



Vistry Homes Ltd

LAND AT BUNTINGFORD WEST, BUNTINGFORD

Proposed Residential Development

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

June 2023

Jon Etchells Consulting
3 Magog Farm Barns
Cambridge Road
Babraham
Cambs
CB22 3GP

je@jon-etchells.co.uk

LAND AT BUNTINGFORD WEST, BUNTINGFORD

Proposed Residential Development

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

June 2023

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
1. Introduction and Methodology	1
2. The Baseline Situation	4
3. The Proposed Development	47
4. Landscape and Visual Effects	55
5. Summary and Conclusions	69

Appendix A ~ Methodology

Appendix B ~ Summary of Landscape and Visual Effects

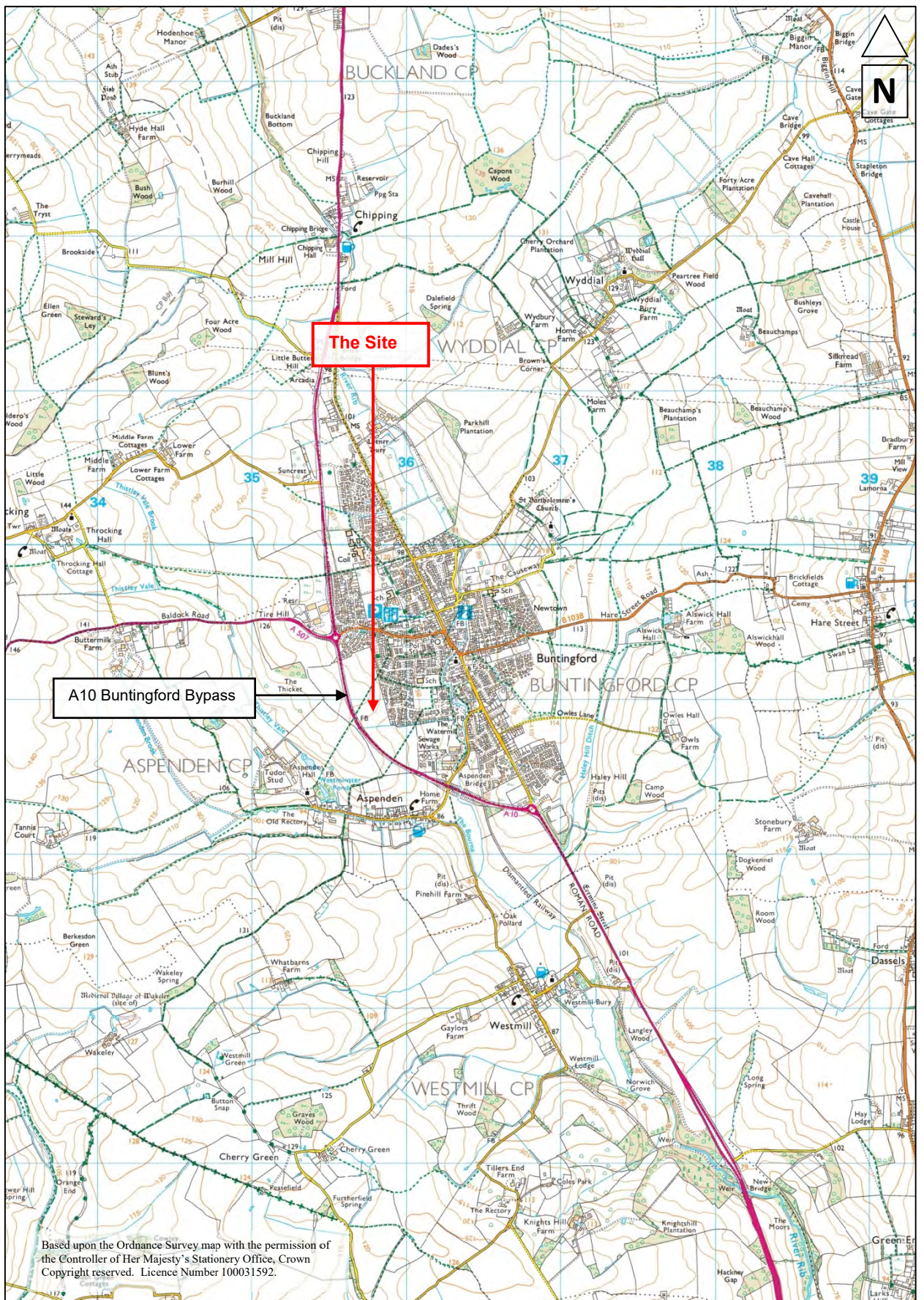
Appendix C ~ Proposals Drawings

<u>Figures:</u>		<u>Following Page</u>
Figure 1	Location Plan	1
Figure 2	Aerial Photograph and Photograph Viewpoints	4
Figure 3	Visual Envelope and Photograph Viewpoints	58

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 General

- 1.1.1 This report has been prepared for Vistry Homes Ltd in connection with the proposed development of a site between the existing edge of Buntingford and the A10 bypass for housing, with provision of 350 new dwellings, up to 4,400m² of commercial and services floorspace (Class E and B8 uses), up to 500m² of retail floorspace and associated works including drainage, access into the site from the A10 and Luynes Rise, allotments, public open space and landscaping. The site lies within the administrative area of East Herts District Council (EHDC), and its location is shown on Figure 1.
- 1.1.2 An outline planning application (with all matters reserved other than means of access) is to be submitted to EHDC, with vehicular access by means of a new roundabout junction on the A10.
- 1.1.3 The site is undeveloped and lies outside the defined settlement boundary as shown on the District Plan Policies Map - it is therefore in the countryside in planning terms. The site lies to the north and east of the A10, and to the south and west of the existing urban area, with a relatively recent housing development along the northern site boundary (with a petrol filling station and veterinary surgery on the south side of the B1038 Baldock Road further to the north), an industrial estate to the east, and the Buntingford Sewage Treatment Works (STW) to the south east (see Figure 1). The centre of Buntingford is around 700m to the north east of the site, with existing access via the two public footpaths which run across the site and into the urban area. The site is currently in active agricultural use, and comprises three large arable fields, with two larger, rolling fields to the west alongside the A10 and a smaller and flatter field in the south eastern part of the site. The site includes a small triangular area between the STW and the A10 at the southern end of the central field which is in temporary use as a gated hardstanding area for storage of materials and machinery. Two fields on the western side of the A10 are also included within the application boundary, and part of the northern field would be used for the provision of measures designed to secure the required Biodiversity Net Gain (see Section 3), with some limited land take from the southern field for the new roundabout junction.
- 1.1.4 Previous proposals for up to 400 new dwellings and a new school (EHDC reference 3/14/2304/OP) on the same site were submitted to EHDC in 2015 and refused in September 2017 for four reasons. Further proposals for up to 400 new dwellings and an area of employment land (with the employment land replacing the school - EHDC



Land at Buntingford West
Proposed Residential Development
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Not to Scale

Figure 1 Location Plan

reference 3/17/1811/OUT) were then submitted to EHDC in 2017 and refused in December of that year for three reasons. The proposals were then substantially revised, and a revised application for a reduced quantum of development was submitted in July 2022 (EHDC reference 3/22/1551/FUL), and refused in a notice dated 9 November 2022 for a total of 8 reasons, of which the first stated:

'The proposal would encroach into the rural area beyond the settlement boundary to the detriment of the character, appearance, and distinctiveness of the area contrary to Policies DES1, DES4, GBR2 of the East Herts District Plan (2018), Policy ES1 of the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.'

1.1.5 The current proposals are similar in principle to those submitted in 2022 (apart from the principal access), but are in outline only, with no detailed proposals in terms of design or layout, though a number of Parameter Plans form part of the proposals and set parameters for land use, access and movement, green infrastructure provision and density and building heights. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the character and quality of the landscape in and around the site, and the likely landscape and visual effects which would result from development of the site for housing and other uses, in order to assist EHDC with their consideration of the planning application for the proposed development. Reference is also made to the refusal of the 2022 proposals, and to some of the consultation comments made by the EHDC Landscape Officer.

1.1.6 The assessment of landscape and visual effects has been undertaken by Jon Etchells Consulting (JEC) - a practice registered with the Landscape Institute, with extensive experience of the assessment of landscape and visual effects of residential development at all scales. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), also prepared by JEC and dated June 2022, accompanied the 2022 application, and this report revises and updates that previous assessment to reflect the current proposals.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 In landscape and visual assessments, a distinction is normally drawn between landscape effects (i.e. effects on the character or quality of the landscape, irrespective of whether there are any views of the landscape, or viewers to see them) and visual effects (i.e. effects on people's views of the landscape, principally from residential properties, but also from public rights of way and other areas with public access). Thus, a development may have extensive landscape effects but few visual effects (if, for example, there are no properties or public viewpoints), or few landscape effects but significant visual effects (if, for example, the landscape is already degraded or the development is not out of character with it, but can clearly be seen from many residential properties).

- 1.2.2 The methodology followed is as set out in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', produced jointly by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and the Landscape Institute ('the GLVIA', 1995, revised 2002 and again in 2013). The document 'Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002' (The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage) also stresses the need for a holistic assessment of landscape character, including physical, biological and social factors. The detailed methodology used is set out in Appendix A.
- 1.2.3 Site visits for the assessment were undertaken in March and late May 2022 as part of the preparation for the June 2022 LVIA (with some use also of photographs taken during an earlier visit in February 2020) - no further detailed site visits were undertaken for this current LVIA, but an on-site check was made in June 2023 that there have been no significant changes in the area around the site in the intervening period. It has been possible to assess views and visibility in both the summer, when deciduous vegetation is in leaf and when views tend to be less open, and also in the late winter, and seasonal variations have been taken into account in the assessment. Photographs were taken from within the site and from publicly accessible areas in the area around it.
- 1.2.4 Viewpoints for the June 2022 assessment were agreed in discussion with the EHDC landscape officer in March 2022, based on those used for a previous assessment in 2017 and with some additions.

1.3 Structure of this Report

- 1.3.1 Section 2 of this report describes the baseline situation in terms of the existing site and the character and quality of the surrounding landscape. Section 3 describes the proposed development in terms of the proposed layout and also the accompanying landscape strategy and outline proposals for the site as a whole. Section 4 sets out the landscape and visual effects likely to result from the development, and also makes some comments on the refusal of the 2022 proposals, and on some of the consultation comments made by the EHDC Landscape Officer. A summary and conclusions are provided in Section 5.

2. THE BASELINE SITUATION


2.1 Landscape Context

Site Location and Boundaries

2.1.1 The site is on the south western edge of Buntingford, and the area proposed for development forms a broad strip between 150 and 250m wide between the existing urban edge and the A10 bypass (see the aerial photograph in Figure 2). Two triangular fields to the west of the A10 are also included within the site, and part of the northern field is proposed to be converted to wildflower grassland as part of the proposals for Biodiversity Net Gain, with the proposed roundabout extending partly into the southern field. The boundaries of the part of the site to be developed (i.e. to the north east of the A10) are as follow:

- The short northern boundary is marked by a tall hedgerow of blackthorn, hawthorn and bramble up to 6m in height, broader and denser to the east but narrower and with some gaps to the west, which also includes ash and field maple trees up to around 15m in height (see Photographs 1 and 2). Beyond this is an area of housing completed in around 2016 at Longmead, on the far side of which is a further hedgerow and then a veterinary surgery and petrol filling station next to the A10/A507 roundabout.
- Taking the eastern boundary to run from the north eastern corner of the site to its southern corner alongside the A10, and including the various changes of direction between those points, it comprises (from north to south):
 - Rear garden boundaries of the adjacent houses on Monks Walk - the boundaries are variable, some have conifer hedges, some have fences and others have no formal boundary, with the northern end of the boundary being generally more open (see Photographs 3 and 29).
 - Further to the south, close to the point where the northern public footpath across the site (Footpath Buntingford 029) runs into the urban edge, the boundary vegetation is taller and more consistent, with a dense hawthorn and blackthorn hedge around 4 to 5m in height (see Photograph 3).
 - To the south of the footpath the adjacent gardens are at a lower level than the site, and slope down to the houses, with the boundary formed by a



 Photograph viewpoints and direction of view
 See Figure 3 for viewpoints 32 to 36.

Land at Buntingford West

Proposed Residential Development

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Not to scale

Figure 2 Aerial photograph and Photograph Viewpoints

variable hedge of blackthorn and hawthorn around 3 to 4m in height and with some gaps (see Photograph 4).

- On the far side of a field boundary hedgerow within the site, the eastern boundary turns to run to the east, and comprises a tall, variable hedge of blackthorn, hawthorn, bramble and dogwood, with occasional ash and field maple trees (see Photograph 5).
- In the easternmost part of the site the boundary turns again to run to the south, and consists of an overgrown hedge of hawthorn, suckering elm and hazel, with a parallel line of tall pine trees up to 15 to 18m in height just to the east of the hedge line (see Photograph 6). The Arboricultural Assessment report which accompanies the planning application notes that some of those trees are covered by a Tree Preservation Order, but are located outside the site boundary.
- The boundary then turns again to run to the east along the north side of the STW (see Photograph 7) and then again to the south to meet the A10 - this part of the boundary comprises a tall but gappy hedge and an intermittent line of tall ash trees up to 18m in height, with a gap at its southern end close to the A10. The triangular area within the site which is in agricultural use as a gated storage yard with hardstanding lies to the west of the southern part of this boundary, and is enclosed along its northern site by a low earth bund between the yard and the field (see Photograph 28).
- The western boundary runs alongside the A10, which curves around the western side of Buntingford (see Photographs 8 to 18). The road is above site levels to the south, generally at grade through the central part of the site and then slightly below site levels (by up to around 2m) in the northern part of the site. Planting along the east side of the road is continuous, but with some areas denser than others, and with some areas of ash trees apparently suffering from die-back with some dead branches and gaps in the foliage. Species include ash, field maple, hawthorn and sycamore up to 7m in height to the south, a greater proportion of willow and sycamore in the central part around the footbridge where heights are up to 10 to 12m, and with some oak and aspen to the north, where the vegetation is generally more sparse. This vegetation is still relatively immature, and will continue to grow into the future, though as it is deciduous it forms a less effective screen in the winter. There is a gap in this vegetation roughly in the centre of the boundary to the central field within the site, which provides access for large agricultural machinery directly from the A10 - this access would cease if development of the site were

to proceed, and the gap could be planted up (though a new gap would need to be created at the proposed access point).

Existing Land Use and Vegetation Within the Site

- 2.1.2 The site is in agricultural use, and comprises three large arable fields, two of which were severed in the past by the construction of the A10, leaving smaller residual areas on the far side of the road. For ease of reference, these fields are referred to below as Fields A, B and C, from north to south (see Figure 2).
- 2.1.3 There are also two visually significant hedgerows within the site area - one running north from the north west corner of the STW (dividing Fields B and C) which comprises a double row of hawthorn, field maple and blackthorn up to 8m in height to either side of a shallow ditch (see Photographs 7 and 22), and a similar hedge running west towards the A10 (dividing Fields A and B). At the western end of this field boundary, close to the A10, there are two distinctive multi-stemmed sycamores around 16m in height, with striking domed canopies, to either side of the field access through the hedge line (see Photographs 19 and 20).
- 2.1.4 The land to the south west of the A10, part of which is proposed for ecological enhancement, is also in arable use, with a narrow grass strip between the wider fields to the north and south of the point where the footbridge crosses the A10 (see Photographs 24 to 27).
- 2.1.5 There are two public rights of way across the site, one running to the north east from Aspenden Church, across a shallow ridge to the north east of Aspenden Hall (where it is Footpath Aspenden 001), crossing the A10 by means of a footbridge and then across the northern part of the site in Field A (as Footpath Buntingford 029) and into the urban area near Monks Walk (see Photographs 3 and 10). The other footpath runs in the same direction but further to the south east, running from Aspenden across the lower end of the same ridge (as Footpath Aspenden 002), across the A10 at grade (see Photographs 9, 21, 23 and 27) and diagonally across the southern part of the site (Field B) into the urban area, as (as Footpath Buntingford 026). The footpaths are signed and marked on the ground, and both appear to be well used, particularly the northern route.
- 2.1.6 The Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Definitive Map also shows a bridleway (Bridleway Aspenden 011) from Aspenden Bridge to the west, connecting with Footpath Aspenden 002 and running outside the site boundary, which was diverted to that route in 2018 and is not shown on the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 mapping (see Figures 1 and 3).

