

August 2023

Land to the rear of 42 -100  
Tollgate Road, Colney Heath

## Landscape and Green Belt Proof of Evidence

of:

**Clive Self**

MA (Urb Des) Dip LA CMLI

PINS Ref: APP/ B1930/W/23/3323099  
LPA Ref: 5/2022/1988

on behalf of:  
Vistry Group

Report No: CSA/3925\_14



Report Reference	Revision	Date	Prepared by	Approved by	Comments
CSA/3925/14		16/07/2023	CS		First draft
CSA/3925/14	A	02/08/2023	CS		Second Draft
CSA/3925/14	B	05/08/2023	CS		Third Draft
CSA/3925/14	C	7/08/2023	CS	CA	Fourth Draft
CSA/3925/14	D	18/08/2023	CS	CA	Final
CSA/3925/14	E	22/08/2023	CS	CA	Final



Certificate No 386562021



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Appendix J: Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment

## **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This evidence is submitted on behalf of Vistry Homes Ltd in respect of a planning application for the demolition of an existing house and stables and the construction of up to 150 dwellings, including affordable, self-build and custom build dwellings, together with all ancillary works.
- 1.2 The Site is located in the southern part of Colney Heath, and extends to approximately 7.8ha. The vast majority of the Site is in equestrian use and comprises two fields of horse grazed pasture with a stable block and manège. The house and garden of No. 42 Tollgate Road is indented into the north western part of the Site.
- 1.3 There is a surfaced track, leading into the Site, which runs alongside the boundary of No 42 Tollgate Road. The track passes alongside an area of hardstanding which is used for parking vehicles and horse boxes.
- 1.4 The southwestern boundary of the Site follows the heavily wooded corridor of the River Colne. The woodland extends in depth from the river to Coursers Road which lies further to the southwest.

### **Settlement Pattern**

- 1.5 Colney Heath has a fragmented settlement pattern which comprises three separate nucleated clusters which are linked by local roads, which have intermittent development alongside them.
- 1.6 The largest part of the village lies to the south and borders the Appeal Site. This area is broadly triangular in configuration with Tollgate Road passing through the southern part of the triangle. Housing within this area is mostly from the post war era and is typically 2 storey with the occasional three storey and single storey property. It is mostly medium density and has a suburban character.

### **Designations**

- 1.7 The Site adjoins the settlement boundary of Colney Heath and is washed over by the Green Belt. It is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality. Similarly, it does not carry any heritage designations.
- 1.8 It is agreed in the SoCG that the Site is not a Valued Landscape in respect of para 174a of the NPPF.
- 1.9 The western part of the Site forms part of the Colney Heath Farm Meadows Local Wildlife Site, which is locally listed for ecological

importance, and which follows the course of the River Colne. This part of the Site is to be kept free of development with a LEMP put in place to ensure it is managed in a beneficial way for wildlife.

- 1.10 There are no trees on the Site that are covered by Tree Preservation Orders ('TPO') and no public onto, or across, the Site.

### **Landscape Character**

- 1.11 The Site falls within the Colney Heath Farmland Landscape Character Area (LCA) 30 which is relatively large and extends from London Colney and St Albans in the west to Hatfield in the east. The overall area is described as a medium-scale landscape contained by adjacent urban areas and transport routes, with visual containment provided by a good network of hedges, field trees and tree belts. The Appeal Site displays a number of these characteristics.

- 1.12 The Site itself is mainly in equestrian use, with associated infrastructure. The houses which back onto the northeastern boundary of the Site are readily visible from within it and clearly have an impact on its character.

- 1.13 The dense belt of woodland which borders the southwestern boundary of the Site provides both physical and visual containment and screens the Site from the wider countryside to the west.

- 1.14 Given the overall character of the Site, the intervisibility with neighbouring housing and the lack of distinctive landscape features within the Site, it is considered to be of medium to low landscape sensitivity to the proposed development.

### **Visibility**

- 1.15 The Site benefits from a good level of visual containment with views largely confined to the neighbouring area, with limited opportunities for middle distance views. The key public views are from Tollgate Road, near to the Site entrance; from further north on Tollgate Road; and from public footpath 33, which runs alongside the northwestern boundary of the Site.

- 1.16 There are also intermittent views from the rear gardens and from the houses which back onto the Site and from several properties on the opposite side of Tollgate Road.

## **Green Belt**

- 1.17 In 2023 Arup was appointed by St Albans City & District Council to prepare a Stage 2 Green Belt Review to help inform work carried out as part of the emerging Local Plan. The Stage 2 Review was a more refined assessment than that which had previously been carried out and examined the performance of '*discrete and small Green Belt parcels*', that were primarily adjacent to large urban areas.
- 1.18 Smaller settlements, such as Colney Heath, that are washed over by the Green Belt, were considered in a separate Annex Report of Washed Over Villages.
- 1.19 The Annex Report looked at 10 smaller settlements and advised on whether they should be washed over or inset into the Green Belt. Of the 10 settlements assessed, eight were recommended for retention as washed over settlement; one for inseting in the Green Belt boundary; and one to potentially be washed over by the Green Belt. Colney Heath was recommended for retention as a washed over village.

## **Appeal Scheme**

- 1.20 The Appeal Scheme is described in the SoCG and DAS. A Parameters Plan was prepared in response to a number of observations from the LPA. This shows that the northwestern and southeastern boundaries of the Site will have 10 metres of new native planting, with a corridor of semi natural green space alongside them. The Colney Heath Farm Meadows LWS will remain free of development and an additional swathe of informal open space will be provided alongside it.
- 1.21 It is evident from the Parameters Plan that the proposed development responds to the Site and its wider setting in an appropriate manner and that it will bring forward a development with a distinct sense of place and that the impact on the wider Green Belt/Countryside will be limited and localised.

## **Effects on Landscape Character**

- 1.22 The effects on the landscape character of the Site itself have been assessed as adverse, due to its change in character, but that does not mean that the development will be unattractive. On the contrary, it will have a strong sense of place and will provide benefits for people and wildlife alike. The Appeal Scheme will also complement both the established pattern of the settlement and that of the wider landscape.

### **Visual Effects**

1.23 The Site is visually well contained, being mostly visible from the immediate surroundings, with limited middle distance views.

1.24 The Planning Officer's RTC reached a similar conclusion and quoted from Herts Landscape Services which said:

*'With regards to visual effects, the LVIA concludes that 'the site is visually well contained, being mostly visible from the immediate surroundings, with limited middle-distance views available.' This conclusion is supported, the site is generally well screened to views from the wider area.....'*

### **Green Belt Impact**

1.25 The SoCG acknowledges that the Appeal Scheme is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and that the Council's housing land shortfall is substantial. The benefits of the Appeal Scheme and the harm that will arise is addressed in the planning balance section of the planning proof of evidence.

