

Proof of Evidence

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Of

UBU Landscape Architects

Site: **Land to North of Chiswell Green Lane,
Chiswell Green, St Albans**

On behalf of Appellant:
Mr S Collins, Headlands Way Limited

Appeal Reference Numbers:
APP/B1930/W/22/3312277

Planning Application Reference numbers:
5/2021/3194/LSM

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Proof of Evidence covers matters relating to landscape character and design. It has been prepared on behalf of Mr S Collins and in relation to the decision of St Albans City & District Council (“SADC”), pursuant to Application No. 5/2021/3194 made on Mr Collins’ behalf, to refuse outline planning permission for the residential development of his site to the north of Chiswell Green Lane, Chiswell Green.
- 1.2. The appeal against the above refusal of permission has been co-joined with another appeal against the refusal of a second outline planning application, submitted to SADC by a different party, for the residential development of a nearby site to the south of Chiswell Green Lane, Chiswell Green.
- 1.3. This Proof of Evidence primarily focuses on the reasons for refusal for the site to the north of Chiswell Green, but will also consider potential cumulative effects of the combined sites where appropriate.
- 1.4. The application for the northern site was registered as a valid application (Application No. 5/2021/3194) in November 2021, and was refused by resolution of the SADC Planning Committee on 17th October 2022, followed by the issue of a Decision Notice on 25th October 2022.
- 1.5. The application was refused by the Council for two reasons, the first reason of which refers to harm to the landscape character and appearance - as follows (with the particularly relevant wording for the purposes of this Proof of Evidence highlighted):

“1. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the proposed development represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021. In addition to the in-principle harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, other **harm is identified as a result of the proposed development in terms of:** its detrimental impact on **the openness of the Green Belt**, harm to Green Belt purposes, **harm to landscape character and appearance**, loss of high quality agricultural land, and impacts on social and physical infrastructure. The benefits comprise the provision of up to 330 affordable housing units including potential for self-build units at the site which would contribute significantly towards

meeting an identified housing need in the District, and potential for provision of a significant area of public open space and a new public footpath. The potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is not clearly outweighed by other considerations; and as a result the Very Special Circumstances required to allow for approval of inappropriate development in the Green Belt do not exist in this case. The proposal is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policy S1 of the St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 and Policy 1 of the St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994.”

- 1.6. Given that reference is made above to the general principles of inappropriate development within the Green Belt, and the detrimental impact this could have on its openness, I have also considered these aspects in my Proof of Evidence where appropriate - although matters of planning and Green Belt policy are principally addressed in the evidence of others, including Mr Steve Fidgett on Planning Balance; and Mr Brian Parker on the Planning and Housing Crises in St Albans.
- 1.7. The evidence which I provide for this appeal has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions irrespective of by whom I am instructed.

2. Role and Involvement

- 2.1. In May 2021, UBU Landscape Architects were commissioned by the agent acting on behalf of Mr Collins to prepare and compile a suite of supporting landscape drawings and documents. This was for the production of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CD 4.17) to identify the landscape baseline conditions of the site north of Chiswell Green Lane, Chiswell Green, and to ascertain the potential effects on the landscape character and visual amenity should a proposed development for up to 330 houses be brought forward on the site. At the time of assessment, UBU were only appointed to consider the principle of housing development and potential mitigation that could be implemented to offset or reduce any identified potential effects.

- 2.2. Subsequently. I have been instructed by the Appellant, as a landscape consultant to UBU Design, to consider the proposals before this Inquiry and provide my expert opinion on its potential landscape and visual effects; and the potential mitigation and benefits that the Appeal Scheme offers as part of the proposals.
- 2.3. I have visited the site on two occasions, including the winter months of 2023 when visibility of the site is at its highest, and have offered advice on the landscape strategy for the design of the Indicative Site Layout.

3. Experience and Qualifications

- 3.1. I am the founder Director of PGLA Landscape Architects and am experienced in all aspects relating to Landscape Architecture, specialising in Landscape and Visual issues related to planning applications. Since 2018, I have provided a consultancy service to UBU Design, focusing on projects that require specialist input on landscape and visual matters. This has included numerous residential schemes of various scales, as well as major solar farm projects nationwide.
- 3.2. I hold a BA (Hons) degree in Landscape Design and the Post Graduate qualification, Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (BLA). I have been a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) since 2000.
- 3.3. I have delivered a number of lectures and seminars for Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Manchester on a range of subjects, including LVIA's. I also specialise in producing landscape appraisals and advice for potential sites within local and national landscape designations, such as Special Landscape Areas and those adjacent or within the Green Belt.
- 3.4. I have been involved in the Appeal application from the early stages. providing landscape design inputs for the masterplan, and I am the author of the LVIA for the Appeal Scheme (CD 4.17) that was submitted as part of the outline planning application. I have reviewed and stand by the preparation and findings of that work in preparing this Proof, and that work which should be read together with this Proof.