The Surrounding Area

2.1.7 The area around the site is as follows:

- To the north are the houses along Longmead, the petrol filling station and other buildings around the A10/A507 roundabout, with the northern part of Buntingford beyond, on the far side of the B1038 Baldock Road - there is a new housing area on the north side of the town, between the A10 and Ermine Street (comprising 'The Maples' Redrow development and a McCarthy and Stone development).
- To the east is the urban area of Buntingford, along Monks Walk to the north and the various cul-de-sacs off Luynes Rise further to the south. To the east of Field C is a small area of rough grass with the northern part of the Watermill Industrial Estate and the River Rib beyond that, and the Buntingford STW further to the south. Beyond the STW and the industrial estate is Aspenden Road, which runs under the A10 to the village of Aspenden. Further to the east there are new areas of housing recently completed or still under construction to the south of Hare Street Road (the 'Meadow Vale' development), to the north of that road (the 'Knights Walk' Taylor Wimpey development), and a larger area on the east side of London Road on the site of the former Sainsbury's distribution centre ('The Village' development).
- To the south and west, on the far side of the A10, are the remnant arable fields referred to above, and beyond those fields are parkland fields running down the slope to Aspenden Hall (see Photographs 39 and 40). Some of the parkland oak trees in these fields appear to have been damaged (and some killed) by horse grazing. Further to the north west is a small area of woodland shown on the Ordnance Survey mapping as The Thicket, which is a locally distinctive feature on high ground.

Topography

2.1.8 The site slopes generally down from north west to south east, towards the valley of the River Rib, and levels within it vary from just above 115m AOD (above Ordnance Datum, or mean sea level) in the western part of Field A close to the A10 to just below 90m AOD in the easternmost part of the site in Field C. Within that general topography, there is a pronounced local ridge within Field A, running into the site from the A10, such that levels fall to both the north east and south east from this ridge.

2.1.9 Within the wider area, the site lies on the western side of a broad valley running to the south through the centre of Buntingford, on the eastern slopes of a broad ridge running to the north west, towards Tire Hill on the A507, where levels reach 126m AOD. The A10 runs downhill from the north west at roughly the same level as the surrounding land, but rises up on a broad embankment to cross the valley of the River Rib to the south east of the site. There is higher ground to the east of the town, running southwards from St Bartholomew's Church (where levels are just over 115m AOD) to Owles Farm at the eastern end of Owles Lane, where levels are around 122m AOD. This broad area of higher ground can be seen from the higher parts of the site, though there are relatively few points within it with public views back to the site (see Section 2.3 below).

Existing Light Sources

2.1.10 The A10 is not lit as it passes the site to the west, but there are lights around the A10/A507 roundabout just to the north west, and also street lighting and lights on and in the houses within the urban area to the east and north of the site. However there are no light sources within the site itself, and the landscape to its west and south (other than for the village of Aspenden) is largely dark and unlit.



1. View north west from the point where the public footpath (Footpath Buntingford 029) enters Field A from the existing urban edge. The trees along the far side of the field are on the northern site boundary, and the houses along Longmead to the north of the site are visible through the trees. The trees on the left of the view are alongside the A10. Three images combined, March 2022.



1A. A similar view in the summer, showing the greater screening effect of the boundary trees. Two images combined, May 2022.



2. View north west from Footpath Buntingford 029 through Field A, showing some of the houses in Longmead on the right edge of the view, and vegetation along the western site boundary with the A10 extending across the view to the left. Two images combined, March 2022.



3. View north east back to the urban edge from Footpath Buntingford 029 across Field A. Note the partially screened adjacent houses (with houses to the north (on the left of the view) clearly visible (see also Photograph 29), and those to the south of the line of the footpath better screened), and also the higher ground visible in the distance. Two images combined, March 2022.



4. View south east from the western edge of Field A next to the A10 footbridge. Note the partially screened adjacent houses and also the higher ground visible in the distance. Two images combined, March 2022.



5. View north east from the south western corner of Field C showing houses along the existing urban edge. Two images combined, March 2022.



6. View south east from the north western corner of Field C showing houses along the northern side of the field on the left of the view and the hedge and pine trees along the eastern site boundary on the right (some of those trees are covered by a TPO), with houses to the west of London Road partially visible in the distance, above the tall hedge and trees. Two images combined, March 2022.



7. View south along the western side of Field C, showing the tall hedgerow within the site on the right and the trees along the northern side of the STW to the left. Two images combined, February 2020.



8. View south west from the eastern side of Field B, showing trees along the line of the A10 on the far side of the field. Two images combined, February 2020.



9. View south west along the line of the public footpath (Footpath Buntingford 026) through Field B, showing trees along the line of the A10 on the far side of the field. Three images combined, March 2022.



10. View south west towards the A10 from Footpath Buntingford 029 at the crest of the ridge within Field A. The A10 footbridge can be seen through the trees just to the left of the line of the footpath. Three images combined, March 2022.



10A. The same view in the summer, showing that the trees alongside the A10 form an effective screen, though there are some occasional narrow gaps (a car is visible on the right of the view) where trees are thinner or affected by ash dieback (see also Photograph 18). Three images combined, May 2022.



11. View north west along the A10 showing the dense vegetation to either side of the road - the site is behind the trees on the right of the view. March 2022.



11A. The same view in the summer, when the trees form a more complete screen. May 2022.



12. View north west from further to the north west along the A10, showing the dense vegetation to either side of the road - the site is behind the trees on the right of the view, and there are some fleeting and filtered views through the trees in the winter. March 2022.



13. View north along the A10 showing the dense vegetation to either side of the road and the footbridge - the site is behind the trees on the right of the view. March 2022.



13A. The same view in the summer. May 2022.



14. View north along the A10 showing the generally dense vegetation to either side of the road (but with some glimpse views through it) - the site is behind the trees on the right of the view. March 2022.



15. View north along the A10 as it approaches the roundabout to the north west of the site, showing the dense vegetation to either side of the road - the northern end of the site is behind the trees on the right of the view. March 2022.



16. View north from the south western corner of Field A, showing vegetation along the western site boundary with the A10 on the left of the view and the higher ground within Field A to the right. Two images combined, March 2022.



17. View south east from the north western corner of Field B, showing vegetation along the western site boundary with the A10 on the right of the view. Two images combined, March 2022.



18. View east from Footpath Buntingford 029 within Field A, showing traffic on the A10 visible through a gap in the roadside vegetation - some of the trees at this point are suffering from ash die-back. May 2022.



19. View south east from next to the footbridge in Field A, showing the hedgerow between Fields A and B running across the middle ground and the two multi-stemmed sycamores framing the access to Field B. Two images combined, March 2022.



19A. The same view in the summer. Two images combined, May 2022.



20. View east from the north western corner of Field B, showing the tall hedge which separates fields A and B on the left of the view. Two images combined, March 2022.



21. View north east along Footpath Buntingford 026 through Field B, showing existing houses along Meadow View, Peasmead and Knights Close on the left of the view, and the tall hedge between Fields B and C on the right. Two images combined, March 2022.



22. View south from the north eastern corner of Field B, with the tall hedge between Fields B and C on the left of the view and vegetation along the western site boundary with the A10 in the background. Two images combined, March 2022.



23. View north east from the south west side of the A10, across the road at the point where the southern public footpath crosses it, with Field B on the far side of the road. March 2022.



24. View south east from the line of the public footpath on the south western side of the A10, showing the screening vegetation alongside the A10 on the left of the view - there are some views through the vegetation to the road in the winter. March 2022.



25. View north west from the line of Footpath Aspenden 001 on the south western side of the A10, showing the woodland area of The Thicket on the skyline on the left of the view, and vegetation alongside the A10 on the right. Two images combined, February 2020.



26. View south east from just to the east of The Thicket, showing vegetation along the line of the A10 on the far side of the field. The site is mostly out of view beyond the A10, but the roofs of some of the houses in the urban area to the east of the site can be seen through the trees on the left of the view, and there are some heavily filtered views of the northern part of the site below those houses. Two images combined, February 2020.



27. View north east along the line of Footpath Aspenden 002. The A10 is behind the post and rail fence and vegetation in the middle ground, and houses along the existing urban edge can be seen in the distance through the trees. Two images combined, March 2022.



28. View east from Footpath Buntingford 026 as it enters Field B, showing the storage area on the right of the view, with the hedge between the site and the STW to its left. Three images combined, March 2022.



29. View north along the eastern site boundary in the northern part of Field A - the urban edge at this point is very poorly screened. March 2022.

2.2 Landscape Character

National Landscape Character

2.2.1 Natural England has produced profiles for England's National Character Areas ('NCAs'), which divide England into 159 distinct natural areas, defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. The site lies within NCA 86, the 'South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland'. This is a large area, extending from Stevenage in the west to Ipswich in the east, and Bury St Edmunds in the north to Chelmsford in the south. Key characteristics of this area are noted as including:

- *'An undulating chalky boulder clay plateau is dissected by numerous river valleys, giving a topography of gentle slopes in the lower, wider valleys and steeper slopes in the narrower upper parts.*
- *Lowland wood pasture and ancient woodlands support the dormouse and a rich diversity of flowering plants on the clay plateau. Large, often ancient hedgerows link woods and copses, forming wooded skylines.*

- *The agricultural landscape is predominantly arable with a wooded appearance. There is some pasture on the valley floors. Field patterns are irregular despite rationalisation, with much ancient countryside surviving. Field margins support corn bunting, cornflower and brown hare.*
- *Winding, narrow and sometimes sunken lanes are bounded by deep ditches, wide verges and strong hedgerows. Transport infrastructure includes the A14, A12, M11 and Stansted Airport.*
- *A strong network of public rights of way provides access to the area's archetypal lowland English countryside.'*

County Landscape Character

2.2.2 Within this wider definition of character, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have published a landscape character assessment ('A Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire', 1997) for the county. This formed Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to the Hertfordshire Structure Plan 1998. HCC have also published a list of changes to the Landscape Strategy, which formed part of a draft new SPG on landscape character, published in 2001.

District Level Landscape Character

2.2.3 The 1997 HCC Landscape Strategy is of necessity quite general, and has now been largely superseded by the more recent and localised assessment of landscape undertaken at a District level and collated for all Hertfordshire Districts on the HCC website. The EHDC landscape character areas are set out in the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 'Landscape Character Assessment', 2007. This shows the northern part of the site as being within landscape character area 141, the 'Cherry Green Arable Plateau', with the southern part (to the south of the A10 footbridge) within character area 142, the 'High Rib Valley'. This character area is divided by the urban area of Buntingford, with part of it to the north and the part which includes the southern part of the site to the south and west of the town.

2.2.4 Key characteristics of the Cherry Green Arable Plateau are noted as including the following:

- *'open arable plateau with some very large field units*
- *minimal settlement, restricted to individual farmhouses*
- *remote and isolated feel*
- *degraded landscape pattern with few hedgerows and associated trees*
- *open views across plateau and to valley of the Rib'.*

2.2.5 The assessment also notes the visibility of the Sainsbury's distribution centre buildings (now demolished, with residential development on that site), which were visible to the south east, though they were outside this character area. Under the heading of 'Visual Impact' the assessment notes:

'The major visual impact on the area comes from the perimeter of Buntingford with significant impact arising from both industrial and residential developments on the upper slopes of the Rib Valley.'

2.2.6 The assessment notes that the strength of character of the landscape is moderate, but the condition is poor, and that the overall landscape strategy should be to improve and restore that condition and character. Relevant landscape strategy and guidelines include the following:

- *'promote the creation of new small to medium scale native broadleaved woods throughout the area to reduce the scale of the open arable areas, using ancient hedge and field boundaries to locate the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion*
- *promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds*
- *promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production as important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats. Buffers also to target rights of way where possible*
- *promote selected hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries and/or rights of way where possible*
- *promote a strategy for reducing the visual impact of development on the upper slopes of Buntingford including the Sainsbury's warehouses'.*

2.2.7 Key characteristics for the High Rib Valley include:

- *'relatively narrow valley feature*
- *small to medium scale landscape in contrast to open arable areas to the adjacent plateaux*
- *willow and poplar tree lined watercourse*
- *urban influence of Buntingford locally intrusive*
- *A10 corridor and associated traffic'.*

2.2.8 The assessment notes that the condition and strength of character of the landscape for the High Rib Valley are moderate, and that the overall landscape strategy should be to

improve and conserve that condition and character. Relevant landscape strategy and guidelines include the following:

- *'promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats*
- *maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource. Where development is likely to affect verges and damage is unavoidable, development should include details of protection of the remaining verge and replacement of its nature conservation value within the proposed scheme. This is particularly important where verges include hedgebanks, sunken lanes, ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees*
- *promote a strategy for reducing the visual impact of development on the upper slopes of Buntingford including the Sainsbury's warehouses'.*
- *develop a strategy for the planting and management of the A10 corridor through the area that respects the historic setting but minimizes the visual context in keeping with local character*
- *encourage the development of an improved network of rights of way both along and across the valley giving enhanced recreational opportunities for residents'.*

Local Landscape Character

2.2.9 The site itself displays some of the characteristics noted in the above character area assessments, but is much more strongly influenced by the A10 and the urban edge of Buntingford (which together enclose it) than the assessment for the wider Cherry Green Arable Plateau indicates, and is not strongly influenced by the River Rib, which flows at its closest around 100m to the east. The site is separated from the open countryside to the south and west by the A10 and, while it is in agricultural use and has an overall rural character, some parts of it have a more strongly edge of settlement character, in particular the north eastern corner of Field A and the enclosed Field C in the eastern part of the site.

2.3 Visibility

2.3.1 Visibility of the site in its current form is limited by existing urban edge to the east (though that does afford views across the site for houses along the urban edge) and by the vegetation alongside the A10 and the rising ground beyond that to the west and south. Visibility also varies across the site, with greater visibility of the higher ground in Field A and significantly less general visibility of the Field C in the eastern corner of the site. The main points from which the various parts of the site can presently be seen are:

- From the north there are limited and filtered short distance views across the northern part of Field A from the houses on the south side of Longmead, and those houses effectively screen any views from further to the north (see Photograph 1).
- From the east there are short distance views from some of the houses along the urban edge, and the nature of these views varies: in the north eastern corner of Field A there are open views from both floors of the adjacent houses (see Photographs 3 and 29), but as the land within the site rises and the boundary vegetation becomes taller and denser as noted above the views become more restricted, and there are partially screened views from first floor windows only (see Photographs 3 and 4). In Fields B and C there are tall hedgerows with some trees along much of the site boundary, and there are limited views in summer, though some filtered views would be possible in the winter and the houses along the north side of Field C have clearer views (see Photographs 5, 21 and 32). From further afield there are some views above the boundary vegetation from upper floor windows of properties to the south east, to the west of London Road (see Photograph 6).
- There are also some more distant views from the higher ground to the north east and east, on the far side of the valley of the River Rib and beyond the urban area of Buntingford - parts of the far valley side can be seen from within the site, particularly on the higher areas of Field A, close to the A10, indicating that the site will also be visible from those parts of the far valley side (see Photographs 3, 4 and 30). However, there are relatively few public viewpoints from which the site can be seen - there are no views from the churchyard of St Bartholomew's Church or the minor road to the north west of the church due to intervening vegetation. The higher, northern part of the site was at one time visible in some views from parts of the public footpath just to the south of the B1038 Hare Street Road (see Photograph 32), but the ongoing housing development to the south of Hare Street Road (the Wheatley Homes Meadow Vale development) has now largely obscured those views (though there will be views from some of the new houses once completed). Parts of the site can also be seen between or above intervening vegetation from the minor road and bridleway just to the west of Owls Farm (see Photographs 33 to 35), together with other current or recent housing developments.
- From the south east there are some limited views from a small area around the junction of the minor road leading to Westmill with the A10 (see Photographs 31 and 36).

- From the south and south west there are filtered views from the A10 as it passes the site - views ahead along the road are generally well screened even in the winter (see Photographs 11 to 15, 42 and 43), but the roadside vegetation is sparse in places and the site can occasionally be seen between and (in winter) through the vegetation in some views out to the side of the road, though these views would be fleeting only as vehicles pass by the site - there are no footways alongside the A10 at this point (see Photographs 14, 18 and 23). There are also some more limited and filtered views from parts of the land to the south and west of the A10 (and also from the two public footpaths as they approach the site), though these are largely screened in the summer by the vegetation along both sides of the road (forming a double line of screening - see Photograph 41) and also by the ridge line which curves around parallel to the A10 just to the south and west (see Photographs 39 and 40).
- From the west there are the generally limited and filtered views from the A10 and adjacent areas referred to above, but there are no other publicly accessible viewpoints. The A507 is winding and generally enclosed as it runs across Tire Hill to the north west of the site, and screening is also provided by the woodland clump of The Thicket and by the tall hedgerow running to its east. There are no significant views from the lower ground around Aspenden Hall, or from any areas further to the west.
- From within the site there are clear views into and across it from the two footpaths which run across the site, including elevated (though localised and filtered by the adjoining trees) views from the footbridge where the northern footpath crosses the A10 (see Photograph 37).



30. View east from the crest of the local ridge on the western side of Field A, showing houses along the urban edge on the eastern site boundary with variable views back to the site, and the narrow strip of distant high ground with some views back to the site on the far side of the urban area (see Photographs 33 to 35). Two images combined, March 2022.