1.26 Given that virtually all of the countryside and smaller settlements within the district are washed over by the Green Belt then it is inevitable that Green Belt land will need to be released to meet the acute housing shortfall in the district. This is evident from the emerging Local Plan which identifies significant Green Belt sites for release for developments.

1.27 The parties agree that there is no conflict with the first two purposes of the NPPF and that the fourth and fifth do not come into play. Harm will arise as a result of the reduction in openness and encroachment into the countryside but for the reasons I set out below the level of harm will be limited.

### **Openness**

1.28 The PPG recognises that in assessing the impact of development on Green Belt Openness, a judgement needs to be made on the circumstance of each individual case. The PPG also recognises that openness has both a spatial and visual aspect.

1.29 The effect of the Appeal Scheme on both of these aspects of Openness is summarised below, both in terms of the impact on the Site itself and on the wider Green Belt.

### ***Spatial***

- 1.30 Approximately half of the Site will remain undeveloped and the greater part of the land that is left open will be used for ecological enhancements. The remaining part of the Site will be developed for housing and supporting infrastructure and that will clearly have a significant impact on the openness on the greater part of the Site.
- 1.31 For the reasons set out below, the loss of openness that the Appeal Scheme will give rise to, will largely only be experienced from the near distance and as such the impact on the wider Green Belt will be strictly limited.

### ***Visual***

- 1.32 Hertfordshire Landscape Services agreed with the findings of the LVIA which concluded that the Site is visually well contained. I have also referred to the parameters plan and site sections which show the extent of additional planting which will further strengthen its physical and visual containment.
- 1.33 Given that the majority of the external boundaries of the Site already have built development, or established planting, alongside them, then the Appeal Scheme will benefit from a good degree of physical and visual containment from day one. This will further strengthen as the boundary planting matures.
- 1.34 The loss of openness of this part of the Green Belt will therefore only be experienced from the neighbouring area and will not be experienced from the wider Green Belt.

### **Conclusion**

- 1.35 The Appeal Scheme has the potential to deliver a high quality development that would complement the existing nucleated settlement pattern. It would be well contained and have a negligible adverse impact on the character of the wider landscape and performance of the wider Green Belt.



## **2.0 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

- 2.1 I am a Chartered Landscape Architect and an Urban Designer. I hold a Diploma in Landscape Architecture and a Master's Degree in Urban Design. I have over 30 years' experience in landscape and townscape design and assessment.
- 2.2 I am the Managing Director of CSA, a multi-disciplinary environmental planning practice which I established in 1998. The practice acts for the public and private sector and has an in-house team of urban designers, ecologists, heritage consultants and landscape architects. We operate from offices in Sussex, Hertfordshire, Hampshire, Cambridgeshire and Worcestershire.
- 2.3 Prior to forming CSA I was responsible for landscape architecture and masterplanning at PRC Fewster Architects and before that I was employed in a similar role at Sargent and Potiriadis Architects. I have worked throughout the UK, Middle East and the United States on a broad range of landscape projects, townscape appraisals and environmental planning work.
- 2.4 My company is currently involved in projects that range from the masterplanning of new settlements to the redevelopment of inner city brownfield sites. We work throughout the UK in both the rural and urban environment.
- 2.5 I have given landscape and urban design advice on numerous sites across the country. I have also given landscape and urban design evidence at Local Plan/LDF Inquiries, Section 77 and 78 Inquiries, and CPO Inquiries.
- 2.6 The evidence that I have prepared and provide for this appeal is true and 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.

### 3.0 BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

#### Background

3.1 This evidence is submitted on behalf of Vistry Homes Ltd in respect of a planning application for the demolition of an existing house and stables and the construction of up to 150 dwellings, including affordable, self-build and custom build dwellings, together with all ancillary works.

3.2 CSA Environmental has been involved with the Appeal Scheme from the outset of the planning application and colleagues at CSA produced the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ('LVIA') (CD 4.10). CSA also provided ecological, arboricultural, heritage and urban design inputs into the planning application.

3.3 Following submission of the planning application, some additional information was submitted to the LPA, and a number of minor amendments were made to the scheme to address the observations that had been made by the LPA. I shall refer to the landscape related changes later in this proof.

3.4 The planning application was recommend for refusal by the Case Officer and the Planning Committee followed the Officer's recommendation. The decision notice (CD 6.2) was issued on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2023 with two reasons for refusal given.

3.5 The first reason for refusal covers a wide range of topics. My evidence addresses the alleged landscape and Green Belt harm. The first part of the first reason for refusal states:

*'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 and harm to landscape character and appearance....*

3.6 The first reason for refusal then goes on to identify the benefits of the Appeal Scheme, which include:

*'....provision of up to 150 dwellings, including 40% affordable housing and up to 9 self-build units at the site which could contribute significantly towards meeting an identified housing need in the District, and the*

*provision of public open space and delivery of 10% biodiversity net gain (through on-site and off-site provision)...*

- 3.7 The first reason for refusal concludes that the benefits of the Appeal Scheme are outweighed by other considerations and as such very special circumstances do not exist to allow development in this part of the Green Belt.
- 3.8 Prior to the submission of evidence, a SoCG was entered into between the LPA and the Appellant. Where matters have been agreed between the two parties, I only briefly address the topic.

### **Methodology**

- 3.9 My evidence is based on the assessment contained within the submitted LVIA (CD 4.10), which was produced by a colleague at CSA. I have also visited the Site and surrounding area on a number of occasions.
- 3.10 From my observations on Site, and from the neighbouring area, I am in agreement with the conclusion of the LVIA that the Site is visually well contained, being mostly visible from the immediate surroundings, with limited middle distance views available. The impact on the function of the wider Green Belt would similarly be limited.
- 3.11 Photographs contained in **Appendix C** have been taken from within the Site or from public vantage points within the vicinity.
- 3.12 Photographs were taken using a digital camera with a lens focal length approximating to 50mm, to give a similar depth of vision to the human eye. In some instances images have been combined to create a panorama. Photographs were taken during periods of good visibility. The photographs and visualisations within this report have been prepared in general conformance with the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 06/19, as set out in the methodology within the LVIA.

### **Green Belt**

- 3.13 As far as I'm aware, there is no specific methodology set out in Government policy for assessing the impact of development on the Green Belt. CSA have developed their own methodology for assessing the impact of development on the 5 purposes of the Green Belt, which are set out in NPPF. The methodology used in that assessment is set out in the LVIA, with a summary in this evidence. I also consider the Green Belt studies which have been undertaken on behalf of St Albans City and District Council. I similarly summarise the impact on openness, from both a spatial and visual point of view.