4. Site Description

- 4.1. The site is currently (albeit intermittently) utilised by St Albans Polo Club and is approximately 14.2 hectares in size. It is comprised of a large agricultural barn, stables with surrounding paddocks, and a polo field. The centre of the site is located at TL 12863 04678 and is located on the western side of Chiswell Green. It currently has vehicular access at two points along Chiswell Green Lane. However, access into the proposed development site is proposed further east on Chiswell Green Lane, at the south-eastern point of the site.
- 4.2. The southern boundary is defined by a densely vegetated road named Chiswell Green Lane.
- 4.3. Most of the eastern boundary is separated from the existing residential settlement fronting onto the Croft and Cherry Hill by two relatively narrow paddocks which are defined by a dense evergreen hedge on the proposed development side in the west. There is a proposed emergency access track that will connect with Cherry Hill and this travels between the two paddocks in an east to west direction. Public footpath St Stephens FP082 adjoins the eastern boundary in the south-eastern corner of the site.
- 4.4. The northern boundary is heavily vegetated with an established evergreen coniferous hedge that separates the site from public footpath St Stephen 80.
- 4.5. The western boundary is adjacent to public footpath St Stephen 21 which travels the entire length of the perimeter in a north to south direction. The boundary line is delineated by a chain link fence. However, there is a substantial belt of native planting on the Appeal Site side which is approaching maturity and provides a screen of the site.
- 4.6. The topography is generally flat to gently undulating across the whole site and the topographical survey demonstrates a gentle fall in a south westerly direction from contour 105m AOD to 97m AOD.
- 4.7. There is a mix of mostly coniferous and some broadleaf trees that are present within the site, but these are located on the various perimeter boundaries.

- 4.8. The site is not within a Conservation Area or any designation such as Site of Special Scientific Interest, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or National Park, but it does fall within the spatial designation of the Green Belt. It is agreed within the Statement of Common Ground that the site is not considered to be a 'valued' landscape.
- 4.9. I will address adjacent landscape character in greater detail below. For present purposes, however, it should be noted that the Appeal Site is closely related to, and influenced by adjacent road infrastructure, housing, and commercial development. In its current state it can be considered as peri-urban (or urban edge), rather than as unspoilt countryside. This is emphasised in my photo study in Appendix 1.

5. Landscape Character

National Landscape Character

- 5.1. The site lies within the National Area (NCA): 111 Northern Thames Basin: see Figure 2 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CD 4.17), as defined by Natural England, published in 2014 and superseding the previous Countryside Agency Character Area profile. Key characteristics of this NCA pertinent to the site context are:
- The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys. The prominent hills and ridges of the 'Bagshot Hills' are notable to the northwest and extensive tracts of flat land are found in the south.
 - Characteristic of the area is a layer of thick clay producing heavy, acidic soils, resulting in retention of considerable areas of ancient woodland.
 - Areas capped by glacial sands and gravels have resulted in nutrient-poor, free-draining soils which support remnant lowland heathlands, although these are now small. Areas that have alluvial deposits present are well drained and fertile.
 - The water bearing underlying Chalk beds are a main source of recharge for the principal London Basin Chalk aquifer.
 - A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea, and slightly steeper valleys of the rivers Stour, Colne and Roman. Numerous springs rise at the base of the Bagshot Beds and several reservoirs are dotted throughout the area.

- 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, while other areas within Essex are more open in character. Significant areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are also present.
- The field pattern is very varied across the basin reflecting historical activity. Informal patterns of 18th-century or earlier enclosure reflect medieval colonisation of the heaths. Regular planned enclosures dating from the Romano-British period are a subtle but nationally important feature on the flat land to the south-east of the area. In the Essex heathlands 18th- and 19th-century enclosure of heathlands and commons followed by extensive 20th-century field enlargement is dominant.
- Mixed farming, with arable land predominating in the Hertfordshire plateaux, parts of the London Clay lowlands and Essex heathlands. Grasslands are characteristic of the river valleys throughout. Horticulture and market gardening are found on the light, sandy soils of former heaths in Essex, particularly around Colchester, along with orchards, meadow pasture and leys following numerous narrow rivers and streams.
- 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.
- 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, with the creation of new settlements such as the pioneering garden city at Welwyn and the planned town at Basildon.
- Brick-built dwellings are characteristic from the late 17th century onwards. Prior to this dwellings and farm buildings tended to be timber built with weatherboarding, now mainly painted white but traditionally black or tarred, and whitewashed plaster walls.

Local Landscape Character

- 5.2. Hertfordshire County Council identifies the site as part of Landscape Character Area (LCA) 10: St Stephens Plateau, in its “Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment” (2000/2005) (CD 8.13). Key characteristics and description of this LCA pertinent to the site context are:
- 5.3. This is 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.