31. View south east from the same point as Photograph 30, showing the southern part of Field A in the foreground and Field B beyond the hedge running to the left from the two tall sycamores. There are some limited views back to this part of the site from the landscape to the south east (see Photograph 36). Two images combined, March 2022.



32. View south west in the direction of the site from the public footpath just to the south of the B1038 Hare Street Road. The ongoing Meadow Vale housing development has blocked the previous views towards the site. Three images combined, March 2022.



33. View west to the site from the end of the minor road near Owls Farm. Field A within the site can just be seen where indicated by the red arrow, with part of Field B to its left. This is a similar viewpoint to Point D in the BCANP Appendix 1. March 2022.



33A. View south west from the same point as Photograph 33, showing houses in The Village development to the east of London Road clearly present in the view. March 2022.



34. View west to the site from further to the west along Owles Lane. Field A within the site can just be seen where indicated by the red arrow, above the intervening higher ground and the roofs of houses on the eastern edge of the urban area. March 2022.



35. View west to the site from Owles Lane as it approaches the urban edge and runs over a local ridge line. Part of Field A within the site can just be seen where indicated by the red arrow, between the houses and trees. March 2022.



36. View north west from the minor road leading to Westmill, close to the A10 - this is a similar viewpoint to Point E in the BCANP Appendix 1. Field A within the site can be seen where indicated by the red arrow at a distance of around 2km. This is a localised view only, and there are no views of the site from around 20m to the north or west of this point. March 2022.



37. View east across the site from the top of the A10 footbridge, showing houses along the eastern edge of Field A extending across the far side of the view. Two images combined, March 2022.



38. View across the A10 into Field B, on the far side of the road, at the point of the existing field accesses off the A10. Two images combined, February 2020.



39. View north east along the line of the public footpath (Footpath Aspenden 001) across the parkland field to the north east of Aspenden Hall. The A10, and also the site on the far side of the road, are screened by intervening vegetation even in the winter. Two images combined, March 2022.



40. View south west along the line of the Footpath Aspenden 001 into the parkland field, showing the intervening ridge line which prevents views between Aspenden Hall and the A10. February 2020.



41. View along the line of Footpath Aspenden 001 from the west side of the A10 - the footbridge (and also to a lesser extent the site beyond it) can be seen through the trees in the winter. Three images combined, March 2022.



41A. The same view in the summer - the footbridge can just be seen, but there are no views across the road to the site. Three images combined, May 2022.



42. View north along the line of the A10 from the footbridge - the road forms an effective screen and break in the local landscape, especially in the summer. May 2022.



43. View south along the line of the A10 from the footbridge - the road forms an effective screen and break in the local landscape, especially in the summer. May 2022.

2.4 Landscape Designations, Quality, Value and Sensitivity

Landscape Designations

- 2.4.1 The site is not covered by any national or local designations for landscape quality, and does not lie within the Green Belt.

Landscape Quality, Value and Sensitivity

- 2.4.2 Using the definitions set out in Appendix A, the site has been assessed as of overall **low to medium landscape quality**. This is because it contains some pleasant and attractive features and aspects (chiefly the rolling arable fields and the field boundary hedgerows), but is also affected by a number of visual detractors, including the adjacent A10, the existing urban edge (which is somewhat raw and open in places) and the nearby STW. As the site comprises a relatively narrow band of land wrapping around the urban edge and with the A10 running around it to the west and the STW to the south, the detracting influence of these features does permeate the site. Landscape condition is not the same as landscape quality, but it does have some similarities, and it can be noted that the EHDC Landscape Character Assessment considered the condition of the Cherry Green Arable Plateau to be poor, and that of the High Rib Valley to be moderate. The assessment also stated for the Cherry Green Arable Plateau that *'the perimeter of Buntingford'* (noting that the urban edge adjoining the site forms part of the boundary to this character area) has a *'major visual impact'*.
- 2.4.3 As noted in Appendix A, the concept of landscape value is also important, and is included in assessments in order to avoid consideration only of how scenically attractive an area may be, and thus to avoid undervaluing areas of strong character but little scenic beauty. The GLVIA contains a checklist (in its Box 5.1, on page 84) of *'factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes'*, and these are landscape quality, scenic quality, rarity, representativeness (i.e. whether the landscape contains features which are particularly important examples), conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects and cultural or literary associations. The Landscape Institute have also published guidance on the assessment of landscape value (*'Assessing landscape value outside national designations'*, TGN 02/21, May 2021) which effectively endorses the Box 5.1 approach for undesignated landscapes, and adds some further clarity to it in terms of separating *'conservation interests'* into nature conservation and cultural heritage, and combining rarity and representativeness into a new factor of *'distinctiveness'*.
- 2.4.4 Considering the factors set out in Box 5.1 (and using the factor of *'distinctiveness'* as set out in the more recent TGN 02/21), there is some additional value in terms of the two

public footpaths which run across the site and connect with the wider countryside to the west of the A10. However, footpaths leading to the countryside on the edge of settlements are not unusual, and this does not significantly elevate the landscape value of the local area, which is at broadly the same level as its quality, and is therefore **low to medium**.

2.4.5 As set out in Appendix A, landscape sensitivity is judged according to the type of development proposed, and relates to the ability of the landscape to accommodate change of the type and scale proposed without adverse effects on its character (i.e. its susceptibility to change), and also to its value. The susceptibility to change of the landscape of and around the site has been judged to be **medium**, because it has a moderate capacity to accommodate change as it adjoins the urban edge and is enclosed by the line of the A10, but the presence of a new and relatively large scale residential development would conflict with the existing character of the landscape to some extent, and new dwellings on the more elevated ground in the northern part of the site would be locally prominent, and would be visible from some areas of the higher ground to the east of the town (albeit at some distance, and in views which already include much of the urban area).

2.4.6 Taking into account that medium susceptibility together with the low to medium landscape value noted above, the sensitivity of the site and surrounds to the proposed development has been assessed as **medium**. As set out in Table 5 of Appendix A, this is because there would be some loss of landscape features (chiefly the open fields which make up the site, though some new landscape features would be provided), and the development would represent a significant change to what is at the moment a largely open, agricultural landscape, but in the context of the adjacent urban edge the new development, while visible, would not be especially discordant.

2.5 Planning Context

National Planning Policy

2.5.1 The Government's national planning policy and guidance on various aspects of planning are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, July 2021). The NPPF states that '*the purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development*', and that in order to do so, the planning system must perform mutually dependent economic, social and environmental roles.

2.5.2 Paragraph 130 of the NPPF states (in part) that:

'Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) *will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b) *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c) *are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) *establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit.’:*

2.5.3 Paragraph 174 of the NPPF states (in part) that:

‘Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- d) *minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
- f) *remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.’*

2.5.4 The wording ‘*in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan*’ in Paragraph 174 a) was an addition first made in the July 2018 update of the NPPF, and shows that firstly landscapes which have an identified quality in the development plan should usually be regarded as valued, and secondly that the protection to be afforded to valued landscapes will vary with their status, with statutorily protected landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks) receiving the highest level of protection, and landscapes recognised and protected by development plan policies protected at a lower level, but still above that of ordinary countryside. The site is not designated for landscape quality at any level, and has no

positive physical attributes to set it apart from the area around it, and the area of and around the site is therefore not a valued landscape in terms of Paragraph 174 of the NPPF.

2.5.5 The supporting Planning Practice Guidance to the NPPF (Paragraph 036 Reference ID: 8-036-20190721) states that:

'The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally-designated landscapes but also the wider countryside.'

Local Planning Policy

2.5.6 The East Herts District Plan (2018) includes the following relevant policies:

- Policy GBR2 Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. The site is outside the settlement boundary and falls within the area of this policy, which states that only certain categories of development will be permitted, including buildings for agriculture or forestry, sport or recreation, or appropriate employment uses.
- Policy DES1 Masterplanning, which states that all significant developments will be required to prepare a masterplan.
- Policy DES2 Landscape Character, which states that development proposals must *'demonstrate how they conserve, enhance or strengthen the character and distinctive features of the district's landscape'*. The policy also states that, for major applications or where there is a potential adverse impact on landscape character, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be provided. The policy goes on to state that: *'Appropriate mitigation measures will be taken into account when considering the effect of development on landscape character/landscaping'*, and refers to EHDC's Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- Policy DES3 Landscaping states that proposals must show how they will retain, protect and enhance existing landscape features which are of amenity and/ or biodiversity value or provide appropriate compensatory features. The policy also states that: *'Where losses are unavoidable and justified by other material considerations, compensatory planting or habitat creation will be sought either within or outside the development site'*.

- Policy DES4 Design of Development, which seeks high quality design to reflect and promote local distinctiveness.
- Policy NE3 Species and Habitats, which includes requirements to enhance biodiversity, retain trees, hedgerows and woodland and provide mitigation and compensation where adverse impacts are unavoidable. The policy also states that a minimum buffer zone of 10m of complementary habitat should be provided adjoining existing trees, hedgerows and Ancient Woodland.

2.5.7 Chapter 6 of the District Plan covers Buntingford, and notes ongoing or committed housing development on sites to the north, east and south east of the town, and that no further allocations are proposed. Paragraph 6.1.17 also states that *‘the open character of the countryside between Aspenden and Buntingford will be preserved, thereby avoiding coalescence between the two communities’*.

Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan

2.5.8 The Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan (BCANP) covers the parishes of Aspenden, Buckland, Buntingford, Cottered, Hormead and Wyddial, and was adopted in 2017. It seeks in general to protect and conserve the countryside and landscape within the community area. It contains Policy ES1, which states that *‘Development proposals should be appropriate to and maintain the Rib Valley setting of the BCA.’* The explanatory text goes on to state that:

‘Development on the fringes of Buntingford which extends on to the higher ground surrounding the Rib Valley could have a harmful effect on the landscape of this area and parts of the Cherry Green Arable and Wyddial Plateaux.’

‘The landscape value of this area is clearly stated in the East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment SPD of 2007 and in East Herts Draft District Plan January 2014 supporting documents. In discussing the strategy for managing change, the Landscape Assessment suggests that EHDC should “promote a strategy for reducing the visual impact of development on the upper slopes of Buntingford including the Sainsbury’s warehouses”.

2.5.9 It also contains Policy HD2, which states that:

‘All new housing developments should be sensitive to the landscape and be of a height that does not impact adversely on views from the surrounding countryside. All development proposals should demonstrate how they conserve, enhance or strengthen the character and distinctive features of the BCA landscape. Where appropriate, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be provided to ensure that impacts, mitigation and enhancement opportunities are appropriately addressed.’

2.5.10 Policy HD4 states that:

'New housing design should respect the rural/semi-rural character of the Buntingford Community Area and its immediate context having appropriate regard to the standards set out in Appendix 4 - Design Code.'

2.5.11 The BCANP contains an assessment of what is described on its page 40 as *'the possible impact of development on the valley setting of the BCA'* in its Appendix 1. This places great emphasis on the limited visibility of the town from the surrounding landscape, and argues that further development (including development of the proposed site, which is specifically referred to in the context of previous development proposals by Bovis Homes) should be limited. On its page 71 the BCANP states that:

'The views from sites D and E in particular show the area between Buntingford and the A10 bypass that is being proposed by Bovis for further housing. It is quite clear from these views that such housing, which would be on land that rises to above 115 metres above sea level, would impinge significantly on the landscape to the detriment of the local area's natural beauty. Such development would be on land rising several metres higher in places than that on which the highest level of development at Longmead, which is clearly shown in the view from point C.'

2.5.12 However, the following should also be borne in mind:

- The photographs from viewpoints A to I reproduced in the assessment were taken in June or December 2015, and therefore predate most of the housing development which has recently taken place or is currently under way around the town, some of which can be seen from those viewpoints.
- It is not explained in the assessment exactly why it is a desirable or positive feature that the town has limited visibility from the surrounding landscape, as opposed to (say) a town in an elevated position which can be widely appreciated. It is part of the established character of the town that it has limited visibility from the surrounding area (though that characteristic has already changed to some degree as a result of recent residential developments) and new development on higher ground would lead to some change in that respect, but visibility of a settlement from the surrounding area is not necessarily inherently harmful.
- Of the 9 viewpoints spaced out around Buntingford in all directions, the site is only present in two of them - viewpoints D and E, between 1.9 and 2km to the east and south east, with the A10 and/ or parts of the urban area between the viewpoint and the site. That indicates that the site in fact has quite limited visibility from the higher ground around the town. It should also be noted that these are not

viewpoints with any specific value or significance - they are not from prominent points or local beauty spots, they are just where the photographs were taken from.

- For viewpoint D, the BCANP states that *'This view also shows that building on the land currently being proposed for development by Bovis would show very significantly on the landscape as seen from the Wyddial Plateau.'* This view is similar to that shown in Photograph 33 above, from which it can be seen that development within Field A of the site would be visible from this point, but that it would be at a distance of around 1.9km, would be seen as a small part only of a wide, expansive view, and also that (as shown in Photograph 33A) new houses in The Village development are already clearly visible from that point (and are closer to it than the site) and commercial buildings in the northern part of the town would also be present in the view (on the right of Photograph 33).
- For viewpoint E, the BCANP states that *'This view also shows the impact that the proposed Bovis development will have if allowed to go forward.'* This view is the same as that shown in Photograph 36 above, from which it can be seen that development within Field A of the site would be visible from this point, but that it would be at a distance of around 2km, and is a localised view only - the viewpoint is not representative of wider landscape effects in this area, and the site can only be seen from short stretches of the A10 and the side road leading to Westmill.
- The BCANP refers to the 2007 EHDC Landscape Character Assessment, but that assessment refers, for both of the character areas which include parts of the site, to the *'major visual impact on the area (which) comes from the perimeter of Buntingford with significant impact arising from both industrial and residential developments on the upper slopes of the Rib valley'* (for the Cherry Green Arable Plateau), and also to the *'extensive visual impact (which) comes from the adjacent residential developments, which in some cases lie adjacent and unscreened'* (for the High Rib Valley). The EDHC assessment notes in particular the influence of the Sainsbury's distribution centre in this respect, which has now been removed, but that site has been redeveloped for housing ('The Village' development), and still has some significant visibility within the local landscape. It can therefore be seen from the above that the EHDC assessment, in contrast to the BCANP, stresses the fact that existing development can be seen from the surrounding landscape, and has an adverse effect upon it.
- The assessment states that development on the proposed site would be *'on land that rises to above 115m above sea level'*. That is correct, but it should be noted that the recent and ongoing development on the sites to the north and south east of the town includes areas above 110m AOD, that the proposed site varies in

elevation and includes significant areas below 110m AOD and also some areas below 100m AOD, and that in the views from the south east which the BCANP illustrates, development on the site would not be on the skyline - there would be higher ground and/ or tall trees behind it in all views of development on the site.

- It is now 7 years since the photographs used in the BCANP were taken, and in that time there has been further growth of the vegetation alongside the A10, which now forms a generally dense, tall and effective screen in the summer, and a significant screen in the winter. The site is therefore enclosed to a greater degree to the west than it was in 2015.
- As the BCANP stresses, the settlement does sit within the lower lying land of the Rib Valley, and that is part of its existing character. However that also means that any new development on the periphery of the town will tend to be on higher land, as has been the case with some of the recent and ongoing development to the east, south east and north of the town.

Strategic Land Availability Assessment

- 2.5.13 As part of the evidence base for the (then) emerging District Plan, EHDC produced a (SLAA) in 2017. This considered a number of sites around Buntingford, including the proposed site, referred to as Site 02/005, Land West of Buntingford. The SLAA noted that:

'The site is well related to the existing settlement and any incursion into the countryside would be limited by the presence of the A10 which would form the western boundary of the site.'

- 2.5.14 Despite this, the SLAA considered the site not to be suitable for development, on the basis of effects on infrastructure and the ability to provide new services and facilities. It is worthy of note that the SLAA consideration of Site 02/001 (Land South of Owles Lane, to the east of The Village development) noted that this would be '*a serious incursion into the countryside and would significantly harm the rural setting of Buntingford and the surrounding area*'. No such view is expressed in the SLAA about the proposed site.