### **Planning Policy Context**

- 3.14 The key landscape and planning policies of relevance to the Site have been summarised in the LVIA and as such I do not replicate them here. Rather, my evidence addresses the specific landscape and Green Belt related matters which are cited in the reason for refusal.

### **Background Character Studies**

- 3.15 The LVIA includes a summary and consideration of the various Landscape Character Assessments and background studies relating to landscape. I have not replicated those assessments here but have referred to the localised landscape and Green Belt studies.

## 4.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE, SURROUNDING AREA AND GREEN BELT CONTEXT

- 4.1 The LVIA provides a detailed description of the Appeal Site and neighbouring area. In the following chapter I therefore only provide a summary of the key characteristics of the Site and neighbouring area, rather than duplicate that information. I have also summarised the key visual receptors.
- 4.2 The tables in **Appendix F** also provide a summary of the anticipated landscape and visual effects from a number of receptors.

### Local Context

- 4.3 The Site is located in the southern part of Colney Heath, and extends to approximately 7.8ha. Its location and immediate context are illustrated on the Site Location Plan and Aerial Photograph in **Appendices A** and **B**, and on the photographs contained within **Appendix C**.
- 4.4 The vast majority of the Site is in equestrian use and comprises two fields of horse grazed pasture with a stable block and manège located in the northern part of the Site. The house and garden of No. 42 Tollgate Road is also indented into the north western part of the Site.
- 4.5 There is a surfaced track, leading into the Site, which runs alongside the boundary of No 42 Tollgate Road. The track borders an area of hardstanding which is used for parking vehicles and horse boxes.
- 4.6 The southwestern boundary of the Site follows the heavily wooded corridor of the River Colne. The woodland extends in depth from the river to Coursers Road which lies further to the southwest.
- 4.7 To the north west, the Site borders the unmade public footpath, Colney Heath 033, which links Tollgate Road to Coursers Road.
- 4.8 The farmyard at Colney Heath Farm, contains the Grade II Listed farmhouse and associated barn, and lies approximately 150m to the northwest of the Site.
- 4.9 Tollgate Road adjoins the northern tip of the Site. The northeastern Site boundary then steps back to follow the rear gardens of the properties fronting onto Tollgate Road. To the south of the Site are a series of paddocks.
- 4.10 The houses which back onto the Site and front onto Tollgate Road follow a linear alignment and comprise a mix of detached and semi-detached

houses. These properties are mostly two storey, with the occasional 2 ½ storey property, and have long rear gardens. None of them are listed.

### **Settlement Pattern**

- 4.11 Colney Heath has a fragmented settlement pattern which comprises three separate nucleated clusters which are linked by local roads, which have intermittent development alongside them.
- 4.12 The western part of Colney Heath is relatively close to the A414 and comprises a small cluster of development which fronts onto the High Street. To the south of the High Street is a more consolidated area of medium density 2 storey housing which extends to Church Lane to the west. The northern side of the High Street comprises frontage housing with Colney Heath School and Nursery at the eastern end.
- 4.13 The largest part of the village lies to the south and borders the Appeal Site. This area is broadly triangular in configuration with Tollgate Road passing through the southern part of the triangle and Roestock Lane passing through the northern part. These two roads are linked by a series of internal roads which serve an area of consolidated suburban development. The properties are mostly 2 storey and medium density with occasional three storey and single storey properties.
- 4.14 The third nucleated cluster similarly has a triangular form and is located to the north. It is bordered by Roestock Lane and Bullens Green Lane and is mostly two storey semi-detached dwellings.
- 4.15 The consolidated areas of development that are described above are mainly from the post war era and are typically suburban in character with private gardens and on curtilage parking. The lower density housing which fronts onto the roads, that link the three parcels, is varied in character and typically from an earlier period but relatively few are listed and none fall within a Conservation Area.
- 4.16 The land which separates the three nucleated clusters, which make up the village, is mainly agricultural land which comprises a series of irregular shaped fields that are in arable and pastoral use.

### **Landscape Character**

- 4.17 The LVIA contains a description of the National Character Area which sets the context for the district character assessments. As the Appeal Site is relatively small, I therefore only refer to the district character assessment.

**Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment** (CD 12.1: Extract in Appendix J)

- 4.18 The Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment divides the county into a series of Landscape Character Areas, with the Site lying in the Colney Heath Farmland Landscape Character Area (LCA) 30.
- 4.19 LCA 30 is relatively large and extends from London Colney and St Albans in the west to Hatfield in the east. The overall area is described as a medium-scale landscape contained by adjacent urban areas and transport routes, with visual containment provided by a good network of hedges, field trees and tree belts. The key characteristics of the Colney Heath Farmland LCA are described as:
- *'medium-scale arable farmland;*
  - *subtle gently undulating landforms;*
  - *severance by transport corridors, past and present;*
  - *areas of semi-natural restored mineral workings;*
  - *heath habitat at Colney Heath; and*
  - *urban development contains area physically but visually largely concealed.'*
- 4.20 The study notes that views both from outside and within the area are generally well screened by roadside vegetation. It also notes that the A414 and A1(M) provide a major source of noise and disruption. It describes the landscape type as frequent, with the heathy habitats being the most distinct features.
- 4.21 The study assessed the landscape condition overall as moderate, and the strength of character as moderate. The guidelines for change within the LCA recommend 'improving and conserving' the landscape, and it also includes a series of management strategies.
- 4.22 I have already described the baseline condition of the Site which is mainly in equestrian use, with associated infrastructure. The rear gardens of the houses which back onto the northeastern boundary of the Site, comprises a mix of domestic fencing and intermittent vegetation. The housing is readily visible from within the Site and clearly has an impact on its character.

- 4.23 The dense belt of woodland which borders the southwestern boundary of the Site provides both physical and visual containment and screens the Site from the wider countryside to the west.
- 4.24 Given the overall character of the Site, the intervisibility with neighbouring housing and the lack of distinctive landscape features within the Site, it is considered to be of medium to low landscape sensitivity to the proposed development.

### **Statutory and Non-Statutory Designations**

- 4.25 The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality. Similarly, it does not carry any heritage designations. This is agreed in the SoCG.
- 4.26 The western part of the Site forms part of the Colney Heath Farm Meadows Local Wildlife Site, which is locally listed for ecological importance, and which follows the course of the River Colne.
- 4.27 The farmhouse and barn to the north at Colney Heath Farm, are both Grade II Listed, as is the Queen's Head Public House and two London Coal Duty markers to the north of the farm. These heritage assets are described in detail in the heritage proof of evidence.
- 4.28 There are no trees on the Site that are covered by Tree Preservation Orders ('TPO').