Key Characteristics and Distinctive Features

- 5.4. The key characteristics are:
- 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.
- 5.5. Distinctive features are:
- Gardens of the Rose - Bone Hill.
 - Recycling plant at Longfield Spring.

Visual and Sensory Perception

- 5.6. 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. From within the area there are extensive views from the motorways, particularly the M1 and M10 (which is now the A414), but also from some of the narrow lanes on the arable landscape to the south. To the north the woodland provides a stronger sense of enclosure. The noise of the motorways is relentless and discordant.

Rarity and Distinctiveness

- 5.7. This landscape type is relatively common in the county. The most distinctive feature is the wooded farmland to the north on the plateau.

Physical Influences

Land Cover and Land Use

- 5.8. The pattern of land cover is the prominent feature of the landscape. This is characterised by extensive areas of arable cropping, particularly to the south, with few low or relic hedges. The proportion of arable reduces on the plateau areas to the north where historically it has been more heavily wooded. There is a good mix of deciduous and conifer plantations defining the open arable fields. Small areas of pasture are located either around farmsteads, e.g. Potters Crouch, or on urban edges, e.g. Chiswell Green, where other suburban uses are present, including recreation grounds and allotments.

Vegetation and Wildlife

- 5.9. Woodlands are a combination of ancient woodlands, e.g. Birch Wood and Park Wood, and plantations, e.g. Potters Crouch Plantation. The main indigenous woodland community is acidic oak/hornbeam.
- 5.10. Many woods were replanted in the 20th century with a high proportion of softwoods, including pine and larch, in the core, while the historic deciduous edges comprising birch, ash, oak and holly are generally retained. Old pollard beech and hornbeam are found at Park Wood and on other historic hedge-bank boundaries. Hedgerow species comprise a wide mix including field maple, beech, hazel, holly, hawthorn and dog rose. Hedges are generally in a state of decline with some only relic. The visual effect of boundary loss is less marked to the north due to the presence of the woodland blocks. Hedgerow trees are mainly oak with occasional ash, but many are mature and over-mature. A number of isolated oak tree rows within fields ghost the line of removed hedgerows.

Field Pattern

- 5.11. The network of lanes, settlement and field patterns exhibits an organic pattern with pre-18th century origins. However, this pattern has been subject to considerable field amalgamation with the removal of hedgerows creating some large featureless prairie fields.

Transport Pattern

- 5.12. There is a dual pattern of roads in the area. The historic lanes, which are relatively intact, are narrow and winding. Overlying, but distinct, are the major network of motorways including the M1, M10 (which is now the A414) and M25 and a large interchange.

Settlement and Built Form

- 5.13. The settlement pattern comprises a number of dispersed farmsteads throughout the area. There is one cluster of dwellings at Potters Crouch, but otherwise the area is sparsely settled up to the well-defined urban areas to the eastern and north-western boundaries. Most farmsteads are modest in scale and are of typical vernacular materials including brick, white render, weatherboard and clay tile. A few examples of thatching are to be found near Park Wood. Holt Farm is a medieval timber-framed and moated farm.

Visual Impact

- 5.14. The motorways present a strong built element in the landscape. The M1 is generally poorly integrated with little in the way of screen planting and a locally dominant influence of vehicles and lighting gantries. The M25 and the interchange with the M1 are better integrated. Despite their size, considerable earthworks and new planting reduce the scale of the feature and its visual impact. There has been some localised movement towards new recreational uses, such as the golf course at Potters Crouch west of the M1, although steep perimeter bunding to the M1 has done little to integrate the change of land use. The raw built edges of Chiswell Green and How Wood represent significant suburban impact.

Accessibility

- 5.15. There are limited opportunities for recreation within the area. Rights of way often pass through large arable fields. Open views to the motorways and the associated noise detract. Specific features of interest are the Gardens of the Rose at Bone Hill, the new golf course at Potters Green, Chiswell Green equestrian centre, and public access to Blackwater Wood.

Community Views

- 5.16. This is an area of some contrast. The landscape near the M1/M25 interchange seems to be of little regard, whereas the distinctive conifer plantations around Potterscrouch and West Furzeffield are valued by the community.

Condition

- 5.17. The Key characteristics so far as condition are concerned are as follows:
- Land cover change: widespread.
 - Age structure of tree cover: mature.
 - Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: fragmented.
 - Management of semi-natural habitat: variable.
 - Survival of cultural pattern: declining.
 - Impact of built development: high.
 - Impact of land-use change: moderate.

Robustness

- 5.18. As for robustness, the key characteristics are:
- Impact of landform: apparent.
 - Impact of land cover: apparent.
 - Impact of historic pattern: relic.
 - Visibility from outside: widely visible.
 - Sense of enclosure: open.
 - Visual unity: coherent.
 - Distinctiveness/rarity: frequent.