3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 General

3.1.1 The planning application is in outline, and the description of development is for 350 new dwellings, up to 4,400m² of commercial and services floorspace (Class E and B8 uses), up to 500m² of retail floorspace and associated works including drainage, access into the site from the A10 and Luynes Rise (but not access within the site), allotments, public open space and landscaping. The Development Framework Plan (see Appendix C) shows the overall layout of the proposed development in terms of the broad location of developed areas and also the principal existing and proposed landscape features. The Green Infrastructure Parameters Plan also reproduced in Appendix C provides further information on the proposals, and the Design and Access Statement (DAS) submitted with the planning application also provides additional information on the evolution and background to the proposals. The main features of the development which are relevant to this assessment are:

- Vehicular access to the site would be by means of a roundabout junction on the A10, at the southern end of the site, with an emergency vehicle, bus and pedestrian/ cycle access via a connection to Luynes Rise to the east. Internal site roads would diverge from the initial access to the east into Field C and to the west and north through Fields B and A. The small hardstanding store/ yard in the southern part of Field B has planning permission for that use and would be removed as part of the proposals.
- The new dwellings would be primarily within Fields A and B, with some also in the northern part of Field C. The employment buildings would be in the southern part of Field C, with the local centre in the north eastern part of Field B.
- As shown on the Density & Building Heights Parameter Plan, the majority of the new dwellings would be up to 10.5m in height, allowing principally for 2 storey dwellings, with potentially some areas of bungalows. There would also be some areas within Fields B and C where the dwellings would be up to 13.5m in height, allowing for 2½ or 3 storey dwellings, which could help to mark entrances and corners and help create a sense of place. The local centre would be up to 13.5m in height, and the employment buildings would be up to 15m in height (and located within the lower parts of the site).

- The A10 is a busy road, and in order to provide the required noise attenuation it is likely that some form of noise attenuation feature would be required - the Development Framework Plan indicates where such a feature (probably a planted bund with an acoustic fence on top of it) could be located, close to the road along the western side of the site. The bund could be designed in detail as a positive landscape feature, with variation along its length in terms of both its maximum height and plan form, so that it appears as a more natural, varied feature rather than an engineered landform. Planting along the bund would largely screen the timber acoustic fence and a new footpath (as indicated on the drawing) could provide access along its eastern slopes, and be part of a broad linear green space along the western side of the site. New planting along the line of the bund would also help to extend and reinforce the existing tree screen alongside the A10 (and replace the sections of lost vegetation - see below), providing enhanced screening both of the road from within the site (the bund and acoustic fence would provide immediate lower level screening and the planting would provide further screening in the medium to long term) and also of the development from the road and from the wider landscape to the west and south west. New planting within the site could help to fill in the existing sparse sections of tree planting alongside the road which appear to have been affected by ash die-back.
- Retention of existing vegetation - the proposals allow for the retention of visually significant vegetation, including the hedges within the site (with the exception of a small section of the hedges between Fields A and B and also B and C, which would need to be removed to create the new road accesses), and also all of the perimeter vegetation which lies within the site. The trees alongside the A10 are outside the site boundary, and would not be affected by the proposed development, other than for some small trees and hedgerow vegetation on the north side of the road, and some slightly taller trees on the south side which would be affected by the proposed roundabout, and also to either side of the roundabout where some vegetation would need to be removed to provide space for localised road widening/ realignment as it approaches the new roundabout. The Development Framework Plan has allowed for the retention of existing vegetation wherever possible, and also respects the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of retained vegetation, to ensure its future viability.
- The existing public footpaths across the site would be retained on their current alignments, with the northern route running through a new area of green infrastructure. The southern footpath would run partly through new open space

areas and partly through the area of new housing, and would also pass close to the local centre.

- Provision of a range of new landscape and open space areas as indicated on the drawings in Appendix C, including those at the points where the two footpaths run into the site from the urban area, to create welcoming gateway features, and also some larger equipped play areas, and an area of allotments in the north eastern corner of the site.
- Sustainable drainage (SuDS) features in the south eastern part of the site are shown indicatively on the Development Framework Plan, and could be incorporated into areas of natural open space, with attenuation basins deigned to be either permanent water bodies or grassed depressions which would only hold water after heavy rainfall.
- In order to achieve the required level of Biodiversity Net Gain, an area of the northern field on the west side of the A10 would be sown and managed as wildflower grassland, with the remainder of that field and also the southern field (to the south of the footbridge) remaining in agricultural use.

Design Panel Review

3.1.2 As part of the development of the 2022 proposals for the site, a design review was undertaken together with the Design Review Panel in April 2022. Extracts from the Design Review Panel (DRP) report of relevance to this assessment are set out below (noting that the current proposals are in outline, but the comments could be taken into account in the eventual detailed proposals):

- *'Subject to the comments within this document, it is considered the site is appropriate for a development of the type proposed. The site boundary is currently felt to be defined by a ragged arrangement of back gardens and has an ill formed relationship with the boundary, the stated aspirations for this development have the opportunity to create an appropriate urban edge to Buntingford, which it is felt is currently missing.*
- *It is considered the development offers an opportunity to provide an appropriate settlement edge to Buntingford.*
- *The site has a range of constraints, of particular note is the noise from the road (A10) as well as the potential odour nuisance from the sewage works, and it is considered to be imperative that the design team demonstrate an understanding of the impact of these aspects.*

- *Retained hedgerows and trees should also be carefully considered to ensure that the masterplan acknowledges from an early stage required widths around existing planting are established and maintained throughout the design process.*
- *The retention of the two well used footpaths is welcomed and as the design proposals now evolve further it would be beneficial to explore how these will be integrated within the scheme.*
- *It is considered it would be beneficial for an LVIA to now be carried out. The site is undulating with a very distinctive topography. It is noted the current proposals are very two dimensional and it would be beneficial to now consider the implications in three dimensions. It would be helpful to begin to consider the site from the near distance and far distance.'*

3.1.3 With regard to the above comments, it can be noted for the purposes of this assessment that:

- The DRP found that the site was in principle appropriate for the proposed development and had the potential to create a more appropriate urban edge at this point than that which exists at the moment. That improved and more robust urban edge could be formed by the noise bund, acoustic fence and planting as indicated on the Development Framework Plan, in conjunction with the existing trees along both sides of the A10.
- The outline proposals have responded to the constraint of road traffic noise by means of the proposed bund and acoustic fencing, which could be integrated into the broad green space proposed for the western side of the site. Separation for the STW to the south east could be provided by areas of open space and the location of the new employment buildings.
- The proposals have allowed for the retention of almost all of the visually significant vegetation around and within the site, and the RPAs of that vegetation have been respected.
- The two footpaths through the site would be retained on their existing routes and run either wholly (for the northern route) or partly (for the southern footpath) through areas of open space.
- An LVIA has now been undertaken and is reported in this document. As noted below, the emerging findings of the LVIA (both for the 2022 proposals and the current proposals) have been progressively fed back into the developing design in an iterative manner, with the intention of minimising the landscape and visual effects of the final design. The comments of the DRP in relation to topography have been noted, and the highest part of the site (in the western part of Field A) would be occupied by either the south western

part of the proposed open space or (where proposed for built development) by buildings of no more than 10.5m in height.

- The comments by the DRP in relation to longer distance views from the higher ground to the east and south east of the site have been carefully considered, and (as set out in Section 4 below) the assessment of this LVIA is that there would be no significant effects on those views, because they would for the most part be from limited areas only, above the existing urban area, and the new development would not fundamentally change the existing views. Furthermore, the highest part of the site (above the 115m contour) would be the most visible part of it in views from the south east, and planting within the proposed open space areas, as well as the existing and proposed trees alongside the A10, would help to ensure that (where visible) the new houses in that part of the site are seen within a largely green context and do not appear on the skyline.

3.2 Green Infrastructure and Landscape Proposals

Green Infrastructure

3.2.1 The broad provision of green infrastructure and the landscape strategy for the site (as illustrated on the Development Framework Plan and Green Infrastructure Parameters Plan - see Appendix C) have been developed in tandem with the emerging findings of this LVIA (and also the June 2022 LVIA), and also (as noted above) in response to the comments made by the DRP. The main areas where landscape considerations have helped to shape the proposals include the following:

- The importance attached to the retention, reinforcement (and, for the relatively short sections where some vegetation would need to be removed) replacement of the existing tree line alongside the A10, to contain and screen the development and also to provide a more robust and appropriate long term urban edge for Buntingford, as suggested by the DRP.
- The illustrative treatment of the proposed noise bund and fencing alongside the A10 such that it could form part of an attractive linear open space along the western side of the site, with a varied form to the bund, new tree and shrub planting and areas of wildflower grassland with a new path following a sinuous alignment through the open space - the intention would be to avoid the impression of a long engineered structure next to the road, and that would be brought out in the detailed design.

- Retention of the existing hedges and trees within the site, for their value as landscape and biodiversity features and also their ability to provide some existing scale and structure for the new development. The proposals would allow for the buffer zones to hedgerows and trees set out in Local Plan Policy NE3 (see Section 2.5 above).
- Retention of the two public footpaths through the site along their existing alignments, with no diversions proposed. The footpaths would also run for the most part through or alongside new linear open spaces.
- Creation of open spaces at the points where the footpaths run into the site from the urban area, with the potential to create attractive and welcoming spaces and also to retain some of the existing sense of having left the urban area and moved into a different environment at those points.
- Responding to the varied topography of the site, by locating the taller proposed dwellings and also the local centre and employment buildings within the lower-lying, south eastern part of the site, and by limiting the heights of buildings in the western (and higher) part of Field A, together with tree planting within the linear park which runs just to the south east of that high point, so that the trees can provide some longer term screening and structure at that point as they mature.

Landscape Proposals

3.2.2 There are no detailed landscape proposals at this stage, and that level of detail would be provided as part of a condition on planning approval, but the broad proposed arrangement of green infrastructure and open space areas is shown on the Development Framework Plan and Green Infrastructure Parameters Plan (see Appendix C), and it is presently envisaged that the landscape proposals could include the following:

- Use of locally appropriate native species in public areas and around the site boundaries. More ornamental species offering greater year round colour and interest would be used within the overall native species framework, closer to and within the gardens of the new houses.
- Provision for local nature conservation benefit wherever possible - this would include new planting of hedgerows, small copses and areas of woodland and trees, creation of wildflower meadows and new wetlands to incorporate

drainage features such as swales and attenuation ponds, as part of the overall provision of the required level of Biodiversity Net Gain.

- Arrangements would be made to guarantee the ongoing maintenance and management of all landscaped areas, with any plant failures replaced for a period of five years, and a detailed long term Landscape and Ecology Management Plan could be secured either by way of a planning condition or a legal agreement.

3.3 Previously Refused Proposals

2017 Proposals

3.3.1 As noted above, previous proposals for development on the site were refused by EHDC in 2017 (EHDC reference 3/14/2304/OP), and revised proposals (EHDC reference 3/17/1811/OUT) were also refused in 2017 for three reasons, the first of which stated that:

'The proposal would encroach into the rural area beyond the settlement boundary to the detriment of the character, appearance and distinctiveness of the area contrary to Policy ENV1 and GBC14 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007, Policy DES1 of the emerging East Herts District Plan (November 2016), Policy ES1 of the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.'

3.3.2 It is therefore relevant to note the differences between the previous proposals (EHDC reference 3/17/1811/OUT) and the current planning application, which are summarised below:

- The previous proposals were for a larger scale of development and a proportionately smaller amount of open space, with up to 400 new dwellings and a larger area of employment uses.
- The design for the development is now substantially different (the proposals are in outline, but their general arrangement is controlled by means of a number of Parameters Plans), and has evolved over time to take on board the recommendations of the DRP and also the emerging findings of this LVIA (and that undertaken in 2022). Significant areas of open space are now proposed, both along the entire western side of the site (where a broad swathe of open space potentially including the trees alongside the A10, new planting, the acoustic fence and mound and areas of wildflower grassland would form a new green edge to the town), as a linear park along the route of the northern footpath through the site and at strategic locations elsewhere within the site.

- The context around the site has also now changed, with significant residential developments either completed or under way on the rising ground to the east, south east and north of the urban area as it was in 2017.
- The trees along both sides of the A10 are still relatively young, and have grown in the intervening period (i.e. 2017 to June 2022, and further to June 2023) to form an improved screen and separating element from the wider countryside to the west and south west.
- Finally, the planning context against which the proposals need to be judged has changed significantly since 2017, with revisions to the NPPF and the adoption of the East Herts District Plan.

2022 Proposals

3.3.3 As also noted above, a detailed application for a development broadly similar to that currently proposed was refused by ECDC in November 2022 (the 2022 proposals differed in that the application was in detail and access was to be by means of a signalised 'T' junction on the A10). There are therefore some differences between the refused 2022 proposals and what is currently proposed, and some comments on the 2022 refusal are made in Section 4.5 below.

4. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

4.1 Landscape and Visual Change

4.1.1 This section sets out the landscape and visual effects which would be expected to arise from the proposed development. Before considering these effects, it is important to note the following important characteristics of both it and the surrounding landscape:

- The site is in active agricultural use, but is visually and physically separated from the more open countryside to the south and west by the busy A10 bypass and the lines of trees along each side of the road, which contain the site against the edge of the settlement.
- The landscape of the site has been assessed as of low to medium quality, and the existing urban edge to the east is in places (especially in the northern part of Field A) quite raw and exposed. This was recognised by the DRP, which described parts of the boundary as a '*ragged arrangement of back gardens*', and stated that '*the development offers an opportunity to provide an appropriate settlement edge to Buntingford*'.
- The site is generally well screened and contained by the trees alongside the A10 (which are still maturing) and the rising ground beyond the road, tall hedges or trees elsewhere and by the urban edge immediately to the north and east. Further containment to the west could be provided by the proposed open space alongside the A10, which could include the acoustic mound and fencing and extensive new planting.
- The outline proposals allow for retention and reinforcement of existing boundary vegetation, with new native species structure planting and other landscaped areas within the site, as indicated on the Development Framework Plan and Green Infrastructure Parameters Plan.
- The proposals have been developed with due regard to the topography of the site, with built development limited (both in extent and height) within the higher parts of the site, and the taller proposed buildings (of up to 3 storeys) generally limited to the lower, south eastern parts of the site.
- The development itself, while visible in some views, would not be unsightly or intrusive - houses are commonplace features of the urban fringe, and though they would be built on a currently greenfield site, they would not appear out of

place on completion of the development, in the context of the existing urban area to the east and north, and given the containment of the A10 bypass to the west.

- However, the site is in the countryside in planning terms and is in agricultural use, so some in-principle adverse effects arising from its development are inevitable, and would apply (to varying degrees) to the development of any greenfield site.

Landscape Change

- 4.1.2 Bearing the above in mind, the degree of change to the landscape around the site brought about by the proposed development would be **medium** - while the developed parts of the site would obviously undergo a significant change (from open land to a new housing development), the remaining parts would not contain built development and would change to a lesser degree, and the overall development would have a limited impact on the wider countryside to the west and south west. Existing positive landscape features such as the trees and the hedgerows around and within the site would be retained, reinforced and managed into the future.

Visibility

- 4.1.3 The current visibility of the site has been described in Section 2.3 above. The new houses and other buildings on the site would be likely to increase that degree of visibility, but the areas from which the development would be visible would not alter significantly (relative to the existing site) as a result of the proposals. The visibility of the proposed development would be as follows:

- From the north there would be some limited and filtered but short distance views of the new houses in the northern part of Field A from the houses on the south side of Longmead, but no significant views from any further to the north as those houses effectively screen any more distant views.
- From the east there would be short distance views of the new houses from some of the existing houses along the urban edge, and the nature of these views varies: in the north eastern corner of Field A there would be open views from both floors of the adjacent houses (though allotments are proposed within the site at that point), but as the land within the site rises and the boundary vegetation becomes taller and denser to the south the views become more restricted, and there would be partially screened views of the upper parts of the new houses from first floor windows only of the existing houses, mainly in the winter. In Fields B and C there are tall hedgerows with some trees along much of the site boundary, and there would be limited views in summer, though some filtered views of the new houses

and other buildings on the site would be possible in the winter, and there would be more open views from the houses along the north side of Field C. From further afield there would also be some limited views above or (in the winter) through the boundary vegetation from upper floor windows of properties to the south east, to the west of London Road.