### **Public Rights of Way**

- 4.29 There is no public access onto the Site and no public rights of way crossing it. Public footpath Colney Heath 033 runs alongside the northwestern Site boundary and is separated from the Site by a hedgerow, with occasional breaks in it, and a timber fence.

### **Site Description**

- 4.30 The Site is in active equestrian use and also includes the property at 42 Tollgate Road. The northwestern part of the Site contains a stable block and a manège, with associated storage containers and horse boxes. Vehicular access to the stables is from Tollgate Road and lies immediately to the west of the drive serving Number 42 Tollgate Road. The remainder of the Site is mainly horse grazed paddocks and there is also a small private children's play area and a timber shed to the south of the access track which serves the Site.
- 4.31 No 42 Tollgate Road is a 2 storey detached house with a hipped roof. It also has a detached single storey garage with access off Tollgate Road.



- 4.32 The north western Site boundary comprises a post and wire fence with intermittent hedgerow cover.
- 4.33 The northern Site boundary is formed by the rear garden fences and intermittent vegetation which runs alongside this boundary.
- 4.34 The northeastern boundary is defined by an outgrown hedgerow.
- 4.35 The northern part of the south eastern Site boundary is formed by a hedgerow with the southern part defined by a post and wire fence.
- 4.36 The southwestern Site boundary is formed by a post and wire fence, with the River Colne beyond. The river is flanked by mature trees, with a dense area of woodland further to the west.
- 4.37 The Site gently slopes from east to west towards the River Colne. The neighbouring countryside is similarly relatively level with subtle changes in topography.

### **Visibility**

- 4.38 A visual assessment of the Site was undertaken as part of the LVIA and a series of photographs taken from within the Site and from public vantage points beyond the Site. The viewpoints are illustrated on the Location Plan and Aerial Photograph contained in **Appendices A** and **B** and on the photographs in **Appendix C**.
- 4.39 The Site benefits from a good level of visual containment with views largely confined to the neighbouring area, with limited opportunities for middle distance views. The key views of the Site are described in the tables contained in **Appendix F** and are summarised below.
- 4.40 In views from Tollgate Road, near to the Site entrance, views are mainly of the outbuildings and areas of hardstanding within the Site with the canopies of the trees alongside the River Colne visible in the middle distance. From further north on Tollgate Road, the Site's north western boundary hedge is visible, with the stables partially visible above the hedge.
- 4.41 Views from Coursers Road, to the northwest of the Site, are largely prevented by the intervening woodland. There is a glimpsed view from close to the bridge that crosses the River Colne but at this point the alignment of the road is such that housing within Colney Heath also comes into view.

- 4.42 Views from Colney Heath Common to the northwest are prevented by the embankment which accommodates Coursers Road and by the intervening woodland.
- 4.43 In views from public footpath 33, which runs alongside the northwestern boundary of the Site, the boundary hedgerow largely screens views. The southwestern part of the Site boundary is largely open and is delineated by a post and wire fence which allows views across the Site and onwards to the houses which back onto it. There are also views to the countryside to the southeast of the Site. These views become filtered and then screened once the footpath enters the woodland alongside the river.
- 4.44 There are also intermittent views from the rear gardens and from some rear windows of the houses which back onto the Site.

### **Landscape Value**

- 4.45 The reason for refusal does not say that the Site is a Valued Landscape, and Hertfordshire Landscape Services has not suggested otherwise. However, for completeness, I have assessed the Site against the criteria set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd edition ('GLVIA) and the supplementary advice issued by the Landscape Institute in 2021 ('TGN 02/21'). The supplementary advice is not intended to provide an exhaustive list and identifies matters that could be considered.
- 4.46 The Council's SoC (para 5.33) does however say that the development would not recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Against that background, landscape value is one of the factors that helps inform judgements on particular qualities and characteristics of the countryside in question.
- 4.47 Box 5.1 of the 3rd edition of the GLVIA sets out seven factors that can help in the identification of Valued Landscapes. I have set these out below with my observations beneath. Where appropriate, I have added, in italics, the definitions contained in the additional guidance in TGN 02/21.

### **Landscape quality (condition) *Landscape condition***

- 4.48 The Site is in equestrian use and includes the house and garden of No. 42 Tollgate Road. The northwestern part of the Site also contains a stable block, a manège and areas of hardstanding. Given these factors, the Site has a more degraded appearance than an area of intact farmland or unspoilt countryside.

- 4.49 TGN 02/21 states that examples of indicators of landscape value include the 'absence of detracting/incongruous features (or features are present but have little influence)'. In the case of the Site, there are clear views of the houses which back onto the Site, and to a certain extent housing on the opposite side of the road. These properties undoubtedly have an influence on its character.

#### **Scenic quality**

- 4.50 The Site does not carry any statutory or non statutory designations for intrinsic landscape quality.

#### **Rarity (Distinctiveness)**

- 4.51 The Site does not contain any rare elements.

#### **Conservation Interest (Natural heritage and cultural heritage)**

- 4.52 The greater part of the Site is not covered by any ecological designations nor is it covered by any heritage designations. The western part of the Site forms part of the Colney Heath Farm Meadows Local Wildlife Site, which is locally listed for ecological importance. Given that this is a non statutory designation, and forms only a relatively small part of the Site, I do not consider that it elevates the Site as a whole to that of a Valued Landscape. Nevertheless, it has been respected and will be enhanced as part of the development and as a consequence there is no objection to the Appeal Scheme from Natural England or Herts Ecology.

#### **Recreation value**

- 4.53 There is currently no public access onto, or across, the Site. The manège is in private ownership.

#### **Perceptual aspects**

- 4.54 GLVIA refers to perceptual aspects as a landscape which is valued for notable qualities of wildness and/or tranquillity. The Site cannot be described as wild and similarly it cannot be described as tranquil.

#### **Association**

- 4.55 As far as I am aware the Site does not have any associations with notable historic figures or historic events.

#### **Function** (*This is a new factor identified in GTN 02/21*)

- 4.56 In the TGN 02/21 guidance, the term 'function' covers a range of qualities with the emphasis on 'healthy functioning landscapes'. Examples include hydrological systems, peat bogs, woodlands, oceans and wildflower meadows, amongst other things. It also states that it includes 'landscapes and landscape elements that have strong physical or functional links with an adjacent national landscape designation.'
- 4.57 Like all sites, the Site performs some function e.g. carbon absorption, absorption of rainwater etc. but there is nothing that would elevate its status above that of a typical site.
- 4.58 Given the above factors, I do not consider the Site to be a Valued Landscape for the purpose of para 174a of the NPPF and the Council have not suggested otherwise.