Conclusions on Local Landscape Character Area

- 5.19. The above key characteristics demonstrate that the overall character area contains a range of landscape features that are of varying value from rural elements to settlements. The sensitivity to change for the type of proposed development within the Landscape Character Area is deemed to be **Medium**.

Site Landscape Character

- 5.20. The landscape character of the site's setting and context generally accords with the national and local landscape character assessments.

Landscape Value

- 5.21. The site lies on the edge of the Green Belt. However, it does not lie within or adjacent to any environmental or heritage designations. The site setting and boundaries are characterised by a flat topography with existing dense vegetated boundary that contains the site well. The fabric of landscape within the site represents a polo club field with low ecological value as it is utilised for grazing with the occasional polo match, there are no distinct landscape features within the site. The boundary vegetation is proposed to be retained. The landscape value is **Medium / Low** to account for its location within the Green Belt and it is used as a grazing land for horses.

Landscape Condition

- 5.22. The current condition of the landscape elements within the site can be described as **Low**. The total land cover is field used as part of the equestrian activities with a track around the perimeter and associated out buildings. The site is bound by dense hedges and mature trees to the majority of the perimeter. There are no distinct landscape features within the site, only the dense vegetation along the boundaries.

Susceptibility to Change

- 5.23. The condition and value of the landscape generally accords the descriptions of the key characteristics of the national, regional, and local landscape character assessments. There are no features or artefacts within the site that are of local distinctiveness, it contains no public rights of way and is not within a historic or a National Park or AONB therefore the lack of the determining features will result in a **Medium Susceptibility to Change**. This accounts for its location within the Green Belt and the dense boundary vegetation which will be retained as part of any development.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 5.24. The sensitivity of the site to accommodate the change of use from grazing land and an occasional polo match to a residential complex with public open space is deemed to be **Medium**. This is due to the description of the landscape condition and landscape value as described above combined with the susceptibility to change.

6. Baseline Visual Assessment

Potential Visual Receptors

- 6.1. A series of representative viewpoints were chosen from a review of the ZTV, Figure 7 of the LVIA (CD 4.17), and a desktop study, to provide coverage of potential views of the proposed development from a range of directions. These are set out in the LVIA at Figure 10 and are considered in paragraphs 3.14 to 3.63 of the LVIA and further considered in below in this Proof of Evidence. The potential viewpoints were then tested through field study and those where no visibility of the development could be achieved were discounted. The selected viewpoints were representative of a range of receptors including residential, recreational, cultural, and transport.
- 6.2. A number of potential visual receptors were identified to provide a detailed assessment of the visual effects of the proposed development.

Recreational Receptors

- 6.3. Potential recreational receptors identified included the following public routes, which run in the vicinity of the site.
- Public Footpaths and Bridleways surrounding the site, including Footpaths St Stephens 21, 80, 81, 82, 28, 39 and 12.
 - National Cycle Route 6.
- 6.4. There are also a number of other promoted routes within the study area as illustrated on Figure 1C of the LVIA (CD 4.17). However, the field survey demonstrated that there were no views of the site from these routes due to existing vegetation and landform or the distance was too great to distinguish the site. These potential receptors were therefore scoped out of the assessment.
- 6.5. The Gardens of the Rose is located to the south of the site and, while it is currently closed, it was considered as part of the assessment.

Residential Receptors

- 6.6. Residential properties and other buildings in view of the site were considered, including those on the western settlement edge of Chiswell Green. The nearest dwellings to the proposed development are located on Cherry Hill and The Croft

directly to the east of the site. There are also a number of properties and farmsteads to the south, east and north of the site.

- 6.7. Due to landform and the presence of hedgerows and/or trees on the field boundaries, it is anticipated that any potential views would be **Negligible**. In particular, investigations revealed that views from these dwellings are virtually screened by intervening layers of vegetation.

Transport Receptors

- 6.8. Travelling receptors include those using major and minor roads in close to the site. In this case the only roads in close proximity to the site are Chiswell Green Lane, Cherry Hill, The Croft, Ragged Hall Lane and Furzebushes Lane. Major routes such as the M1, M25 and North Orbital Road were also considered. However, due to roadside embankments and intervening vegetation it is unlikely that the site will be visible. It will also be viewed in context of the existing settlement edge and views will be fleeting, filtered and therefore **Negligible**.
- 6.9. Travelling receptors are considered to be **Low** in terms of sensitivity to development.

Cultural Receptors

- 6.10. There are a number of listed buildings and scheduled monuments within the study area, these are demonstrated in Figure 4 of the LVIA (CD 4.17). The field survey demonstrated that due to landform, vegetation and the surrounding built environment, the proposed development will **Not Be Visible** to the majority of cultural receptors.