- There would also be some more distant views from the higher ground to the north east and east, on the far side of the valley of the River Rib and beyond the urban area of Buntingford. The new houses in Field A would be visible from some of the properties within the ongoing Wheatley Homes Meadow Vale housing development to the south of Hare Street Road, above the intervening urban area, and some of the new houses (again, principally on the higher ground of Field A) would be visible between or above intervening vegetation from the minor road and bridleway just to the west of Owls Farm at a distance of around 1.9km, together with other current or recent housing developments which would also be present in these expansive views.
- From the south east there would be some limited views of the new houses on the higher parts of Field A from a small area around the junction of the minor road leading to Westmill with the A10, at a distance of around 2km.
- From the south and south west there would be filtered views into the western part of the site from the A10 as it passes the site - views ahead along the road are generally well screened even in the winter, but at the moment the site can occasionally be seen between and (in winter) through the vegetation in some views out to the side of the road. However, those views would be screened by the proposed bund and acoustic fence, such that there would be very few views of the new houses on the site from the road. There would be some limited and fleeting views at the points where there would be gaps in the bund and fencing to allow the footpaths to pass through them and alongside the hedge between fields A and B, and also more open views into the site at the point of the proposed access.
- There would also be some more limited and filtered views from the two public footpaths as they approach the site on the far side of the A10, though these views would be largely screened (in the case of the northern route) in the summer by the vegetation along both sides of the road (forming a double line of screening), and views from any further to the south west are screened by the ridge line which curves around parallel to the A10 just to its south and west, such that there would be no views from the lower ground around Aspenden Hall, or from any areas further to the west.
- From within the site there would be clear views of the new buildings and other

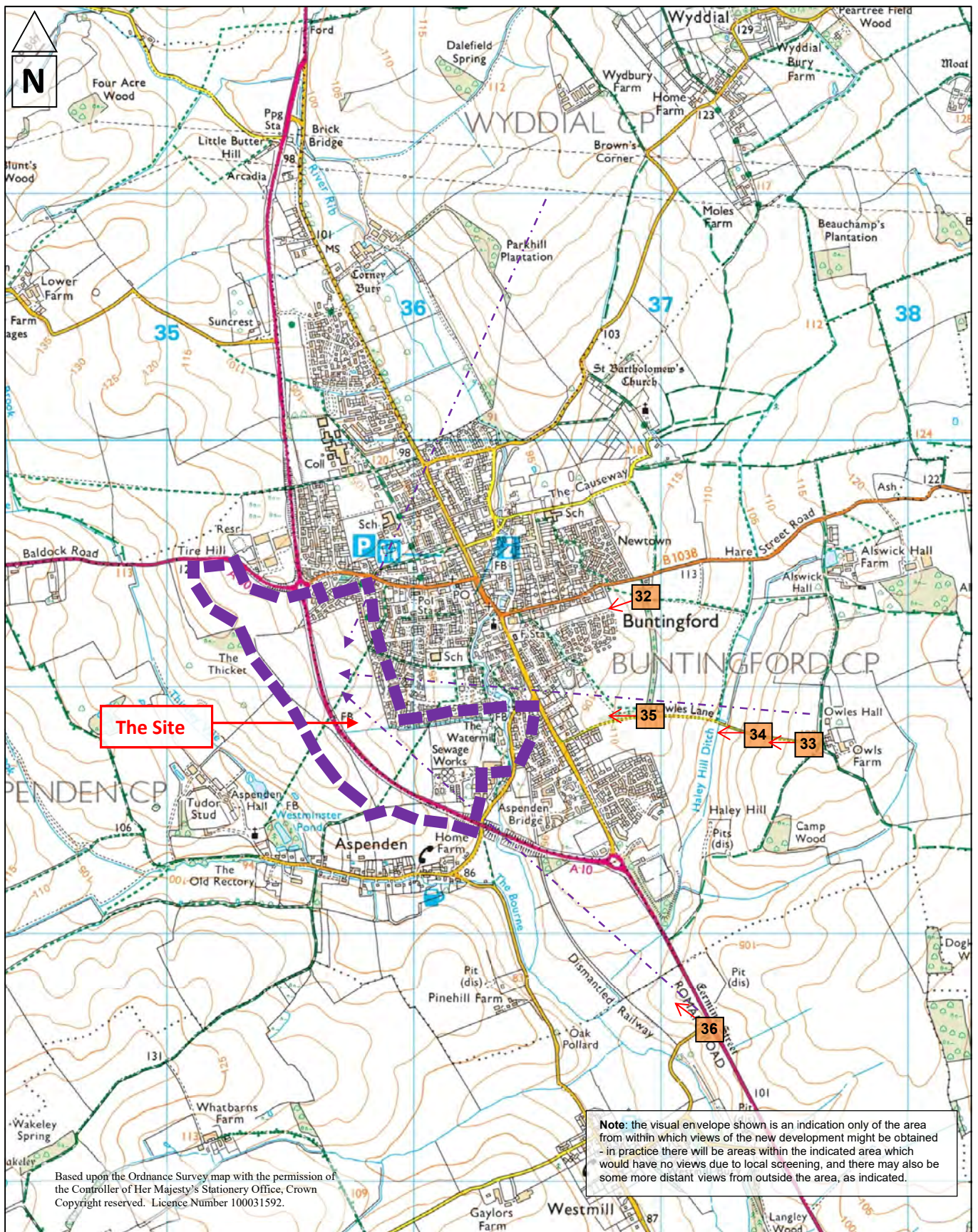
elements of the development from the two footpaths which run across the site, and each route would need to cross the new internal access roads (one crossing for the northern footpath, and two for the southern route, which would also run close to the new local centre).

- 4.1.4 The anticipated visual envelope for the proposed development is shown on Figure 3, and illustrates the above analysis of views. Visibility of the new development would be limited by a combination of the existing urban edge to the east and north, vegetation along the A10 and also the rising ground beyond that to the south and west and further vegetation to the north. There would also be some partial and distant views from the higher ground to the north east, east and south east of Buntingford.

4.2 Landscape and Visual Effects

Landscape Effects

- 4.2.1 The landscape of and around the site has been assessed as of medium sensitivity to development of the type proposed. The degree of change brought about by the development would also be medium, and overall landscape effects would therefore be **moderate adverse** at their greatest (see Appendix B for a summary of landscape effects at various scales). This would be in the winter soon after completion, when the various elements of the development would be at their most visible - effects in the summer would be at a lower level, as much of the existing screening vegetation is deciduous (as would be the majority of the new planting), and would be **slight to moderate adverse** only. There would be a sense of development and the urban edge extending out into the countryside, but this would be limited by the fact that the development would only extend to the line of the A10 bypass, which already forms a strong local landscape feature, and which would be reinforced as a robust long term boundary to the urban area by the proposed open space, planting, bund and acoustic fence along the western side of the site.
- 4.2.2 It is also important to note that the area over which these effects would be experienced is limited - there would be no significant views, and no significant effects, beyond the area of the visual envelope shown on Figure 3.
- 4.2.3 The above effects have been categorised as adverse, as there would be some inevitable harm as a result of the introduction of new buildings into what is presently an undeveloped site, but it should be noted that the new houses and employment uses in themselves, and the development as a whole, would not be unsightly or intrusive - any harm would occur as a result of the development of what is presently a greenfield site.



Land at Buntingford West

32 → Photograph viewpoints and direction of view.
(See Figures 1 and 2 for remaining viewpoints).

Proposed Residential Development

— Approximate extent of visual envelope.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

— Distant views from beyond main visual envelope.

Not to Scale

Figure 3 ~ Visual Envelope and Photograph Viewpoints

4.2.4 The above effects would be expected to decrease slowly with time, as the extensive proposed planting begins to mature (noting also that the existing trees alongside the A10 will continue to grow into the future), and as the new houses are integrated more fully with the surrounding area. There would be some longer term beneficial landscape effects within the site in terms of the new planting and areas of open space, but in overall terms the net **effects after around 15 years would be expected to be slight adverse**, chiefly as a result of the loss of the presently open land.

Visual Effects

4.2.5 Landscape effects are those affecting the landscape as a resource, while visual effects are those affecting a specific visual receptor. Visual receptors are normally taken to be people in their homes or in publicly accessible points, or moving along public highways or footpaths. It is not at this stage possible to predict visual effects in any detail, as there are no detailed proposals for the development or for any associated mitigation which may help to reduce the effects, and as visual effects for any one receptor would depend to a large extent on the precise location of individual new buildings. The following is therefore a generalised assessment of likely effects on visual receptors, based on the proposals as shown on the Development Framework Plan and taking into account the landscape proposals as indicated on the Green Infrastructure Parameters Plan (as also summarised in tabular form in Appendix B):

- Properties to the east and north - some of the houses along the urban edge in the north eastern corner of Field A would have clear views of the proposed houses, and would lose their presently open, rural views. These properties would experience **high adverse visual effects**. Other properties in this area with more limited views (including those to the north of the site in Longmead where there is a tall hedge along the site boundary, and properties to the east with screening from garden vegetation) would experience **slight to moderate or moderate adverse effects**. Existing houses further to the south with limited and filtered views through garden or boundary vegetation would experience **moderate or slight to moderate adverse effects**, depending on the nature of their existing views. Houses along the northern edge of Fields B and C would have filtered views through the tall boundary hedgerow (with clearer views for those adjoining Field C), and would also experience **moderate or slight to moderate adverse effects**, with up to **moderate to high adverse effects** for properties adjoin the north western part of Field C. A few properties to the south east, close to London Road, would have some views to the upper parts of some

of the new houses within the site, and would experience **slight adverse** visual effects.

- Public Rights of Way - there would be clear and short distance views from the two public footpaths as they pass through the site (including some elevated views across the new development from the footbridge which carries the northern footpath across the A10), though the northern route would run within a new linear park through the site and the southern footpath would run for part of its length across new open space areas. People walking along these routes would experience **moderate to high adverse visual effects** for the northern footpath, and **high adverse visual effects** for the southern route, as their visual experience would change from being within a field to being within an urban area, and users of the both routes would need to cross the new internal site access roads. Effects for the northern footpath would be lower as it would run within a green corridor (though the new houses would be visible to either side of it), and because it would only need to cross internal site roads once. However, people using footpaths are essentially mobile, and their views will tend to change as they move along a route - when walking from south west of the A10 into the urban area (or vice versa) along either footpath, then the part of that overall route within the site would change, but the experience of walking along the remaining parts would not alter to any significant degree. For people walking towards the urban area on the south west side of the A10 there would be some views of the new houses within the site, but those views would be largely screened by intervening vegetation and would also be across the A10, so any adverse effects on those parts of the routes would be no more than **slight adverse**. To the east of the site there would also be some limited views from a short section of the bridleway to the west of Owls Farm - these views would be at a distance of around 1.9km, and the new houses on the site would be visible in the context of an expansive view which also includes parts of the urban area and the recent residential development at The Village. Any effects would therefore be **insignificant**, and for a short section of the route only.
- Local roads - There would be some filtered views from the A10 as it passes the site (particularly in the winter), though the proposed bund and acoustic fence would screen most views of the new houses, other than at the gaps in the bund and around the new access, where there would be clear views into the site along the line of the access. There would also be a general sense of the urban edge having extended out towards the road. However, people driving along busy roads are generally taken to be of low sensitivity to visual effects, and the proposed planting would further screen the development over time. Any effects for users of the A10 would therefore be no more than **slight adverse**.

- Higher ground to the north east, east and south east - there would be some limited and distant views from visual receptors (houses and users of Owles Lane and short stretches of some Public Rights of Way) in some areas of the higher ground to the north east, east and south east of the site, as indicated on Figure 3. The roofs of some of the new houses would be visible in these views, but existing development within the town would also tend to be visible in the middle ground of the view, with development on the site visible in the background beyond. These views are also generally expansive, and the development would form a small component only of the overall view. Effects would therefore be no more than **slight adverse**, and for a small number of receptors only.

4.2.6 In terms of overall visual amenity, the development would be dominant in some short distance views from houses along the existing urban edge to the east, but would have a much lower visual presence elsewhere, and effects on the general visual amenity of the area around the site would be **slight to moderate adverse**.

4.2.7 As for landscape effects, the above effects are those which would be experienced in the winter - effects in summer would generally be at a lower level, and all effects would be expected to decrease progressively with time, especially those for properties along the existing urban edge, which would be screened from the new development over time as the proposed planting grows up.

Night Time Effects

4.2.8 There are at present no detailed proposals for lighting of the site, but it is anticipated that there would need to be lighting for the new roads within the site and for the new roundabout junction on the A10, though any lighting would be designed to minimise potential adverse effects and prevent sky glow or light spillage. There would also be light sources within the new houses and within and around the employment uses. Any new lighting would be screened to some extent by the existing and proposed surrounding vegetation, and in most views where it could be seen it would be in the context of the existing lighting in the wider urban area to the north and east. The lighting associated with development of the site would therefore have a similar level of night time effects to those experienced during the day.

4.3 Effects During Construction

4.3.1 The above assessment of effects has been of the completed development. There would also be additional effects during the construction stage, arising from the presence and

movement of construction plant and the exposure of soil during earthworks, because partly completed buildings can appear more discordant and also because the proposed planting would not yet be in place. However, most of the construction activity would be screened to some extent by the surrounding vegetation, and any additional effects would be for a limited duration only, and would (as for the longer term effects described above) be felt over a limited area.

4.4 Planning Policy

4.4.1 Most of the planning policies set out in Section 2 seek as a minimum to prevent significant landscape harm, and to provide enhancement where possible. It therefore follows that, if no significant longer term harm would result from the proposed development, the development would not be in conflict with the policies. Relevant policies are considered below, together with an analysis of whether or not the proposed development would be in conflict with them:

- There would be potential conflict with those parts of the NPPF which seek to conserve and enhance the natural environment, as would be inevitable for development on any greenfield site. However, the harm would be minimised by the design of the development and by the extensive landscape proposals, which would lead to local landscape and biodiversity benefits, which would increase over time.
- There would be an in principle conflict with Local Plan Policy GBR2, as the development is not for one of the categories which are listed as appropriate in the rural area outside the Green Belt, though as noted above in terms of landscape character the site is separated from the open countryside to the south and west by the A10 and parts of it have an edge of settlement character.
- The proposals accord with Policy DES1, as a masterplan has been developed with respect to comments from the DRP, the community engagement undertaken and also to the findings of this LVIA.
- In respect of Policy DES2, the development would cause some limited and localised harm to local landscape character, but the character and quality of the open countryside to the west and south of the site would be maintained, and a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been produced as required by the policy. The development would also:

- Retain existing landscape features, including the vegetation around the site perimeter and the hedgerows and trees within the site, including the distinctive mature sycamores between fields A and B.
 - Provide extensive appropriate mitigation measures as suggested by the policy.
 - Contribute to the strategy for managing change as set out for the High Rib Valley in the EHDC Landscape Character Assessment, as it would include planting along the A10 corridor and would also improve the local network of rights of way with connections within the site.
 - Contribute to the strategy for the Cherry Green Arable Plateau character area, in that it would include some new native broadleaved woodland planting alongside the A10.
- The development would comply with Policies DES3 and DES4, as it would retain and protect important existing landscape features and would provide extensive new or reinforced landscape and amenity features, which would enhance local biodiversity interest, as set out in the ecology reports which accompany the application.
 - The development would also comply with Policy NE3, which includes requirements to enhance biodiversity and retain existing trees and hedgerows.
 - There would be no conflict with paragraph 6.1.17 of the District Plan, which states that *'the open character of the countryside between Aspenden and Buntingford will be preserved, thereby avoiding coalescence between the two communities'*. The development would not be visible from Aspenden as a result of the local ridge line between the settlements, and the line of the A10 and the trees alongside it also forms a strong physical and visual barrier between the settlements, with an extensive area of open land to the south and west of the road.

4.4.2 There would be some degree of conflict with Policies ES1 and HD2 of the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan, as there would be some adverse landscape character effects, but this assessment has shown that such effects would be at a relatively low level, localised and would further decline with time as the extensive landscape proposals begin to mature. The proposals have also been designed with respect to local topography to limit development (both in terms of its extent and its height) on the higher parts of the site, and in order to minimise any effects on longer distance views.

4.4.3 In summary, while there would be some inevitable, in-principle harm in respect of some of the above policies, as would tend to be the case for any proposed development of a presently greenfield site, that harm would be minimised by the retention of existing landscape features, by the nature and design of the proposed development and by the extensive landscape proposals. Any harm would be at a relatively low level, would affect a limited area around the site, and would reduce over time.

4.4.4 As noted below, the previous proposals on the site were refused, with the first reason for refusal citing Local Plan Policies DES1, DES4 and GBR2, Neighbourhood Plan Policy ES1, and unspecified paragraphs of the NPPF. The analysis set out above has shown that the current proposals would comply with Policies DES1 and DES4, but there would be some limited conflict with Policies GBR2 and ES1, and also with some parts of the NPPF. Much of that conflict would be largely inevitable for development on any unallocated greenfield site, and will need to be weighed in the overall planning balance against the benefits of the development, including the provision of new homes.

4.5 2022 Refusal

4.5.1 As noted above, an application broadly similar to the current proposals (though it was in detail, with access by means of a signalised 'T' junction with the A10) was submitted in July 2022 (EHDC reference 3/22/1551/FUL), and refused in a notice dated 9 November 2022 for a total of 8 reasons, of which the first stated:

'The proposal would encroach into the rural area beyond the settlement boundary to the detriment of the character, appearance, and distinctiveness of the area contrary to Policies DES1, DES4, GBR2 of the East Herts District Plan (2018), Policy ES1 of the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.'

4.5.2 It is clearly the case that the proposals would be located to the west of the existing settlement boundary, and the assessment set out above has shown that there would be some adverse landscape and visual effects, which would amount to a degree of detriment to the character and appearance of the area. However, any proposed development of a greenfield site would (usually) be outside existing settlement boundaries, and would (inevitably) involve a degree of landscape harm and detriment, and as noted above any harm in this case would be at a relatively low level, would affect a limited area around the site, and would reduce over time, and any such harm would need to be weighed in the overall planning balance against the benefits of the development.