### **Green Belt**

- 4.59 Colney Heath is washed over by the Green Belt, as is the Appeal Site. The LPA have undertaken several reviews of the Green Belt and these are summarised below.

### **Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment 2013 (CD12.2).**

- 4.60 The Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment was undertaken by Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) in 2013 on behalf of St Albans City and District Council, Dacorum Borough Council, and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
- 4.61 The Assessment was undertaken at a very strategic level and covers three districts, all of which contain a number of large settlements. It clearly does not contain a sufficient level of detail to enable individual sites to be assessed.
- 4.62 The assessment identifies the Site as falling within Green Belt Parcel 'GB34 – Green Belt Land between Hatfield and London Colney'. This parcel covers an area of 419ha.
- 4.63 In relation to purpose 1, to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, the assessment found that Parcel GB34 makes a '*limited or no*' contribution, noting that the parcel is located away from large built-up areas.
- 4.64 In terms of purpose 2, to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another, the assessment found a '*partial*' contribution. It acknowledged that '*overall, any minor reduction in the gap would be unlikely compromise the separation of 1st tier settlements in physical or visual terms, or overall visual openness.*'

- 4.65 The assessment identified a '*significant*' contribution to purpose 3, to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. It did however acknowledge that there is linear development in the northern part of the parcel, around Colney Heath and Bullens Green, and that the A1(M) is a major urban influence.
- 4.66 In relation to purpose 4, to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, the assessment finds a '*partial*' contribution, noting that there are Conservation Areas at London Colney and Sleapshyde.
- 4.67 The assessment also considered a '*local*' Green Belt purpose, which is maintaining existing settlement pattern. It considers that the parcel makes a '*significant*' contribution to this local contribution. This is clearly not one of the national purposes of the Green Belt but is a matter which I have nevertheless considered in this evidence, as it is a relevant design consideration.
- 4.68 The strategic level of the assessment is evident from the section which deals with the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas. This concludes that: '*The parcel is located away from large built-up areas of London, Luton and Dunstable and Stevenage. It does not form a connection with a wider network of parcels to restrict sprawl*'.
- 4.69 Given the strategic nature of the 2013 Green Belt Review, I do not consider that its overall conclusion on the function of Parcel GB34, can be applied to smaller parcels of land, such as the Appeal Site.

**St Albans Stage 2 Green Belt Review 2023 (CD12.3).**

- 4.70 In 2023 Arup was appointed by St Albans City & District Council to prepare a Stage 2 Green Belt Review to help inform work carried out as part of the emerging Local Plan.
- 4.71 In broad terms, the Stage 2 Review was a more refined assessment than that which had previously been carried out and it examined the performance of '*discrete and small Green Belt parcels*', that were primarily adjacent to large urban areas.
- 4.72 Smaller settlements, such as Colney Heath, that are washed over by the Green Belt, were considered in a separate Annex Report with the findings summarised in the main report.

**Green Belt Review: Washed Over Villages Study 2023 (CD 12.4: Extract Appendix I)**

- 4.73 This Study looked at 10 smaller settlements and advised on whether they should be washed over or inset into the Green Belt. Of the 10 settlements

assessed, eight were recommended for retention as washed over settlements; one for inseting in the Green Belt boundary; and one to potentially be washed over by the Green Belt.

4.74 The Study considered the function of each village against a series of criteria:

- Part 1: Assessment of 'open character' of the village. This was broken down into: *settlement form and scale and key open spaces*.
- Part 2: Assessment of 'openness' contribution to the Green Belt. This was also subdivided into: *Key views to/from settlement and Settlement edge characteristics and setting*.

4.75 In the Study, Colney Heath is described as '3 separate nucleated clusters'. The nucleated cluster which the Appeal Site adjoins is B and is described as:

*'The largest area (B) to the south, is a cluster of development along looping lanes and cul-de-sacs between Tollgate Road and Roestock Lane. This area has some localised three storey development with moderate density and moderately sized gardens. The development is a mixture of detached, semi-detached and terraced houses'.*

#### **Part 1 Assessment: Open Character**

4.76 In respect of the performance of Colney Heath against Part 1, the review concluded that the village as a whole had a score of 'moderate'. It did however note that in respect of settlement form and scale, 'Area B scores low resulting from the development density and infill development...'.

4.77 The overall conclusion in respect of Part 1 was that 'the village scored moderate for both criteria and therefore is considered to have an open character'.

#### **Part 2 Assessment: Openness contribution to the Green Belt**

4.78 The first section of the Part 2 Assessment considered key views to/from the settlement and concluded that 'the score is moderate for Areas A, B and C and is therefore moderate overall. This is because all areas of the settlement have mixed boundaries with some degree of intervisibility and relationship with the wider landscape'.

4.79 In assessing the function of Area B, it states that: 'In area B most views are internal along the looping roads of the settlement structure. They

*typically feature vegetated green verges and front gardens but have little connection to the wider Green Belt landscapes'.*

4.80 It then goes on to say: *'Views from the southern boundary, however, have very strong connections to the wider landscape with open arable fields and wooded blocks in the background as there is a visually permeable boundary with no adjacent development along Tollgate Road'.*

4.81 The description in para 4.78 of views from the southern boundary of Area B appear to be from the section of Tollgate Road which lies to the west of the Site, as that boundary is open. By contrast, views from the eastern section of Parcel B, which backs onto the Appeal Site, are largely prevented by the frontage housing on Tollgate Road with only glimpsed views, between the properties, of the canopies of the trees alongside the River Colne.

4.82 The second section of the Part 2 Assessment considers Settlement Edge Characteristics and Setting. The overall score for this was: *'.. moderate as areas A, B and C all have mixed natural and man-made boundaries with some degree of intervisibility and relationship with the wider landscape'.*

4.83 Part 2 of the Study concluded that: *'The village scored moderate for both of the criteria. Its open character is therefore considered to make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt'.*

### **Recommendation**

4.84 The overall recommendation was that *'the village has an open character and makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt, therefore it should be retained as washed over'.*

4.85 The Reg 18 version of the Local Plan, that is currently out for consultation, continues to show Colney Heath as a washed over settlement.

### **My Observation**

4.86 From my observations of the village as a whole, the key component of openness is the fact that the nucleated clusters, that make up the settlement, are largely separated by parcels of undeveloped land which allows the neighbouring countryside to permeate into the village. They also provide opportunities for framed views out to the neighbouring countryside.