7. Design Strategy

- 7.1. The overall landscape strategy for the Appeal Site has been informed by the findings and summary within the LVIA (CD4.17), specifically in Section 6 which discusses the potential for embedded mitigation within the design proposals and is summarised below with my additional comment.

Retain and Enhance Existing Boundary Vegetation

- 7.2. The existing vegetation along the boundaries will be retained where possible and enhanced through infilling and maintenance where required. Retaining the vegetation will create a sense of maturity to the scheme and help to integrate the development into the existing settlement edge, landscape and countryside.

Provide a High Quality Landscape Scheme Responding to the Local Character

- 7.3. The Indicative Proposed Site Layout clearly demonstrates the potential to provide a residential development that reflects the existing settlement patterns to the west but also provide ample public open space and landscape buffers that surround a tree lined streets that lead to a central green space at the heart of the development.

Enhance the Ecological Value of the Site

- 7.4. The proposed introduction of new trees, hedges, shrubs and wildflower meadows will create tree lined routes and wildlife corridors throughout the proposed development, and this will increase the biodiversity offer within the Appeal Site.

Increase the Aesthetic and Recreational Value of the Site

- 7.5. There is plenty of potential and design intent to create high quality landscape spaces within the site which can include a Memorial Park, a village green, play area and recreational routes that can be accessed by residents of the proposed development and those within the local community.

Mitigate Visual Impact by Setting the Built Form into the Site surrounded by Landscape Buffers and Public Open Space

- 7.6. The Indicative Proposed Site Layout Rev D (CD 4.47.1) clearly demonstrates that the proposed new homes will be set into the application site and set within a wide and robust landscape framework. This will reduce, and in most cases remove, the potential for visual connectivity between the built form of the development and the visual receptors identified within the LVIA (CD 4.17).

8. Landscape Reasons for Refusal

- 8.1. In this section I will deal with the landscape and visual matters raised within the first Reason for Refusal, as set out in paragraph 1.5 above with my emphasis added.

- 8.2. When considering the wording of the Reason for Refusal, I acknowledge that there will be an inevitable effect on the spatial consideration of openness as this will obviously be physically reduced in volume with the introduction of a residential development of up to 330 new homes. However, this will be an inevitable corollary of any housing development on open green field and/or Green Belt land if such development is necessary to meet the housing needs of the District.
- 8.3. Furthermore, in terms of the potential effects on visual amenity, any reduction of the current openness will only be apparent at a localised level to the majority of the visual receptors, and I do not consider will cause more than a very localised and marginal detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt itself.
- 8.4. In these regards, the LVIA has identified several potential visual receptors such as recreational users of the local footpath network, residential receptors from nearby settlement, houses, and farmsteads, as well as transport receptors from users of the local road network.
- 8.5. Users of the local footpath network such as St Stephen footpaths 80, 21 and 82 will experience very little change in view from the current condition. This is apparent in the following representative viewpoints 1-10 within the LVIA and accompanying descriptions within section 3.16 to 3.63 (and in corresponding winter viewpoints 1-10 in Appendix 2 of this Proof of Evidence).
- 8.6. Viewpoints 18 and 19 are located on PRow St. Michael Rural FP 012 adjacent to Square Wood. From this slightly elevated location to the west of the site, glimpsed views can be seen of the site in the centre of the photograph on Viewpoint 18. The evergreen hedgerow found along the eastern boundary with settlement edge of Chiswell Green can be seen in the background to the left of the view. The proposed development will be visible from this receptor and appear in advance of the current housing fronting onto Cherry Hill.
- 8.7. The full sense of openness of the Green Belt is experienced by the users of this footpath, but this is currently defined and enclosed by the settlement edge of Chiswell Green. The experience of openness will be slightly reduced (when the viewer is looking eastwards) by the introduction of the proposed housing

development. However, a substantial distance of some 400m will remain unaffected with the immediate visual experience of open fields and countryside remaining intact. Furthermore, open views to the south, west and north will remain unaltered, maintaining the sense of openness to the footpath user. Therefore, although I acknowledge that the openness will inevitably be reduced, the actual change in experience for the user is likely to be **Negligible** and Insignificant.