4.5.3 The EHDC Landscape Officer made a number of comments in his consultation response to the Planning Officer, which were presumably taken into account by that officer in recommending refusal of the application. A number of the main comments are reproduced below in italics, with a response following in normal text (the responses are made in the light of the detailed assessment set out in this LVIA):

The agricultural land use of the site is to be found on both sides of the A10 and can be described as coherent or interconnected, despite the obvious presence of the road transport corridor - the undulating landform, open landscape character, land use and vestigial field pattern having been largely retained.

The site is presently in agricultural use and there is also agricultural land to the west of the A10, but the road does (as acknowledged in this comment) have an obvious presence within the local landscape. The road, together with the traffic passing along it and the trees to each side of it, does form a physical and visual barrier and does enclose the site against the edge of the settlement, separating it from the more open countryside to the west.

The change of use, and scale of the proposed development, will result in urbanisation of the currently rural/agricultural landscape character of the site and surrounding area to the west. Albeit there are mixed adjacent land uses of water treatment works, housing, and transport corridor, the development will result in the loss of a clear and common connection between the agricultural land use of the site and the wider landscape setting.

The proposals would result in some significant changes to the landscape of the site itself, but those changes would be contained to a significant extent by the enclosing road and the trees alongside it. This comment exaggerates the 'clear and common connection' between the site and the wider landscape to the west - while there are some views across the A10 (mainly in the winter) the site is generally well enclosed and separated from the wider landscape by the road and the trees alongside it, which would help to contain the proposed development and provide a logical boundary for the extended settlement.

The extension of the urban fringe of Buntingford up to the A10 bypass in this location will mean the loss of landscape buffer and/or physical separation of the town from the transport corridor, forfeiture of the favourable transition from urban fringe to rural landscape and will be visually intrusive by disrupting valued views enjoyed by users of the rights of way which cross the site.

There is at the moment some agricultural land between the edge of the settlement and the A10, and much of that land would be developed as a result of the proposals, but that would not be inherently harmful and would reflect the situation in many similar towns with bypasses, where development has extended out to the bypass from the previous edge of the settlement.

The LVIA categorises the site as of low to medium landscape quality. However, by using criteria for determining landscape quality the site meets various criteria for both medium and high quality.

The site can, therefore, reasonably be said to fall into the medium landscape quality categories, but this can be raised to medium/high when adding in the special quality of the site as an important landscape buffer between Buntingford and the A10 bypass.

This is a judgement made by the Landscape Officer, and differs from that set out in this assessment, which is of low to medium quality. The fact that the site lies between the edge of the settlement and the A10 would not affect its inherent landscape quality - it could potentially affect its landscape value, but it is not clear why the Landscape Officer considers that separating the edge of the settlement from the A10 bypass in itself means that the value of the landscape should be higher - the site is in the area between the edge of the settlement and the road, but that does not increase its value.

The introduction of new housing development of this scale will have adverse impact on the wider landscape as experienced by existing residents, users of the A10 and local Rights of Way.

There would be some adverse landscape effects, as set out in this report, but effects on the wider landscape would be limited due to the contained nature of the site and its location between the urban edge and the A10.

The landscape buffer between the A10 corridor and the outskirts of Buntingford will be lost. The A10 would no longer bypass the town but will instead coalesce with urban style housing development on an expanded urban fringe of Buntingford.

The A10 would clearly continue to bypass the town (it would not run through it), but the edge of the town would expand outwards to run close to the road - that is a commonly occurring situation, and it is not clear why the Landscape Officer considers it to be so harmful. If new development on greenfield sites is required, then a location such as this

(where the site is enclosed and contained by a busy, tree-lined road) would in principle be preferable to an uncontained site bordered by open countryside.

The main viewpoints from which the various parts of the development will be seen are:

- *From the houses to the east along the urban edge.*
- *From the far side of the valley of the River Rib - parts of the far valley side can be seen from within the site, indicating that the site will also be visible from those parts of the far valley side.*
- *From the A10 as it passes the site - the roadside vegetation is sparse in places and the southern section of the A10 is on higher ground relative to the site.*
- *From the two public footpaths which cross the site, including elevated views from the footbridge where the northern footpath crosses the A10.*

There would be some views of the development, and some adverse visual effects, for properties along the existing urban edge. However, as set out in this assessment, any views from the higher ground to the east of the River Rib would be very limited and would be across the existing urban area, and any visual effects would be low level and limited. There would be clear views from the two public footpaths, with some adverse visual effects.

The identity of the local surroundings is that of existing housing development set well back from the A10 ring road and looking out onto a landscape that is rural in character. The proposals however result in the immediate and permanent loss of this identity with the A10 now forming a tight collar around the development and therefore the town.

There would clearly be some change to the existing relative arrangement of the edge of the settlement and the A10 bypass, but as noted above that arrangement has no specific significance or value, and any development of a greenfield site will result in some change to the existing development pattern.

- 4.5.4 In summary, there would clearly be some adverse landscape and visual effects as a result of the proposed development, as would be the case for any development on a greenfield site, and that is the assessment set out in this report. The Landscape Officer has noted that there would be adverse effects, but (in comparison with the assessment in this report) has exaggerated the connection of the site to the wider landscape to the west of the A10 and the significance and value of the role of the site in forming a buffer

between the edge of the settlement and the bypass, resulting in an overstatement of the level of those effects.

- 4.5.5 While the site does clearly form an open area between the urban edge and the road, it is not clear why the Landscape Officer ascribes such value to that 'buffer function' - the site does not separate two areas which should in terms of planning principle be kept apart (as could be the case if it were to be between two settlements which could merge and lose their separate identity). There would in principle be no specific or inherent harm in the urban area extending out to the bypass, which would then form a logical and robust boundary to the settlement, and would be a more appropriate arrangement in terms of landscape effects than a settlement extending out into open countryside with no obvious defining or enclosing feature.
- 4.5.6 As noted above, the previous proposals on the site were refused, with the first reason for refusal citing Local Plan Policies DES1, DES4 and GBR2, Neighbourhood Plan Policy ES1, and unspecified paragraphs of the NPPF. The analysis set out above has shown that the current proposals would comply with Policies DES1 and DES4, but there would be some limited conflict with Policies GBR2 and ES1, and also with some parts of the NPPF. While there would be some landscape and visual harm as set out in this assessment and that harm should be taken into account in the overall planning balance, it should be taken into account at the correct level, which is that it would be at a relatively low level, would affect a limited area around the site, and would reduce over time.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 A site to the south west of Buntingford, between the existing urban edge and the A10 bypass, is proposed for a housing development of 350 new dwellings with some commercial, services and retail floorspace in the south eastern part of the site and associated works including drainage, access, allotments, public open space and landscaping.
- 5.2 The site is not covered by any national or local designations for landscape quality, and does not lie within the Green Belt, but it lies outside the defined settlement boundary and is in the countryside.
- 5.3 This report provides information on the character and quality of the landscape of and around the site, and the likely landscape and visual effects which would result from the proposed development of the site, in order to assist EHDC with their consideration of the planning application.
- 5.4 The site is in agricultural use and comprises three large arable fields, with the northern field being in a more elevated position and more open to view, and the south eastern field being lower and more enclosed.
- 5.5 Two public footpaths cross the site, running from the village of Aspenden across the A10 and then through the site and into the urban area to the north east. These footpaths would be retained on their current alignments as part of the proposed development.
- 5.6 The site as a whole is separated from the open countryside to the south and west by the A10 and, while it is in agricultural use and has an overall rural character, some parts of it have urban fringe characteristics. The site has been assessed as of overall low to medium landscape quality, as it contains some pleasant and attractive features and aspects (chiefly the rolling arable fields and the field boundary hedgerows), but is also affected by a number of visual detractors, including the adjacent A10, the existing urban edge (which is somewhat raw and open in places) and the nearby STW.

- 5.7 This development would be contained within the line of the A10, but the new houses on the higher parts of the site would be locally prominent, and the overall sensitivity of the site to the proposed development has therefore been assessed as medium, as there would be some loss of landscape features (chiefly the open fields which make up the site, though some extensive new landscape features would be provided), and the development would represent a significant change to what is at the moment a largely open, agricultural landscape, but in the context of the adjacent urban edge the new development, while visible, would not be discordant.
- 5.8 The proposals are in outline, but would allow for the retention of the visually significant vegetation around and within the site, with the exception of two short sections of hedgerow in the central part of the site which would need to be removed to create access into the northern and eastern fields, and a short length of the hedgerow and trees along each side of the A10 in order to create the new roundabout access. The proposals would also allow for the creation of significant areas of open space and new planting within the site, including an extensive area along the western side of the site which could include a mound and fencing for attenuation of traffic noise, together with extensive planting, areas of wildflower grassland a new footpath. There would also be open spaces at the points where the two footpaths run into the site from the urban area, which could be designed to create welcoming gateway features, larger equipped play areas, and an area of allotments in the north eastern corner of the site.
- 5.9 The development itself would not be unsightly or intrusive - houses are commonplace features of the urban fringe, and though they would be built on a currently undeveloped area, they would not appear out of place on completion of the development, in the context of the urban area to the north and east, and the STW and industrial estate to the south east. However, the site is in the countryside in planning terms and is presently undeveloped, so some in principle adverse effects would arise from its development, and would apply (to varying degrees) to the development of any greenfield site.
- 5.10 The degree of landscape change brought about by the development would be medium, and overall landscape effects would be moderate adverse at their greatest. This would be in the winter soon after completion, when the various elements of the development would be at their most visible - effects in the summer would be at a lower level, as much of the screening vegetation is deciduous, and would be slight to moderate adverse only. These effects would be expected to decrease over time, as the extensive proposed planting begins to mature (noting also that the existing trees alongside the A10 will

continue to grow into the future), and as the new houses are integrated more fully with the surrounding area. The overall net landscape effects after around 15 years would be expected to reduce to slight adverse only, with the residual adverse effects chiefly as a result of the loss of the presently open land.

- 5.11 It is also important to note that the area over which these effects would be experienced is limited, and does not extend for a significant distance beyond the site boundary - some views of the new development would be possible from the higher ground to the east and south east of Buntingford, but in such views it would be seen in the context of the existing urban area or the A10 and its traffic, and the overall view from those areas would not change significantly.
- 5.12 There would also be adverse visual effects for some of the properties along the eastern edge of the site, where their presently open and largely rural views would be changed by the development. There would be adverse visual effects for users of the two public footpaths which cross the site, and also (to a lesser degree) for people passing along the A10. All of the visual effects identified would be expected to decline over time.
- 5.13 In policy terms, while there would be some inevitable, in principle harm in respect of some landscape protection policies, as would tend to be the case for any proposed development of a greenfield site, that harm would be minimised by the retention of existing landscape features, by the nature and design of the proposed development and by the extensive landscape proposals.
- 5.14 An application broadly similar to the current proposals (though it was in detail, with access by means of a signalised 'T' junction with the A10) was submitted in July 2022 (EHDC reference 3/22/1551/FUL), and refused in a notice dated 9 November 2022 for a total of 8 reasons, of which the first referred to encroachment into the rural area and harm to the character, appearance and distinctiveness of the area. It is clearly the case that the proposals would be located to the west of the existing settlement boundary, and the assessment set out in this report has shown that there would be some adverse landscape and visual effects, which would amount to a degree of detriment to the character and appearance of the area. However, any proposed development of a greenfield site would (usually) be outside existing settlement boundaries, and would (inevitably) involve a degree of landscape harm and detriment, and any harm in this case would be at a relatively low level, would affect a limited area around the site, and would reduce over time, and any such harm would need to be weighed in the overall planning balance against the benefits of the development.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

1 General

- 1.1 In landscape and visual assessments, a distinction is normally drawn between landscape effects (i.e. effects on the character or quality of the landscape, irrespective of whether there are any views of the landscape, or viewers to see them) and visual effects (i.e. effects on people's views of the landscape, principally from residential properties, but also from public rights of way and other areas with public access). Thus, a development may have extensive landscape effects but few visual effects (if, for example, there are no properties or public viewpoints), or few landscape effects but significant visual effects (if, for example, the landscape is already degraded or the development is not out of character with it, but can clearly be seen from many residential properties).
- 1.2 The core methodology followed is that set out in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', produced jointly by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and the Landscape Institute ('the GLVIA', 1995, revised 2002 and 2013). The document 'Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002' (The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage) also stresses the need for a holistic assessment of landscape character, including physical, biological and social factors. This document notes that '*Landscape is about the relationship between people and place.*'
- 1.3 Further information is set out in 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment', October 2014 (Christine Tudor, Natural England) to which reference is also made. This paper notes that 'Landscape' is defined in the European Landscape Convention as: '*Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*'.
- 1.4 The GLVIA guidance is on the principles and process of assessment, and stresses that the detailed approach adopted should be appropriate to the task in hand. It notes that professional judgement is at the core of LVIA, and that while some change can be quantified (for example the number of trees which may be lost), '*much of the assessment must rely on qualitative judgements*' (GLVIA, section 2.23), and the Landscape Institute's Technical Committee has advised that the 2013 revision of the GLVIA '*places greater emphasis on professional judgement and less emphasis on a formulaic approach*'. The judgements made as part of the assessment were based on the tables set out below.
- 1.5 Assessment of the baseline landscape was undertaken by means of a desk study of published information, including Ordnance Survey mapping and landscape character assessments at national, county and local scales.

2 Methodology for this Assessment

2.1 For the purposes of this assessment, the guidance set out above was generally adhered to, with the following specific refinements:

1. Landscape and visual effects were assessed in terms of the magnitude of the change brought about by the development (also referred to in the GLVIA as the '*nature of the effect*', though as effects are the end product of the assessment, rather than one of the inputs to it, the term change is used to avoid confusion) and also the sensitivity of the resource affected (also referred to in the GLVIA as the '*nature of the receptor*'). There is some confusion in the guidance about the term 'impact'; the overall process is known as Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, but what is actually assessed is more usually referred to as effects, and the GLVIA does also use the word 'impact' to mean the action being taken, or the magnitude of change. In order to avoid this source of confusion, this assessment does not use the word 'impact', but instead refers to the **magnitude of change** caused by the development, which results (in combination with the sensitivity of the resource affected) in landscape and visual **effects**.
2. Landscape and visual effects have been considered in terms of whether they are direct or indirect, short term/temporary or long term/permanent, and beneficial or adverse. It is also important to consider the area over which the effects may be felt, and to note that effects will generally tend to decline with distance from the development in question, so the scale at which the judgement is made will affect the level of significance of the effects.
3. The **magnitude of change** will generally decrease with distance from its source, until a point is reached where there is no discernible change. It will also vary with factors such as the scale and nature of the proposed development, the proportion of the view that would be occupied by the development, whether the view is clear and open, or partial and/or filtered, the duration and nature of the change (e.g. temporary or permanent, intermittent or continuous etc), whether the view would focus on the proposed development or whether the development would be incidental in the view, and the nature of the existing view (e.g. whether it contains existing detracting or intrusive elements).
4. In terms of **sensitivity**, residential properties were taken to be of high sensitivity in general, although this can vary with the degree of openness of their view (see Table 7 below). Landscapes which carry a landscape quality designation and which are otherwise attractive or unspoilt will in general be more sensitive, while those which are less attractive or already affected by significant visual detractors and disturbance will be generally less sensitive (see Table 4 below).
5. For both landscape and visual effects, the assessment is of the development **complete with the proposed mitigation measures**. Those measures are part of the proposed development, and there has therefore been no assessment of a hypothetical,

unmitigated development. However, as the mitigation measures involve planting, they will take time to become effective, and the assessment therefore makes allowance for this, considering an initial scenario in the winter of the first year after planting and then a future scenario where the planting has begun to mature.

6. The GLVIA suggests in section 3.32 that an assessment should distinguish between significant and non-significant effects (based on the fact that the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 require the assessment of '*direct and indirect significant effects*' on the environment). Where an assessment forms part of a wider EIA and is summarised in an Environmental Statement (ES), that judgment may be for the editor of the ES to make, but in an assessment which is not part of an EIA, it should be noted that the GLVIA makes it clear in section 3.34 that '*effects not considered to be significant will not be completely disregarded*', and therefore adverse landscape and visual effects of any level (other than no effect or negligible) should be carried forwards by the decision maker into the overall planning balance, as they still constitute harm (or benefit).

LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

7. **Landscape change** was categorised as shown in Table 1 below, where each level (other than no change) can be either beneficial or adverse:

Table 1 ~ Magnitude of Landscape Change	
Category	Definition
No change	No loss or alteration of key landscape characteristics, features or elements.
Negligible	Very minor loss or alteration (or improvement, restoration or addition) to one or more key landscape characteristics, features or elements.
Low	Minor loss of or alteration (or improvement, restoration or addition) to one or more key landscape characteristics, features or elements.
Medium	Partial loss of or damage (or improvement, restoration or addition) to key characteristics, features or elements.
High	Total or widespread loss of, or severe damage (or major improvement, restoration or addition) to key characteristics, features or elements.