- 4.87 In terms of key characteristics, I do not consider that Colney Heath is defined by the prevailing density or the incidental areas of open space within the village as these are largely suburban in character as opposed to rural and are relatively modest in extent.
- 4.88 Given that the Appeal Scheme displays many of the characteristics of Colney Heath that are identified above e.g. it will have mixed boundaries with some degree of intervisibility and a relationship with the wider landscape, then it could continue to be washed over by the Green Belt.
- 4.89 I have already described how the nucleated clusters that make up Colney Heath are largely separated by swathes of open land. As the Appeal Scheme will not encroach into any of the swathes of open land that separate the parcels it will not harm this characteristic of the village.



## **5.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AND SUMMARY OF LANDSCAPE AND GREEN BELT EFFECTS**

- 5.1 The Appeal Scheme and the factors that have informed the layout are described and illustrated in the Design and Access Statement (CD 4.6). In summary, the proposed development comprises:
- A development for up to 150 new homes (including affordable self-build and custom build homes;
  - New areas of informal and formal public open space, recreational footways, play areas, and a potential new pedestrian link to Public Footpath 033;
  - Retention and enhancement of Colney Heath Farm Meadows Local Wildlife Site; and
  - Demolition of No. 42 Tollgate Road,
- 5.2 The application is in outline with all matters reserved save for means of access.
- 5.3 A Parameters Plan has been provided. This shows that the northwestern and southeastern boundaries of the Site will have 10 metres of new native planting, with a green corridor of semi natural green space alongside them. This depth of planting was recommend by Herts Landscape Service and will strengthen the existing vegetation which already exists along significant parts of these boundaries. The Colney Heath Farm Meadows LWS will remain free of development and an additional swathe of informal open space will be provided alongside it. Drainage basins will also be provided within the informal area of open space.
- 5.4 Height parameters have also been provided, with the maximum height being 2 ½ storeys. On the periphery of the development the height is limited to 2 storeys. A maximum height of 6 metres is also proposed on the northeastern part of the Site. A Local Area of Play ('LAP') will also be provided within the development envelope.
- 5.5 There will be a single point of vehicular and pedestrian access from Tollgate Road with opportunities for recreational routes throughout the Site.
- 5.6 The illustrative masterplan (CD4.20) shows how an inclusive development can come forward within the parameters of the Site. In broad terms, this shows that houses would back onto the rear gardens

of the existing properties on Tollgate Road, with those on the eastern, southern and western parts of the Site, oriented to face onto the areas of open space and countryside beyond.

- 5.7 It is evident from the above description that the proposed development responds to the Site and its wider setting in an appropriate manner and that it will bring forward a development with a distinct sense of place.

### **Summary of effects**

- 5.8 The LVIA contains a detailed assessment of the anticipated landscape and visual effects. The effects tables are reproduced in **Appendix F** of this evidence. They provide an assessment of effects at year 1 and year 15. A brief summary of the anticipated landscape and visual effects is also given below. I also provide a commentary on the impact of the development on the Green Belt.

### **Settlement Pattern**

- 5.9 I have previously described the fact that Colney Heath is made up of a series of nucleated clusters of development which are linked by roads which have intermittent development alongside them.
- 5.10 The Appeal Scheme will complement the nucleated pattern of development in the southern part of Colney Heath and will be of a similar scale to the neighbouring development.

### **Landscape Features**

- 5.11 There are no landscape features within the Site that would act as a constraint to development. A small section of hedgerow will require removal on the Site frontage. This very minor loss of vegetation will be more than compensated for through planting within the development.
- 5.12 The Local Wildlife Site which runs alongside the River Colne is being retained and a landscape and ecological management plan will be put in place to ensure that this area is managed in an appropriate manner.

### **Landscape Character, Value and Sensitivity**

- 5.13 The Site is not covered by any statutory or non statutory designations for landscape character or quality. It's character is affected, to a certain degree, by the neighbouring properties which back onto it. Similarly, it is affected by its equestrian use. I consider it has a medium to low landscape sensitivity to the scale and density of development identified on the parameters plan.

- 5.14 As part of the development the horse paddocks, stables and associated infrastructure will be removed, as will the house and garden of No. 42 Tollgate Road. The area identified as the Colney Heath Farm Meadows Local Wildlife Site will remain undeveloped and will be managed in an appropriate manner.
- 5.15 The parameters plan shows that a significant part of the Site will remain free of development, with the undeveloped land retained for recreational use, wildlife benefits and to strengthen the visual containment of the Site.
- 5.16 The effects on the landscape character of the Site have been assessed as adverse, due to the change in the character of the Site, but that does not mean that the development will be unattractive. On the contrary, it will have a strong sense of place and will provide benefits for people and wildlife alike.
- 5.17 Given the Site's rural fringe character and extent of the existing and proposed boundary planting, the Appeal Scheme will complement the established settlement pattern and bring forward a range of market and affordable housing, amongst other things.
- 5.18 The development will remain separated from the more rural countryside around Colney Heath, by the dense belt of woodland alongside the River Colne and by the existing and proposed vegetation on the northern and southern Site boundaries. There will therefore be no significant effects on the character of the wider landscape/townscape.

### **Visual Effects**

- 5.19 The Site is visually well contained, being mostly visible from the immediate surroundings, with limited middle distance views available.
- 5.20 The Planning Officer's RTC reached a similar conclusion and quoted from Herts Landscape Services which said:
- 'With regards to visual effects, the LVIA concludes that 'the site is visually well contained, being mostly visible from the immediate surroundings, with limited middle-distance views available.' This conclusion is supported, the site is generally well screened to views from the wider area.....'*
- 5.21 The key views and the visual effects of development at the Site are summarised in the tables in **Appendix F** and briefly discussed below. A series of Photomontages from key viewpoints have also been produced (**Appendix H**).

