacent settlement edge. The following assessment of the visual effects of the proposed development are made.

7.3.4 Construction

Given the progressive nature of the construction process, the potential visual effects arising will vary throughout the phase of works. Construction activities, including plant and vehicle movement, will be visible at times from receptors closest to the site though the extent will be dependent upon proximity to The Site, orientation of views and (potentially) the time of the year. Receptors with limited views of The Site are more likely to experience confined views or glimpses of a specific construction activity rather than the whole construction site.

7.3.5 During the Construction Phase, some short term reversible adverse effects upon the local visual resource will occur. The majority of these will be resultant views of construction vehicles and machinery used to build the development and the structures as they are erected and are not considered to be significant. All construction works will be carried out in full accordance with best practice procedures to minimise and protect, as far as practicable, potentially adverse effects – such as noise - upon the local visual resource.

7.3.6 There will be some initial adverse effects on the local visual resource however this will be dependent on the visibility of The Site by the visual receptors. Residents within close proximity of The Site will also have views of construction features though these will be screened or filtered by existing vegetation, topography and their orientation to The Site.

7.3.7 The development proposal is of relatively moderate scale. The construction effects are therefore likely to be relatively short term but will be more severe for receptors in the immediate vicinity of the landscape. Effects will largely be confined to the application site and its immediate environs. Effects are therefore considered to range from **Minor Adverse** for sensitive receptors adjacent to the development to **Negligible** for receptors at greater distances from The Site.

7.3.8 Completed Development (Following Completion of the Construction Phase)

The impact of the completed development and the consequential effects on visual receptors has been assessed. Immediately on completion, it is judged that the

proposed development would result in a **Negligible** effect on The Site and immediate surrounding and a **Negligible** impact on the wider landscape due to the screening provided by the topography, built form and vegetation in the area.

- 7.3.9 Landscape mitigation is proposed as part of the development. The more sensitive area of the visual envelope – along the eastern boundary - could be planted at the start of the Construction Phase. This would allow vegetation to establish and develop during the Construction Phase. The existing and proposed trees, hedging other vegetation here will provide a significant landscape buffer. Visual effects would again vary depending on the sensitivity and location of the receptors, resulting in a **Negligible** effect on the receptors adjacent to The Site and its immediate vicinity and a **Negligible** effect on the wider landscape. In the longer term the proposed landscaping will mature and further integrate the development into the local landscape.
- 7.3.10 The availability of relatively open views to The Site are limited to the south and east of The Site. Even these views are screened or softened to some degree by vegetation within The Site or the wider landscape. All views are local range views – less than 750 m from the centre of The Site. Localised topography, vegetation cover and the existing built environment restrict visibility of The Site from the majority of the wider landscape.
- 7.3.11 The following provides a summary of the specific visual effects assessment included at Appendix E.
- 7.3.12 Residential Properties
The potential visibility of the proposed development is limited to a relatively small number of existing properties closest to The Site: the residential developments adjacent to the northern, southern and western boundaries. Receptors A. The exact layout of these private properties is not known. The dwellings on Harpenden Road have long rear gardens and properties on Sandridgebury Lane are orientated to the north-west – generally away from the development. The residents of 19 Sandridgebury Lane are adjacent to The Site and their rear garden runs along the boundary. Part of this section of the site will be developed but part will be retained as open space. A property on Petersfield is located adjacent to the boundary. However dwellings within The Site will be set back from the boundary with rear gardens up to the boundary. The relationship to both these existing properties will be considered at

the final design stage and will be set out so as to have no significant impact on these properties. The proposed dwellings will have ridge heights which correlate to the existing dwellings in the area. Existing boundary vegetation will be retained as part of the development which already provides good screening to these boundaries. These users are assessed as having a low visual susceptibility and the resultant visual effects are therefore assessed to be **Negligible** in the long term.