8. **Landscape quality** was judged on site by an experienced assessor, with reference to the criteria shown in Table 2 below. **Landscape condition** (i.e. the physical state of the landscape, including its intactness and the condition of individual landscape elements) can have a bearing on landscape quality, as indicated.

Table 2 ~ Criteria for Determining Landscape Quality	
Category	Typical Criteria ¹
Very high quality	National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty standard - the area will usually (though not necessarily, especially for small areas) be so designated. It is also possible that some parts of designated areas may be of locally lower quality, if affected by detractors. Will generally be a landscape in good condition, with intact and distinctive elements.
High quality	Attractive landscape, usually with a strong sense of place, varied topography and distinctive landscape or historic features, and few visual detractors. Will generally be a landscape in good condition, with intact and distinctive elements.
Medium quality	Pleasant landscape with few detractors but with no particularly distinctive qualities. Will generally be a landscape in medium condition, with some intact elements.
Low quality	Unattractive or degraded landscape, affected by visual detractors. Will generally be a landscape in poor condition, with few intact elements.

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of landscapes which may be judged to be of the given quality - they are not intended to be applied in full or literally in all cases.

9. The quality of the landscape is one element which goes into the consideration of **landscape value**, which also takes account of other factors, including rarity, representativeness, conservation interests, recreational value and perceptual aspects such as wildness or tranquillity - these are some of the factors listed for the consideration of landscape value in Box 5.1 of the GLVIA on its page 84.

10. Box 5.1 has come to be used as a default method for determining landscape value, and is frequently referenced. However, it should be noted that it appears in the GLVIA under the heading of 'Undesignated landscapes', and also predates the February 2019 NPPF (later amended in July 2021), which states that valued landscapes should be protected and enhanced '*in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan*'. This shows that landscapes which have statutory protection (i.e. AONBs and National Parks) or an identified quality in the development plan should be regarded as valued, and secondly that the protection to be afforded to valued landscapes will vary with their status, with statutorily protected landscapes receiving the highest level of protection, and landscapes recognised and protected by development plan policies valued and protected at a lower level, but still above that of ordinary countryside. It is also often useful to include some consideration of the function that an area of landscape may have in determining its value, for example if it plays a role in the separation and setting of settlements.

11. The GLVIA considers landscape value as a measure to be assessed in association with landscape character, in order to avoid consideration only of how scenically attractive an area may be, and thus to avoid undervaluing areas of strong character but little scenic beauty. It is defined in the glossary of the GLVIA as:

'The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons.'

Landscape value was judged on site by an experienced assessor, with reference to the above discussion and the criteria shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 ~ Criteria for Determining Landscape Value	
Category	Typical Criteria ¹
Very High Value	Often very high quality landscapes, usually in good condition, with intact and distinctive elements. Will often (though not necessarily, especially for small areas) be a statutorily designated landscape with strong scenic qualities. May have significant recreational value at national or regional scale and include recognised and/or popular viewpoints. May have a strong functional element, for example in providing an open gap between settlements. May also be a rare landscape type, or one with strong wildlife, cultural or other interests or connections.
High Value	Often high quality landscapes, usually in good condition, with some intact and distinctive elements. Will sometimes be a designated landscape with strong scenic qualities. May have significant recreational value at a local scale and include some recognised and/or popular viewpoints. May be a rare landscape type, or one with some wildlife, cultural or other interests or connections. May be a landscape of limited quality, but with a strong functional element, for example in providing an open gap between settlements.
Medium Value	Often pleasant, medium quality landscapes, usually in reasonable condition, with some intact or distinctive elements. Unlikely to be a statutorily or locally designated landscape, but may have some localised scenic qualities. May have some recreational value at a local scale or include some local viewpoints, or have a functional role, for example in providing an open gap between settlements. May have some wildlife, cultural or other interests or connections.
Low Value	Likely to be a lower quality landscape, usually in poor condition, with few intact or distinctive elements. Likely to have limited recreational value at a local scale with no significant viewpoints. Few if any wildlife, cultural or other interests or connections.

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of landscapes which may be judged to be of the given value - they are not intended to be applied in full or literally in all cases.

12. The assessment of landscape value is then carried forward into the determination of landscape sensitivity.

13. **Landscape sensitivity** relates to the ability of the landscape to accommodate change of the type and scale proposed without adverse effects on its character (i.e. its susceptibility to change), and also to the value of the landscape concerned. As noted in the GLVIA (section 5.39), sensitivity is *'specific to the particular project or development that is being proposed and to the location in question'*. Susceptibility is defined in the GLVIA as *'The ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue negative consequences.'* Susceptibility is judged according to the criteria set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4 ~ Criteria for Determining Landscape Susceptibility	
Category	Typical Criteria ¹
High Susceptibility	A landscape with a low capacity to accommodate change, either because the change in question would be large scale and/ or out of character with the existing landscape, or because the landscape has little capacity to accept or absorb that change which would be poorly screened and readily visible. The change would conflict with the existing character of the landscape.
Medium Susceptibility	A landscape with a moderate capacity to accommodate change, either because the change in question would be generally in scale and/ or character with the existing landscape, or because the landscape has some capacity to accept or absorb that change, which would be partially screened. The change would conflict with the existing character of the landscape to some extent.
Low Susceptibility	A landscape with a high capacity to accommodate change, either because the change in question would be small scale and/ or in keeping with the existing landscape, or because the landscape has a high capacity to accept or absorb that change which would be well screened. The change would complement the existing character of the landscape.

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of landscapes which may be judged to be of the given level of susceptibility - they are not intended to be applied in full or literally in all cases.

14. The judgement as to sensitivity combines judgements on susceptibility and value. A landscape of high sensitivity will tend to be one with a low ability to accommodate change and a high value, and vice versa. Landscape sensitivity was judged according to the criteria set out in Table 5 below, taking into account factors such as the presence or absence of designations for quality and the nature of the proposed change.

Table 5 ~ Criteria for Determining Landscape Sensitivity	
Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
Very High	<p>A landscape with a very low ability to accommodate change because such change would lead to a significant loss of valuable features or elements, resulting in a significant loss of character and quality.</p> <p>Development of the type proposed would be discordant and prominent.</p> <p>Will normally occur in a landscape of very high or high quality or value.</p>
High	<p>A landscape with limited ability to accommodate change because such change would lead to some loss of valuable features or elements, resulting in a significant loss of character and quality.</p> <p>Development of the type proposed would be discordant and visible.</p> <p>Will normally occur in a landscape of high quality or value, but can also occur where the landscape is of lower quality but where the type of development proposed would be significantly out of character.</p>
Medium	<p>A landscape with reasonable ability to accommodate change. Change would lead to a limited loss of some features or elements, resulting in some loss of character and quality.</p> <p>Development of the type proposed would be visible but would not be especially discordant.</p> <p>Will normally occur in a landscape of medium quality or value, a low quality/value landscape which is particularly sensitive to the type of change proposed, or a high quality/value landscape which is well suited to accommodate change of the type proposed.</p>
Low	<p>A landscape with good ability to accommodate change. Change would not lead to a significant loss of features or elements, and there would be no significant loss of character or quality.</p> <p>Development of the type proposed would not be readily be visible or would not be discordant.</p> <p>Will normally occur in a landscape of low quality or value.</p>

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of landscapes which may be judged to be of the given sensitivity - they are not intended to be applied in full or literally in all cases.

15. **Landscape effects** were determined according to the interaction between magnitude of change and sensitivity, as summarised in Table 6 below. As noted in the GLVIA (section 5.55):

'... susceptibility to change and value can be combined into an assessment of sensitivity for each receptor, and size/scale, geographical extent and duration and reversibility can be combined into an assessment of magnitude for each effect [i.e. magnitude of change]. Magnitude and sensitivity can then be combined to assess overall significance.'

Table 6 ~ Significance Criteria for Landscape Effects

Significance	Typical Criteria ¹
No Effect	The proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complement the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape • incorporate measures for mitigation to ensure that the scheme will blend in well with the surrounding landscape • avoid being visually intrusive and adverse effects on the current level of tranquillity of the landscape • maintain existing landscape character in an area which is not a designated landscape nor vulnerable to change.
Insignificant	The proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generally fit the landform and scale of the landscape • have limited effects on views • can be mitigated to a reasonable extent • avoid effects on designated landscapes.
Slight Adverse	The proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do not quite fit the landform and scale of the landscape • will impact on certain views into and across the area • cannot be completely mitigated because of the nature of the proposal or the character of the landscape • affect an area of recognised landscape quality or value • would lead to minor loss of or alteration to existing landscape features or elements, or introduce some minor new uncharacteristic elements.
Moderate Adverse	The proposals are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • out of scale or at odds with the landscape • visually intrusive and will adversely impact on the landscape • not possible to fully mitigate • will have an adverse impact on a landscape of recognised quality or value, or on vulnerable and important characteristic features or elements • would lead to loss of or alteration to existing landscape features or elements, or introduce some new uncharacteristic elements.
High Adverse	The proposals are damaging to the landscape in that they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are at variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape • are visually intrusive and would disrupt important views • are likely to degrade or diminish the integrity of a range of characteristic features and elements and their setting • will be damaging to a high quality or value, or highly vulnerable landscape • cannot be adequately mitigated • would lead to significant loss of or alteration to existing landscape features or elements, or introduce some significant new uncharacteristic elements.
Major Adverse	The proposals are very damaging to the landscape in that they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape • are visually intrusive and would disrupt fine and valued views • are likely to degrade, diminish or even destroy the integrity of a range of characteristic features and elements and their setting • will be substantially damaging to a high quality or value, or highly vulnerable landscape, or would fundamentally alter a less valuable landscape • cannot be adequately mitigated • would lead to extensive loss of or alteration to existing landscape features or elements, or introduce some dominant new uncharacteristic elements.

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of situation in which landscape effects of the given level of significance may be expected - they are not intended to be definitions to be applied in full or literally in all cases.

2. Effects in the 'Major Adverse' category are unlikely to occur with most forms of development, but the scale set out above is intended to cover all potential forms of development in all landscapes, so this category is likely to apply only where the landscape is extremely sensitive and/ or where the development is at a very large scale or of a very intrusive nature.

Table 6 ~ Significance Criteria for Landscape Effects (continued)

Significance	Typical Criteria ¹
Slight Beneficial	<p>The proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fit the landform and scale of the landscape • will improve certain views into and across the area to a limited extent • can be effectively mitigated • remove small scale unattractive or discordant features • benefit an area of recognised landscape quality or value • would introduce some minor new or restored positive and characteristic elements.
Moderate Beneficial	<p>The proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fit the landform and scale of the landscape • will improve certain views into and across the area • can be effectively mitigated • remove significant unattractive or discordant features • benefit a landscape of recognised quality or value, or enhance vulnerable and important characteristic features or elements • would introduce some new or restored positive and characteristic elements.
High Beneficial	<p>The proposals provide significant benefit to the landscape in that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are in accord with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape • will improve important views • are likely to enhance a range of characteristic features and elements and their setting • will lead to improvement to a high quality or value, or highly vulnerable landscape • need no significant mitigation • would introduce some significant new or restored positive and characteristic elements.
Major Beneficial	<p>The proposals provide very significant benefit to the landscape in that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are in accord with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape • will improve expansive and/or fine and valued views • are likely to significantly enhance a range of characteristic features and elements and their setting • will lead to substantial improvement to a high quality or value, or highly vulnerable landscape • need no mitigation • would introduce some extensive or highly significant new or restored positive and characteristic elements.

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of situation in which landscape effects of the given level of significance may be expected - they are not intended to be definitions to be applied in full or literally in all cases.
2. Effects in the 'Major Beneficial' category are unlikely to occur with most forms of development, but the scale set out above is intended to cover all potential forms of development in all landscapes, so this category is likely to apply only where the landscape is extremely sensitive and/ or where the development leads to some major or widespread landscape improvements.

VISUAL EFFECTS

16. For **visual** effects, the GLVIA (in section 2.20) differentiates between effects on specific views and effects on *'the general visual amenity enjoyed by people'*, which it defines as:

'The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area.'

There is obviously some overlap between the two, with **visual amenity** largely being an amalgamation of a series of views. This assessment therefore considers effects on specific views, but then also goes on to consider the extent to which effects on those views may affect general visual amenity, taking into account considerations such as the number of views within which the development may be present, the magnitude of change to those views, the discordance of the development, the relative importance of those views, and also the number and importance of other views in which the development is not present.

17. In describing the nature and content of a view, the following terms may be used:

- No view - no views of the site or development.
- Glimpse - a limited view in which the site or development forms a small part only of the overall view.
- Partial - a clear view of part of the site or development only.
- Oblique - a view (usually through a window from within a property) at an angle, rather than in the direct line of sight out of the window.
- Fleeting - a transient view, usually obtained when moving, along a public right of way or transport corridor.
- Filtered - views of the site or development which are partially screened, usually by intervening vegetation, noting the degree of screening/filtering may change with the seasons.
- Open - a clear, unobstructed view of the site or development.

18. For the purpose of the assessment visual change was categorised as shown in Table 7 below, where each level (other than no change) can be either beneficial or adverse:

Table 7 ~ Magnitude of Visual Change	
Category	Definition
No change	No discernible change.
Negligible	The development would be discernible but of no real significance - the character of the view would not materially change. The development may be present in the view, but not discordant.
Low	The development would cause a perceptible deterioration (or improvement) in existing views. The development would be discordant (or would add a positive element to the view), but not to a significant extent.
Medium	The development would cause an obvious deterioration (or improvement) in existing views. The development would be an obvious discordant (or positive) feature of the view, and/or would occupy a significant proportion of the view.
High	The development would cause a dominant deterioration (or improvement) in existing views. The development would be a dominant discordant (or positive) feature of the view, and/or would occupy the majority of the view.

19. **Sensitivity** was also taken into account in the assessment, such that a given magnitude of change would create a larger visual effect on a sensitive receptor than on one of lesser sensitivity (see Table 8 below). As discussed above for landscape sensitivity, the sensitivity of visual receptors is determined according to the susceptibility of the receptor to change and the value attached to the view in question, with higher value views being those from specific or recognised viewpoints or those from Public Rights of Way where users would be expected to be using the route with the intention of enjoying the views from it.

Table 8 ~ Criteria¹ for Determining Visual Sensitivity	
Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
Very High	Visitors to recognised or specific viewpoints, or passing along routes through statutorily designated or very high quality landscapes where the purpose of the visit is to experience the landscape and views.
High	Residential properties ² with predominantly open views from windows, garden or curtilage. Views will normally be from ground and first floors and from two or more windows of rooms in use during the day ³ . Users of Public Rights of Way with predominantly open views in sensitive or unspoilt areas. Non-motorised users of minor or unclassified roads in the countryside. Visitors to heritage assets where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience, or visitors to locally recognised viewpoints. Users of outdoor recreational facilities with predominantly open views where the purpose of that recreation is enjoyment of the countryside - e.g. Country Parks, National Trust or other access land etc.
Medium	Residential properties ² with views from windows, garden or curtilage. Views will normally be from first floor windows only ³ , or an oblique view from one ground floor window, or may be partially obscured by garden or other intervening vegetation. Users of Public Rights of Way with restricted views, in less sensitive areas or where there are significant existing intrusive features. Users of outdoor recreational facilities with restricted views or where the purpose of that recreation is incidental to the view. Schools and other institutional buildings, and their outdoor areas. Motorised users of minor or unclassified roads in the countryside.
Low	People in their place of work. Users of main roads or passengers in public transport on main routes. Users of outdoor recreational facilities with restricted views and where the purpose of that recreation is incidental to the view.

- Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of situation in which visual sensitivity of the given level may be expected - they are not intended to be definitions to be applied literally in all cases.
- There is some discussion in the GLVIA as to whether private views from residential properties should be included within an LVIA, as they are a private (rather than a public) interest, but they have been included in this assessment on the basis that they are likely to matter most to local people. The appropriate weight to be applied to such views can then be determined by the decision maker.
- When (as is usually the case) there has been no access into properties to be assessed, the assumption is made that ground floor windows are to habitable rooms in use during the day such as kitchens/dining rooms/living rooms, and that first floor rooms are bedrooms.

20. **Visual effects** were then determined according to the interaction between change and sensitivity (see Table 9 below), where effects can be either beneficial or adverse. Where the views are from a residential property, the receptor is assumed to be of high sensitivity unless otherwise stated.