- 5.22 Properties in the northern part of the Site will be visible from the access road leading into the Site and from its immediate environs.
- 5.23 The upper storeys and roofscape of the homes will be visible, over the hedgerow on the Site boundary, from a relatively short section of Tollgate Road to the northwest of the Site. As the new boundary planting matures, views will be screened or heavily filtered. There will be similar views from properties on the northern side of Tollgate Road.
- 5.24 There will be similar, albeit more distant, glimpsed views from a short section of Coursers Road to the north of the bridge over the River Colne and from the neighbouring properties.
- 5.25 Views from public footpath 33, immediately to the northwest of the Site, will largely be of the upper storeys and roofscape of the new homes. The existing hedgerow and new planting alongside this boundary will filter or screen views of the houses as the vegetation matures.
- 5.26 There will be some opportunities for views of the housing from the gardens and rear windows of the properties on Tollgate Road which back onto the Site. These properties have deep rear gardens and there is intermittent vegetation along the boundary which will fragment views.
- 5.27 There will also be some opportunities for views of the upper storeys and roofscape of the new homes from the section of Tollgate Road which lies to the south east of the Site. The 10 metre wide band of vegetation along the south eastern Site boundary will heavily filter or screen these views as it matures.
- 5.28 Views from Mymms Park Country House, which lies approximately 1.4km south east of the Site, are considered in detail in the Heritage Evidence.
- 5.29 The Heritage Evidence states that: *'Views include those from north-west facing windows, and the terrace/garden on the north side of the house. From the central bay of the first floor long gallery, 100 Tollgate Road is visible through a gap in planting at the north-eastern park boundary, along with other properties at Tollgate Road. The rooftops of existing properties to the north-west of 100 Tollgate Road are also visible, beyond the site, although not prominent due to the distance and intervening trees.'*
- 5.30 In assessing the impact of the Appeal Scheme, the Heritage Evidence makes reference to the photomontages that have been prepared and concludes that the impact will be *'minimal'* at completion of the development and at year 15 the visual impact will be *'resolved'*.

5.31 From my observations on Site, I would agree with the findings of the Heritage Evidence and would add that the existing boundary planting is to be significantly enhanced and that properties in the northeastern part of the Site will be limited to 6 metres in height.

**Assessment of the Site's performance against Green Belt purposes**

5.32 I now consider the impact of development on the Site on the Green Belt purposes.

5.33 The Site lies adjacent to the settlement boundary of Colney Heath and, like the settlement, is washed over by the Metropolitan Green Belt.

5.34 I acknowledge that the Appeal Scheme constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it does not meet the exceptions in para 149 of the NPPF.

5.35 Paragraph 6.18 of the SoCG (CD8.3), helpfully narrows down the differences between the parties and states that: *'It is agreed that there are five purposes that Green Belts serve. The parties agree that the proposals will not assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment'*.

5.36 The SoCG does not say that there is conflict with any of the other Green Belt purposes. However, for completeness, I now provide an assessment of the Appeal Scheme, against the first four purposes of the Green Belt, as set out in paragraph 138 of the NPPF. The 5th purpose of the Green Belt is not considered, on the basis that this purpose is considered to apply equally to all areas within the Green Belt. For ease of reference, I have added the Council's judgments, as set out in their SoC, on the Green Belt purposes, in brackets after mine.

**To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**

5.37 Colney Heath is not considered to be a large built up area, rather it is a washed over village. There is therefore no conflict with this purpose.

5.38 The Site is well contained by the dense belt of woodland that runs alongside the River Colne and the properties facing onto Tollgate Road. The northwestern and southeastern boundaries follow existing field boundaries and 10 metres of additional planting will be introduced to further strengthen these boundaries.

5.39 The Site clearly has a strong relationship to housing in the southern part of Colney Heath and will complement the nucleated settlement pattern in this part of the village.

- 5.40 The Appeal Scheme can therefore be accommodated on the Site without resulting in unrestricted sprawl and the Site is considered to make no contribution to this Green Belt purpose (SoCG: no conflict).

**To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another**

- 5.41 Colney Heath is not a town and there is therefore no conflict with this Green Belt purpose. However, for completeness, I have assessed the impact of the Appeal Scheme on its separation from neighbouring settlements.
- 5.42 The nearest settlement to the west of the Site is London Colney which is over 2.5k away. That settlement is contained on its eastern boundary by the A1081 and there are significant areas of woodland in the intervening countryside. There is no intervisibility between the two settlements.
- 5.43 To the south, the nearest settlement is South Mimms, at over 4km away. Again, there are extensive areas of woodland between the two settlements and no intervisibility.
- 5.44 Given the physical and visual containment of the Site, and the relatively modest scale of the proposed development, there will be no actual or perceived coalescence with these settlements.
- 5.45 The Appeal Scheme therefore does not conflict with this Green Belt purpose (SoCG: no conflict).

**To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

- 5.46 I have already described the character of the Site and its relationship to neighbouring development along Tollgate Road. While the Appeal Scheme will, as a matter of fact, encroach onto the greater part of the Site, it will have only a strictly limited effect on the wider countryside due to the relationship of the Site to Colney Heath and the established Site boundaries which will be strengthened with new planting.
- 5.47 Against that background, the observations of Hertfordshire Landscape Services are relevant. Their response to the application states:

*'With regards to visual effects, the LVIA concludes that 'the site is visually well contained, being mostly visible from the immediate surroundings, with limited middle-distance views available.'*

*'This conclusion is supported, the site is generally well screened to views from the wider area by the intervening settlement to the east, and the vegetation associated with the river corridor to the west'.*

- 5.48 The Appeal Scheme is therefore considered to make a relatively weak contribution to this Green Belt purpose. (SACDC: conflict: substantial harm).

***Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns***

- 5.49 Colney Heath is not defined as a 'town' within the settlement hierarchy for St Albans District. In addition, it has no Conservation Area. The vast majority of buildings near the Site date from the 20th Century and are of no historic value. The Site therefore makes no contribution to this Green Belt purpose (SACDC No comment).

***Openness***

- 5.50 The PPG recognises that in assessing the impact of developments on Green Belt Openness, a judgement needs to be made on the circumstance of each individual case. The PPG also recognises that Openness has both a spatial and visual aspect.
- 5.51 The effect of the Appeal Scheme on both of these aspects of Openness is summarised below, both in terms of the impact on the Site itself and on the wider Green Belt.

***Spatial***

- 5.52 In the previous section I have identified that approximately half of the Site will remain undeveloped and that the open land will primarily be used for ecological enhancements. The balance of the Site will be developed for housing and supporting infrastructure and that will clearly have a significant impact on the spatial openness of the greater part of the Site.
- 5.53 For the reasons set out below, the loss of openness that the Appeal Scheme will give rise to, will only be experienced, for the most part, from the near distance and as such the impact on the wider Green Belt will be strictly limited.

***Visual***

- 5.54 Hertfordshire Landscape Services agreed with the findings of the LVIA which concluded that the Site is visually well contained. I have also referred to the parameters plan and site sections which show the extent of additional planting which will further strengthen its physical and visual containment.
- 5.55 Given that the majority of the external boundaries of the Site already have built development, or established planting, alongside them, then

the Appeal Scheme will benefit from a good degree of physical and visual containment from day 1.