- 8.8. As demonstrated in viewpoints 16, 17 and 20 to 24 within the LVIA (CD 4.17), other footpaths on the wider and long-range network will have no visual connection with the proposed development and, therefore, the sense of openness will remain unaffected for users of these receptors.
- 8.9. The other receptors that will experience some change in the experience of openness will be residents on Cherry Hill that face onto the road. The principal rooms at the ground floor and front of the dwellings will look towards the Appeal Site. However, residents will experience visual separation from the proposed housing caused by the carriageway and paddocks. The existing evergreen hedge that defines the eastern boundary of the appeal site and the paddocks will remain unchanged and further screening in the form of a landscape buffer on the development side will mature and eventually screen any potential views of the proposed two storey houses on the east of the proposed development. Whilst it could be considered that the additional substantial planting actually reduces the openness of the Green Belt, this is not in my view a 'detrimental impact' as described in the Reason for Refusal. Furthermore, whilst it is likely that long range views across the site from the upper storeys that face the Appeal Site will be reduced, these rooms are not, in my view, as important as the principal lower rooms and therefore I consider the reduced openness to be only **Moderate** in significance.
- 8.10. The transport receptors on Chiswell Green are unlikely to experience any degree of noticeable change for users travelling along Chiswell Green Lane, as demonstrated in viewpoints 10-13 24 within the LVIA (CD 4.17). The exception to this will occur where a section of hedgerow is removed to allow for access, but any glimpsed views into the development will be viewed in context with the existing residential settlement. Furthermore, immediate views into the site from the access point will be of the open space of the proposed memorial park, with a tree lined avenue leading

to the first row of houses a considerable depth into the Appeal Site. I consider any effects on openness to be **Minor** and insignificant from this receptor.

- 8.11. Turning to the other landscape related reference that I highlighted in bold in the reason for refusal, I do not consider that the proposed development will create an unacceptable degree of harm to the landscape character and appearance which cannot be acceptably reduced and/ or offset with appropriate landscape mitigation.
- 8.12. The LVIA has considered the potential effects of the proposed development on the landscape character at three levels in accordance with the Landscape Institute Guidelines. These are the effects on:
- The site within the boundary (including any landscape features);
 - The setting of the site (which mostly considers the effects on the boundary vegetation); and
 - The broad landscape context, namely Landscape Character Area St Stephens Plateau as identified in the Hertfordshire Landscape Assessment publication (2005).
- 8.13. As for the first of these, the findings of the LVIA (CD 4.17) concluded that the only significant effects would occur within the site boundary, but no landscape features would be harmed. The potential mitigation in the form of the public open space, tree lined streets, village green and robust landscape buffers, would reduce the residual effects to **Moderate** at maturity.
- 8.14. As for the second, the existing vegetation that forms the setting of the site would remain mostly unchanged apart from the modified existing access points that will become pedestrian links and the removal of a small section of hedge in the south east portion of the site to provide access. The existing boundaries will be enhanced with a new and wide landscape buffer and therefore the overall effects will be **Minor** with the potential to reduce to **Slight** when the full landscape mitigation treatments mature.
- 8.15. As for the third, when considering the likely effects on the wider landscape character (which I think the reason for refusal is suggesting will be detrimentally impacted), I

agree with the statement in 5.3 of the LVIA which concludes that the magnitude of change will be **Small**:

“Overall, the wider Local Character Area will remain intact with the general characteristics remaining un-altered as a result of the introduced development. The site is located adjacent to the existing settlement edge and the only landscape features which are along the boundaries will be retained therefore the magnitude of change is considered to be small.”

- 8.16. Apart from the minimal reduction in area from the St Stephens Plateau landscape area that will become part of the settlement edge of Chiswell Green, the characteristics and appearance of the landscape will remain as is now and as described in the baseline Section 2 of the LVIA (CD 4.17) and the Hertfordshire Landscape Assessment publication.
- 8.17. I conclude that the proposed development will cause an inevitable and localised impact that is confined within the boundaries of the Appeal Site. This is inevitably the case for residential development located in green field sites, and I agree with the qualification in the first Reason for Refusal that the potential harm sits alongside the landscape benefits that the scheme can offer such as the “potential for provision of a significant area of public open space and a new public footpath.”
- 8.18. The proposed development will not, however, cause any detrimental impact on the landscape character and appearance of the countryside outside of the site boundaries that can be considered significant enough to support a Reason for Refusal. In terms of appearance alone, I have provided analysis on the visibility of the site in the opening paragraphs of this section when considering openness, and my analysis and conclusions apply equally to appearance - such as the views that will be achieved from the public footpath adjacent to Square Wood to the north west, for example - and the residual effects cannot be considered significant due to the proposed mitigation, distance, and space between the viewer and the Appeal Site from that location.
- 8.19. Indeed, it is quite clear that the key characteristics of the Hertfordshire Landscape Assessment will remain intact throughout the remaining Character Area:

- The undulating plateau to the north of the area that gently slopes to the north east will stay as the current landform; the field patterns will remain open arable and of medium to large scale;
- The woodlands will remain visually interlocking to the north; and
- The narrow winding lanes and dispersed settlements and scattered farmsteads will all remain as described.

8.20. From my analysis above, I do not consider the proposed development will result in detrimental impact to the landscape character and the appearance of the countryside.

Evidence Relating to Issues raised in the Committee Report and Statutory Responses.