7.3.13 Users of Woollam Playing Fields

Users of the Playing Fields will do so on a transient and/or sporadic basis. Their main focus will be the activities they are involved in rather than the views to the south. These views are currently screened by existing vegetation. It is assumed that at least some of this was planted as part of the Planning Approval for the Playing Fields development. These users are assessed as having a low visual susceptibility and the resultant visual effects are therefore assessed to be **Negligible** in the long term.

7.3.14 Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

There are PRoWs which run in the wider countryside outside The Site. Views towards The Site from most of these (Footpaths 9, 17 and 94) are limited or blocked due to local topography, built form or existing vegetation. Views of The Site are generally limited to those from Footpath 96 to the east and south-east. These are within the context of the noise and movement from the adjacent road and railway network and the use of Porters Park Industrial Estate. The existing built edge of St Albans is visible along the horizon and becomes more prominent as users move west along the footpath. However much of this built edge is screened and softened by existing vegetation and topography. The proposed development will site along the edge of the existing built edge of St Albans. Whilst it may be closer to some of these viewpoints it will sit within an existing landscape setting that will help assimilate it into the landscape. Resultant visual effects are considered to be **Negligible**.

7.3.15 Users of Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane adjacent to The Site

Close range views of the proposed development are restricted to users of Harpenden Road near the proposed pedestrian access and Sandridgebury Lane (Receptor C) where it runs directly adjacent to the existing field gate to The Site. Otherwise views are significantly screened and blocked by the existing built form and vegetation in the area. There are frequent vehicle movements along these roads. Existing vegetation will be retained and reinforced and enhanced through the planting of further native vegetation. This will further screen the development. The presence of the proposed

development will not be unexpected given the presence of the existing development here and its association with the built form of St Albans. These users are assessed as having a low visual susceptibility and the resultant visual effects are therefore assessed to be **Negligible**. In the longer term the proposed landscaping will mature and further integrate the development into the local landscape.

8.0 Summary and Conclusion

- 8.1 This LVIA has appraised landscape character and visual amenity, and the resulting landscape and visual effects, in relation to the proposed residential development of The Site. The landscape and visual effects have been considered in relation to the mitigation provided by the Landscape Master Plan.
- 8.2 The Landscape Master Plan has been designed with consideration to the information gathered as part of baseline studies and through the findings of the LVIA. The proposals has been designed so that development sits within an attractive, varied and useable landscape that will screen the development and integrate it into the local area.
- 8.3 The site has a landscape character with a low value and a low susceptibility to change to this form of development. As such, it has been assessed as being able to accommodate an appropriate and well-designed and considered development of this scale.
- 8.4 The Site is considered to be visually well-contained within the context of the wider landscape. The existing local topography and features within the landscape combine to provide limited views to a small number of residential receptors, users of PRoW 96, Harpenden Road and Sandridgebury Lane . Whilst there will be inevitable minor adverse impacts on the landscape and visual receptors during construction, after completion the overall visual effects within the wider countryside are considered to be negligible in the long term.
- 8.5 To the east of The Site the area becomes more rural but is heavily influenced by the main line railway which runs north-south through the landscape. Public views from here are limited to Footpath 96 and along Sandridgebury Lane. In relation to views from here the proposals will see the introduction of development which sits within the area of development bound by Woollam Playing Fields and residential development to

the north and residential development on Sandridgebury Lane to the south. The proposed ridge heights and materials used will reflect those currently used in the local area. Existing vegetation to the boundaries will be retained and reinforced with the addition of further trees and other vegetation. Some of the existing trees are over 10.0 m height and some of the proposed trees will grow to a height of over 10.0 m which is above the height of the proposed dwellings. Overall this vegetation will provide screening to the boundaries and help to set the proposed development in a mature and developing landscape.

- 8.6 Views from the west include urbanising elements such as the existing built form along Harpenden Road and the general edge of settlement of St Albans. The proposals will sit behind the existing development and vegetation and will not be readily visible from these viewpoints.
- 8.7 Impacts are therefore considered to be acceptable within the landscape context and would not result in any overall landscape and visual harm. Therefore, in my view there are no landscape, character or visual impact reasons to prevent the development of the site with this scale and form of layout.