- 5.56 As the hedgerow on the north eastern Site boundary matures and as the additional planting on the field boundaries becomes established, the greater part of the development will be screened from the wider landscape.
- 5.57 Whilst there is currently no public access onto the Site, views from within it, will inevitably change. The impact on the wider Green Belt will however be localised and will reduce over time as the planting matures.
- 5.58 Taking account of the spatial and visual components of the Appeal Scheme, the impact of the development on the Green Belt would be strictly localised.

#### **Green Belt Conclusion**

- 5.59 Overall, the Appeal Scheme has the potential to deliver a high quality development that would complement the existing nucleated settlement pattern of Colney Heath. It would be well contained and although there would be an impact on the openness of the greater part of the Site, these effects will be localised, and the proposed development would not have a significant material impact on the function of neighbouring Green Belt nor the wider Green Belt.



## **6.0 RESPONSE TO REASON FOR REFUSAL**

6.1 In the previous section I have addressed the impact of the Appeal Scheme on the Green Belt and also considered the anticipated landscape and visual effects. The following section is therefore only a brief response to the reason for refusal.

### **Green Belt**

6.2 The parties agree that the Appeal Scheme is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and that the Council's housing land shortfall is substantial. The benefits of the Appeal Scheme and the harm that will arise is addressed in the planning balance section of the planning proof of evidence.

6.3 Given that virtually all of the countryside and smaller settlements within the district are washed over by the Green Belt then it is inevitable that Green Belt land will need to be released to meet the acute housing shortfall in the district. As a consequence, there will inevitably be an impact on its openness. This is evident from the emerging Local Plan which identifies significant Green Belt sites for release for developments.

6.4 The parties agree that there is no conflict with the first two purposes of the NPPF and that the fourth and fifth purposes do not come into play. Harm will arise as a result of the reduction in openness and encroachment into the countryside but for the reasons I set out below the level of harm will be limited.

6.5 The impact of the Appeal Scheme on the spatial and visual aspects of the Green Belt have been addressed in the previous section.

### **Encroachment**

6.6 I have already described the strong relationship the Site has with Colney Heath and the collaborative approach that was taken with SACDC in shaping the masterplan and parameters plan, to ensure that a development could be brought forward in a manner that provided an appropriate level of containment to the Site and was of an appropriate scale.

### **Colney Heath as a washed over village**

6.7 In the previous section of this evidence I have referred to the 2023 review of Washed Over Green Belt villages. That report provides recommendation on whether or not settlements should continue to be washed over by the Green Belt or inset in it. When we have the adopted

Local Plan we will know whether or not the recommendations are followed.

- 6.8 The washed over villages study provides a useful description of the village of Colney Heath. It is described as three nucleated clusters of development that have a range of densities and incidental areas of open space within them. The visual relationship with the wider Green Belt is also considered.
- 6.9 It is apparent from the illustrative masterplan and parameters plan that the Appeal Scheme will complement the nucleated settlement pattern of Colney Heath; have significant areas of open space within it; and have an appropriate interface with the wider Green Belt. Given these factors, it would not be discordant with the character of the village and could be washed over by the Green Belt in a similar manner to the rest of the village.

### **Harm to Landscape Character and Appearance**

- 6.10 The Site itself is of limited intrinsic landscape quality. I say that because there are no landscape features within the Site of particular value e.g. veteran or TPO trees; the underlying landform is relatively flat; and the land is intensively grazed and is sub divided by post and wire fences. There are also a number of detracting features, such as the areas of hardstanding; the manège; stables; and outbuildings, all of which are of a utilitarian appearance.
- 6.11 The houses that back onto the Site are of no particular architectural merit and do not have a sensitive interface with the Site.
- 6.12 The LPA agree that the Site is not a Valued Landscape in respect of para 174a of the NPPF.
- 6.13 In considering landscape character and appearance it is also important to look at the landscape benefits the scheme will deliver.
- 6.14 Approximately 48% of the Site will remain as green open space. This will include Colney Heath Farm Meadows, new areas of planting, SuDS features and informal areas of open space. In addition, there will be incidental areas of open space within the development envelope, street trees and there will also be the gardens of the properties. Overall these will provide significant landscape benefits.
- 6.15 A landscape and ecological management plan will also be in place to ensure that the public areas of open space are managed in an

appropriate manner so that the spaces provide benefits for people and wildlife alike.

- 6.16 In terms of wider landscape impacts, paragraph 6.22 of the SoCG acknowledges that the landscape impacts will be limited and localised. It states that:

*It is agreed that the landscape impacts will not be significant on the character of the landscape / townscape in the immediate vicinity of the Appeal Site and there will be no material effects on the wider, rural landscape character around Colney Heath.*

- 6.17 Hert's Landscape Services did however express their concern over the role the Site plays in providing an open buffer between the existing built-up area and the more sensitive wildlife site and river corridor.
- 6.18 In respect of the ecological sensitivity of the wildlife site, both Natural England and Herts Ecology supported the Appeal Scheme, subject to conditions.
- 6.19 In terms of the landscape setting of Colney Heath Farm Meadows and the neighbouring woodland, the parameters plan and site sections show that the proposed housing will be set back from the wildlife site by approximately 30 metres. The intervening area of land between the wildlife site and the housing will largely be occupied by informal open space with the private drives and front gardens of the houses occupying the eastern part of this swathe of land.
- 6.20 While I accept that development will be drawn closer to the wildlife site it will have a far more empathetic relationship with it than the houses which currently back onto the Site, in that the houses will be orientated to face onto it. These properties will be mainly served by private drives and so there will be limited traffic movement and lighting will be subdued.
- 6.21 There will also be public access to this swathe of land which will allow the general public the opportunity to view this enhanced wildlife corridor.

### **Intrinsic Character and Beauty of the Countryside.**

- 6.22 The character of the greater part of the Site will change from equestrian use to housing with associated green infrastructure. The key feature of value within the Site is the Colney Heath Farm Meadows Wildlife Site which will be retained and enhanced. The existing field pattern will also be respected with the external field boundaries retained and

enhanced. The Appeal Scheme will therefore respond to the prevailing pattern of the countryside in an appropriate manner.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The Appeal Scheme will deliver a development that provides a range of market and affordable housing, together with recreational facilities. There will also be significant landscape enhancements and BNG.
- 7.2 The scale and configuration of the development will complement the nucleated settlement pattern of the southern part of Colney Heath.
- 7.3 From my observations on Site and from the wider area, I believe that there will be a negligible adverse impact on the character of the wider landscape and performance of the wider Green Belt if the Appeal Scheme is allowed.



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