8.21. My evidence in this section has thus far addressed the specific landscape related issues raised as the first Reason for Refusal for the proposed development. The following is a consideration of the comments which I assume were raised by the Landscape Officer to the Case officer regarding the submitted LVIA, as well as general comments regarding the landscape found within the Officer Report (CD 4.48).

8.22. Section 8.4 of the Officer Report is titled Landscape Character. It opens with references to paragraphs 92, 130 and 174 of the NPPF, and sets out that Local Authority's decisions should lead to the enhancement of the natural environment and ensuring that new developments are sympathetic to local character. Paragraphs 8.4.2 to 8.4.4 describe the importance of trees and how Policies 1 and 74 of the Local Plan consider that development will need to be well integrated with the existing landscape and significant harm to the ecological value of the countryside avoided. Paragraph 8.4.5 confirms that the site lies within Landscape Character Area 10 – St Stephens Plateau, as defined under Hertfordshire's Landscape Assessment, and references objectives set out in Local Plan Policy 143 for Watling Chase Community Forest. Paragraphs 8.4.6 to 8.4.13 provide specific comments and concerns regarding the LVIA submitted in support of the Appeal application.

- 8.23. I have discussed the comments raised with the Applicant when the comments were first raised, and Mr Parker sent a response by email dated 27th January 2022 (Appendix 3) to the Case Officer that explained that the content of the LVIA was commensurate with the level of detail required for an outline application and to determine the principle of whether the site could accommodate residential development of up to 330 units without causing undue harm to the landscape and the visual amenity. He explained that further detail will be submitted at the Reserved Matters stage. I will consider the points raised in the Committee Report in more detail in the following paragraphs.
- 8.24. Paragraph 8.4.6 suggests that the LVIA assessment is limited due to the absence, at the time of writing in July 2021, of a firm site layout and the absence of description of such characteristics /parameters such as building heights, mitigation etc. parameters plan.
- 8.25. I disagree with this concern. The LVIA is a tool that can and should aid design at **all** stages of development - from the initial concepts, right through to construction and beyond. The Landscape Institute Guidelines state that there are various levels of assessment that should be commensurate with the scale and stages of development, and this determines whether a landscape and visual appraisal, a standalone LVIA, or a LVIA Chapter as part of an Environmental Statement within an EIA is appropriate. In this case we were asked to consider the likely effects on landscape and visual amenity to inform the emerging design so as to ensure that a landscape-led, residential development could be accommodated within the Appeal Site without causing detrimental harm to the landscape character.
- 8.26. Furthermore, a development description was included in paragraphs 1.18 to 1.19 of the LVIA which stated:

“The proposals are for a landscape led residential development that will provide a range of different types of accommodation to meet the local housing needs. The development will sit within an existing robust landscape framework and the majority of boundary trees and vegetation will be retained providing a sense of maturity to the development. The proposals will introduce street trees, areas of public open space, hedgerows and boundary treatments which will increase the

biodiversity levels and connect and enhance existing green infrastructure networks and wildlife corridors”.

- 8.27. The text for the ZTV Figure (Figure 7 of CD 4.17) confirms that it was run with an assumption of building heights to be 10m, which establishes that the design intent is for two storey houses or three storeys with low ridge heights. It should be clear, when reviewing the Indicative Proposed Site Layout, that the principles described above have been transposed into the final design for the outline application and therefore the findings of the assessment are still valid and accurate.
- 8.28. Paragraph 8.4.7 suggests that although the model has considered surrounding woodland and buildings and this is beneficial, a ‘bare earth’ version is required to present a worse-case scenario.
- 8.29. I disagree that this is a requirement as the main use of the ZTV is to indicate the locations from where development is not visible, so those viewpoints can be discounted and areas of theoretical visibility assessed and checked in the field. A “bare earth” scenario, without any built form of settlement and blocks of woodland, is a very unlikely scenario indeed.
- 8.30. However, for completeness, these have now been modelled and are included in Appendix 4. I do not, however, think these contribute to the overall assessment of the proposed development as they only demonstrate that more visibility would occur to the east should the settlement of Chiswell Green be removed and/or if the blocks of substantial woodland are felled. Moreover, in any of these highly unlikely, indeed fanciful, scenarios, the effects would be similarly mitigated by the surrounding landscape buffers and mature vegetation that surrounds the site perimeter.
- 8.31. Paragraph 8.4.8 suggests that photomontages and night time visuals are likely to be required. However, this must sensibly be assumed to mean only that they are likely to be required at a later stage such as Reserved Matters. It is also stated that the LVIA is required to provide a clear statement on sensitivity for each visual receptor. I have re-looked at this and believe that Tables 8 and 9 clearly set out the sensitivity gradings in the LVIA, and the level of explanation within the viewpoint

descriptions is adequate to prove an overall baseline view that is commensurate with an outline application.