Table 9 ~ Significance Criteria for Visual Effects	
Significance	Typical Criteria ¹
No Effect	No change in the view.
Insignificant	The proposals would not significantly change the view, but would still be discernible.
Slight	The proposals would cause limited deterioration (or improvement) in a view from a receptor of medium sensitivity, but would still be a noticeable element within the view, or greater deterioration (or improvement) in a view from a receptor of low sensitivity.
Moderate	The proposals would cause some deterioration (or improvement) in a view from a sensitive receptor, or less deterioration (or improvement) in a view from a more sensitive receptor, and would be a readily discernible element in the view.
High	The proposals would cause significant deterioration (or improvement) in a view from a sensitive receptor, or less deterioration (or improvement) in a view from a more sensitive receptor, and would be an obvious element in the view.
Major	The proposals would cause a high degree of change in a view from a highly sensitive receptor, and would constitute a dominant element in the view.

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of situation in which visual effects of the given level of significance may be expected - they are not intended to be definitions to be applied literally in all cases.

21. **Photographs** were taken with a digital camera with a lens that approximates to 50mm. This is similar to a normal human field of view, though this field of view is extended where a number of separate images are joined together as a panorama. Visibility during the site visits was good (by definitions set out on the Met Office website, i.e. visibility was between 10 to 20km).
22. The Landscape Institute have produced guidance on the use of visualisations (Technical Guidance Note 06/19, Visual Representation of Development Proposals, September 2019). As its title suggests, this guidance is largely to do with how a proposed development is illustrated, but does also contain sections on baseline photography. Section 1.2.7 states that '*Photographs show the baseline conditions; visualisations show the proposed situation*', though it does then also go on to provide guidance for what it refers to as 'Type 1 Visualisations', which are in fact baseline images - 'Annotated Viewpoint Photographs'. The detailed guidance for these images suggests that panoramic images should be presented at A1 size. As this guidance is extensive, and is intended for use where visualisations such as photomontages are also produced, it has been followed for this assessment in terms of its general recommendations regarding lens types, noting where images have been combined into panoramas and the use of annotations to describe the content of the photographs and the extent of the site within them, but not in terms of all of

the recommendations for presentation of images. The photographs included within this assessment are intended as general representations of what can be seen from the viewpoints used, and are not a replacement for observing the site and the views on the ground - any decision maker making use of this assessment should visit the site, and the photographs are simply an *aide-memoire* to assist consideration following a site visit, not a replacement for it.

23. A useful concept in considering the potential visual effects of a development is that of the visual envelope (or zone of visual influence, ZVI). This is the area from within which the development would be visible. Any significant visual effects will therefore be contained within this area, and land falling outside it need not be considered in terms of visual effects. The area from within which the various elements of the proposed development would be visible has therefore been estimated using the manual approach set out in the GLVIA (section 6.7), with map interpretation, rough cross sections where required, site observation using an eye height of 1.7m and visualisation of the potential visibility of the proposed development. The boundary shown for the visual envelope is an estimate - it is not a firm or absolute boundary, and should be taken as an indication of the area from within which views of the development are likely to be possible. In some cases, some limited views of parts of the new development may be obtained from areas outside the identified visual envelope, from more distant properties or from elevated, distant vantage points, above intervening vegetation or other screening features, and such views are referred to where appropriate in the assessment.

APPENDIX B ~ SUMMARY OF LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

Table 1: Summary of Landscape Effects

Landscape Receptor	Quality and Sensitivity	Baseline Situation	Proposals and Mitigation	Landscape Change	Effects in Year 1 (Winter)	Effects in Year 15 (Summer)
<p>Landscape features within and around the site</p>	<p>Medium: the fields which make up the site are characteristic features of the local landscape, but are separated from the wider landscape to the west and south west by the A10 and the vegetation alongside it, and are in themselves open arable fields with no features within them. The hedges and trees around and within the site are also of medium quality and sensitivity.</p>	<p>The site comprises three large arable fields with tall hedgerows between them.</p> <p>The site is enclosed by the urban edge to the north and east, and the line of trees along each side of the A10 to the west and south.</p>	<p>The hedges within the site would be retained, with some short gaps created for the internal access roads. Some vegetation alongside the A10 would also be lost at the point of the proposed access.</p> <p>New houses would extend across the majority of the site area, with employment uses also in the southern part of Field C.</p> <p>The proposals are in outline, but the Parameter Plans indicate that there would be a broad band of open space with new tree planting, wildflower grassland and a new footpath along the western side of the site, which would also include a bund and acoustic fence for noise attenuation. The northern footpath through the site would run within a new linear park, and there would also be other open spaces within all three of the fields.</p>	<p>Most of the internal and perimeter vegetation would be retained with extensive additional planting, but there would be a high degree of change within the site, as the presently open fields would be largely developed, as would occur with development of any greenfield site.</p>	<p>Moderate to high adverse effects in terms of the replacement of the open, undeveloped fields of the site by built development.</p>	<p>Some beneficial effects in terms of the additional planting and areas of open space, with the benefits increasing over time, but some net adverse effects would persist into the future, as the open fields of the site would be permanently lost.</p>
<p>National Character Area 86, South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland.</p>	<p>Not stated specifically, and will vary within such a large area, but likely to be medium away from larger settlements and major transport routes.</p>	<p>The area of and around the site forms a very small part only of this large national character area.</p>	<p>Proposals are very small scale in relation to this national character area.</p>	<p>The local landscape change resulting from the proposals would be negligible in the context of this large character area.</p>	<p>Insignificant at this scale.</p>	<p>Insignificant at this scale.</p>
<p>Cheery Green Arable Plateau and High Rib Valley Landscape Character Areas (as set out in the EHDC Landscape Character Assessment).</p>	<p>Sensitivity and quality are not directly considered in this assessment, though condition for the Cherry Green LCA is stated to be poor, and moderate for the High Rib Valley LCA.</p>	<p>Assessment for both LCAs notes the effect on local character of the urban edge of Buntingford, which is described as '<i>locally intrusive</i>' for the High Rib Valley.</p>	<p>Proposals are relatively small scale in relation to the extent of these character areas, but would extend the existing settlement to the west of Buntingford, though only into an area which is contained by the line of the A10 bypass.</p>	<p>Low, given the scale of this character area and the generally contained nature of the site. Development would not be out of place in the edge of settlement context and would have limited visibility from the surrounding area.</p>	<p>Slight adverse at this scale.</p>	<p>Slight adverse at this scale, with some reduction over time.</p>

Table 1: Summary of Landscape Effects (continued)

Landscape Receptor	Quality and Sensitivity	Baseline Situation	Proposals and Mitigation	Landscape Change	Effects in Year 1 (Winter)	Effects in Year 15 (Summer)
<p>The site and immediate surrounds (i.e. the area within the visual envelope as shown on Figure 3).</p>	<p>Medium quality and value.</p> <p>Medium sensitivity to development of the type proposed.</p>	<p>The site is separated from the open countryside to the south and west by the A10 and, while it is in agricultural use and has an overall rural character, some parts of it have a more strongly edge of settlement character, in particular the north eastern corner of Field A and the enclosed Field C in the eastern part of the site.</p> <p>The site has a medium capacity to accommodate change as it adjoins the urban edge and is enclosed by the line of the A10, but the presence of a new and relatively large scale residential development would conflict with the existing character of the landscape to some extent, and new dwellings on the more elevated ground in the northern part of the site would be locally prominent, and would be visible from some areas of the higher ground to the east of the town (albeit at some distance, and in views which already include much of the urban area).</p>	<p>The proposals are for up to 350 dwellings, most of which would be 2 storeys in height with taller buildings generally limited to the lower-lying parts of the site, together with an area of employment uses and a local centre. Access would be via a new roundabout junction on the A10, which would entail some localised loss of roadside vegetation.</p> <p>New houses would extend across the majority of the site area, with employment uses also in the southern part of Field C.</p> <p>The proposals are in outline, but the Parameter Plans indicate that there would be a broad band of open space with new tree planting, wildflower grassland and a new footpath along the western side of the site, which would also include a bund and acoustic fence for noise attenuation. The northern footpath through the site would run within a new linear park, and there would also be other open spaces within all three of the fields.</p>	<p>Change within the site would be at a high level, as the existing fields would be replaced by built development, with extensive landscape areas, especially along the western side of the site.</p> <p>The degree of change to the landscape around the site would be medium - while the developed parts of the site would undergo a significant change (from open land to a new housing development), the remaining parts would not contain built development and would change to a lesser degree, and the overall development would have a limited impact on the wider countryside to the west and south west. Existing positive landscape features such as the trees and the hedgerows around and within the site would be mostly retained, and would be reinforced and managed into the future.</p>	<p>Moderate adverse effects on the local landscape - there would be a sense of development and the urban edge extending out into the countryside, but this would be limited by the fact that the development would only extend to the line of the A10 bypass, which already forms a strong local landscape feature, and which would be reinforced as a robust long term boundary to the urban area by the proposed open space, planting, bund and acoustic fence along the western side of the site.</p> <p>Effects in the summer would be at a lower level and would be slight to moderate adverse.</p> <p>These effects would be experienced within the area of the visual envelope shown on Figure 3 - there would be some lower level effects beyond that area, but those effects would be no more than slight adverse as the development would have a limited presence in these more distant views.</p>	<p>Slight adverse - effects would decline over time as a result of the proposed new planting, but a degree of harm caused by the replacement of the open fields by a new residential area would persist into the future.</p> <p>The new houses and employment uses in themselves, and the development as a whole, would not be unsightly or intrusive - any residual harm would occur as a result of the development of what is presently a greenfield site.</p>

Table 2: Summary of Visual Effects

Visual Receptor	Sensitivity	Baseline Situation	Proposals and Mitigation	Magnitude of Change	Effects in Year 1 (Winter)	Effects in Year 15 (Summer)
Properties to the east and north	High for around 12 properties in Monks Walk with views from both upper and ground floor windows across the northern part of Field A.	Generally open views across the site, with some variable screening by garden vegetation. Open land of the northern part of the site is visible, but also some views of existing houses in Longmead.	New houses would extend across the view, though allotments are proposed in the north eastern corner of the site which would provide some separation from the new built development. Some tree and hedgerow planting along eastern boundary.	Between medium and high, depending on nature of existing view and presence of localised screening.	High adverse visual effects for 9 properties with most open views, moderate to high adverse for the remainder.	All effects would tend to decrease to some extent over time, but presently open views across the site would be permanently lost.
	Medium for 5 properties further to the south along Monks Walk and around 8 properties to the north along the south side of Longmead, with views from first floor windows only.	Filtered views across the site, with some further localised screening by garden vegetation. Open land of the northern part of the site is visible, but also some views of existing houses along other parts of the urban edge.	New houses would extend across the view, with some new boundary planting.	Between low and medium, depending on nature of existing view - some properties are well screened by existing garden vegetation.	Moderate adverse visual effects for around 7 properties with more open views, slight to moderate adverse for the remainder.	All effects would tend to decrease to some extent over time, but presently open views across the fields for those properties with more open existing views would be permanently lost.
	Medium for around 22 properties further to the south with views to the west over Field A and also with views to the south over Field B - views are from mainly first floor windows.	Filtered views across the site, with some further localised screening by garden vegetation. Open land of the site is visible through or above the boundary vegetation.	New houses would extend across the view, with some new boundary planting and a linear open space along the north side of Field B.	Between low and medium, depending on nature of existing view - some properties are well screened by existing garden vegetation.	Moderate adverse visual effects for around 12 properties with the clearest views, slight to moderate adverse for the remainder.	All effects would tend to decrease to some extent over time, but presently open views across the fields for those properties with more open existing views would be permanently lost.
	High for around 6 properties to the north of Field C with views from both upper and ground floor windows, medium for a further 8 properties with more limited views.	Generally open views across the site, with some screening by garden vegetation. Open land of Field C visible, but also some views of the STW and industrial buildings beyond the field.	New houses in the north western part of Field C, with some new boundary planting and a broad area of open space in the eastern part of Field C.	Up to medium to high for properties with most open views of new houses, between low and medium elsewhere.	Moderate to high adverse for around 6 properties with the clearest views, slight to moderate or moderate adverse for the remainder	All effects would tend to decrease to some extent over time, but presently open views across the fields for those properties with more open existing views would be permanently lost.
	Medium for around 6 properties to the west of London Road.	Limited views over other intervening properties to Field C.	Upper parts of some of the new houses in Field C would be visible, beyond the proposed open space.	Low - new houses would be seen in the context of other existing properties in the view.	Slight adverse.	Effects would decrease further over time.

Table 2: Summary of Visual Effects (continued)

Visual Receptor	Sensitivity	Baseline Situation	Proposals and Mitigation	Magnitude of Change	Effects in Year 1 (Winter)	Effects in Year 15 (Summer)
Users of Public Rights of Way	High for users of Footpaths Buntingford 029 and 026 across the site.	Clear views across the open fields of the site from both routes as they cross the site, though the urban edge and traffic on the A10 are both also visible.	Footpath 029 would run within a new linear park and Footpath 026 would run partly across new open spaces, but the new houses across the site would be clearly visible, and the present rural experience of walking along these routes would be largely lost.	Moderate to high for Footpath 029 which would run within a green corridor and cross site access roads once only, and high for Footpath 026 which would have 2 road crossings.	Moderate to high adverse for Footpath 029 and high adverse for Footpath 026.	Effects would tend to decrease to some extent over time, but the experience of walking along these routes would be permanently affected.
	High for users of footpaths to the west of the A10.	Filtered views from relatively short stretches of these two routes - any views from further to the west screened by topography.	New houses would be partially visible across the A10 and through the trees alongside it, mainly in the winter.	Negligible - partial and filtered views from short sections of the routes only, mainly in the winter and across the A10.	Slight adverse, for relatively short sections of each route.	Effects would tend to decrease further over time.
	High for users of routes on the higher ground to the east of Buntingford.	Filtered views from relatively short stretches of the bridleway near Owls Farm, and possibly parts of other routes further to the north, at distances of 1.9km or greater.	New houses would be present in the view, but only as part of expansive views which also include parts of the existing urban area and recent housing developments, closer to the viewpoints.	Negligible - new houses on the site would form a small and distant part only of the view.	Insignificant, for short sections of the routes only.	Effects would tend to decrease further over time.
Users of local roads	Low for motorised users (there are no footways alongside the A10 as it passes the site).	Filtered views of parts of the site from the road as it passes the site, mainly in the winter.	New houses would extend across the site, but would be largely screened by the existing trees alongside the road and also by the proposed bund, acoustic fence and planting, other than at gaps in the bund and at the point of the new access. Some roadside vegetation would need to be removed at the point of the proposed access, where there would be some clear views into the site.	Up to medium at some points, but low or negligible for the most part as the road passes the site.	Slight adverse effects, for a short time only in the context of an overall journey.	Effects would tend to decrease further over time.

Notes:

1. Visual effects would vary in detail with the detailed design of the development and the detailed extent and nature of any mitigation planting.
2. There would also be some low level visual effects for a few properties on the higher ground to the east of Buntingford, but any views of the development would be limited, distant and in the context of other parts of the urban area being present in the view, so any effects would be either insignificant or slight adverse.

APPENDIX C ~ Proposals Drawings

Development Framework Plan
Green Infrastructure Parameters Plan

NOTES
 This drawing is the property of FPCR Environment and Design Ltd and is issued on the condition it is not reproduced, retained or disclosed to any unauthorised person, either wholly or in part without written consent of FPCR Environment and Design Ltd.



KEY

- Application boundary
- Land under the control of the applicant
- Residential
Up to 350 dwellings at approx. 35 dwellings per hectare average
- Employment
Use Classes E and B8
- Local Centre
Use Class E
- Children's Equipped Play Area
- Allotments
- - - Recreational Route
- - - Footway Cycleway
- - - Existing Public Right of Way
- - - Indicative Acoustic Fence on Bund with Proposed Planting
- - - Indicative Attenuation Feature
- - - Potential Swale
- Retained agricultural land
- Ecological enhancement area
- 1 Proposed vehicular, pedestrian and cycle access from A10
- 2 Proposed bus link, pedestrian and cycle access from Luynes Rise



PO5	08/06/2023	Access updated	CTH	KMN
PO4	06/06/2023	Roundabout added	CTH	KMN
PO3	26/05/2023	Title block and key amended	JMG	KMN
PO2	19/05/2023	A10 access amended; minor amendments	JMG	KMN
PO1	21/04/2023	Final issue	JMG	KMN

fpcr logo and contact information:
 FPCR Environment and Design Ltd
 Lockington Hill, Lockington, Derby, DE74 2RH
 t: 01509 672772
 e: mail@fpcr.co.uk
 w: www.fpcr.co.uk

client: **Countryside Partnerships and Vistry Homes**
 project: **Buntingford West, Buntingford, Hertfordshire**
 drawing title: **DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN**

scale: 1:2500 @ A1	dm: JMG	chk: KMN	date created: April 2023
project number: 10537	status: S3	issue: P05	
document number: 10537-FPCR-XX-XX-DR-A-1002			