- 8.32. I agree that, as started in paragraph 8.4.9, winter views are preferable in order fully to demonstrate potential visibility; and these have been completed and included in Appendix 2. Generally, the winter views conform with the findings of the LVIA, but demonstrate that there is a small degree of reduced visibility of the screening effect of the existing landscape buffer on the western side of the Appeal Site.
- 8.33. I disagree with the comment in Paragraph 8.4.10 that each viewpoint should be assessed individually. The viewpoints are representative views of the visual receptor and I believe it is more helpful that the reporting in the LVIA accounts for the effects on the whole receptor rather than a snapshot at a particular point on a public footpath for example.
- 8.34. Paragraph 8.4.11 is a statement that the conclusions of the LVIA are not supported for the reasons set out previously, namely the absence of parameters and a site layout. I have addressed this when considering their paragraph 8.4.6 above.
- 8.35. Paragraph 8.4.12 confirms that the removal of a section of hedge, and possibly trees, can be controlled by condition and it is unlikely that the implementation of the access will lead to harm to the landscape character.
- 8.36. Paragraph 8.4.13 concludes that the site is of a significant scale and there is opportunity to strengthen existing boundaries and provide open space, recreational opportunities, and SuDS features. Furthermore, the comment seems to agree that the most significant change to character and appearance will be localised to within the site itself and its immediate surroundings.
- 8.37. The section concludes with a re-iteration on how the assessment in the LVIA is not robust enough to demonstrate the degree of harm that will occur. I disagree with this statement as I believe the assessment and conclusions of the LVIA have clearly led to, and informed, a landscape-led Indicative Site Proposal; and the level of assessment is commensurate with an outline application, with landscape to be considered as Reserved Matters.

- 8.38. In light of the above, it is clear there are no Reasons to Refuse consent for the Appeal Scheme based on matters relating to detrimental impact to openness and/or harm to landscape character or appearance.
- 8.39. Furthermore, the findings of the LVIA that was completed in July 2021 has informed the Indicative Site Proposal ensuring that the design can be considered as landscape led, with special focus on the retention of existing green infrastructure features, such as boundary planting and the provision of open space, recreation opportunities, play areas and SuDS features.

9. Potential Cumulative Effects

- 9.1. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CD 4.17) has considered the potential effects for the Appeal Site for the north of Chiswell Green Lane in isolation to the proposed development for up to 390 homes and a school to the south of Chiswell Green and therefore I have considered whether there are any Cumulative Effects of the combined scheme that could increase the impacts on the landscape and visual receptors.
- 9.2. Table 9.1 (Appendix 5) provides an overview of cumulative effects and demonstrates that there will be no increased effects on the landscape receptors apart from the inevitable erosion of a higher portion of the Landscape Character Area 10 and an increase in the western urban edge of Chiswell Green. The effects to the setting of the sites are marginally increased but not to a degree that would warrant a higher grade of significance.
- 9.3. There are few opportunities where the two proposed developments are visible to the visual receptors. The exception to this could arise when the user of public footpath FP12 in the vicinity of Square Wood look south eastwards towards Chiswell Green and I anticipate it may be possible to see portions of the built form together, but this will be limited the upper storeys and roof lines of the new buildings. These should be further reduced in time as the landscape mitigation matures and the proposed developments will be integrated into the landscape and urban edge of Chiswell Green.

- 9.4. I therefore conclude that there will no harmful or significant cumulative effects should both schemes be developed.

10. Summary and Conclusions

- 10.1. The Appeal Application was refused with two issues relating to landscape. In respect of the suggested reasons for refusal set out in St Albans District Council's Decision Notice, I have considered the following matters:

- Impact on the openness on the Green Belt;
- Harm to landscape character and appearance.

Impact on Openness in the Green Belt

- 10.2. I acknowledge that there will be an inevitable effect on the spatial consideration of openness as this will obviously be physically reduced in volume with the introduction of a residential development of up to 330 new homes. However, in terms of the potential effects on the visual amenity, the reduction of the current openness will only be apparent at a localised level to the majority of the visual receptors and will not cause detrimental impact on the wider openness of the Green Belt.

Harm to the Landscape Character and Appearance

- 10.3. I do not consider that the proposed development will create an unacceptable degree of harm to the landscape character and appearance which cannot be satisfactorily and acceptably reduced and/or offset with appropriate landscape mitigation.
- 10.4. Overall, the Appeal Schemes provides an appropriate and high-quality landscape led design solution in line with good practice.

Overall Conclusion

- 10.5. For the reasons explained in this Proof of Evidence and the LVIA, it is my professional opinion that there is no justification for refusing the proposed development on the landscape grounds set out in the first Reason for Refusal as stated in Decision Notice dated 25th October 2022.