

# NICHOLSONS

## Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment Methodology

2024 v2

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. This methodology is derived from the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (2013) (GLVIA 3), jointly published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. This publication gives guidance on carrying out a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), either as a standalone appraisal or part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- 1.2. In the context of this methodology, the term “landscape” should be taken to include townscape and seascape considerations where relevant.

## **2. DEFINING THE STUDY AREA**

- 2.1. Prior to any assessment being undertaken, it is important to consider the scope and extent of the study area. Typically the study area will be defined through the preparation and assessment of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and/ or desk based study and site assessment. This process will allow the identification of a delimited visual envelope, one which is defined by the prevailing topography, vegetation and built form.
- 2.2. A landscape study may extend beyond a relatively confined visual envelope, where there is clear evidence that the site is part of, or intrinsically linked to a wider character area. The detail of such studies will be appropriate to the scale of the development, for instance where tall structures such as wind turbines may have an influence over a larger distance, the assessment will take this into account.

### **3. DESCRIPTION OF EFFECTS**

- 3.1. The level of effect on both landscape and visual receptors should be identified in respect of the different components of the proposed development. In order to assess the significance of the effect upon a receiving environment, it is necessary to consider the effect magnitude, i.e. the degree of change, together with the sensitivity of the receptor.
- 3.2. This assessment will identify whether the effects are:
- Adverse, Beneficial or Neutral - Adverse effects would typically occur where there is loss of landscape elements, or the proposal detracts from the recognised landscape quality and character of an area or view. Neutral effects would include changes that neither add to nor detract from the quality and character of an area or view, but which nonetheless result in an identifiable change. Beneficial effects would typically occur where a development could positively contribute to the landscape character or view, for example through the replacement of incongruous elements with more appropriate uses.
  - Direct or Indirect – A direct effect will be one where a development will affect a view or the character of an area, either beneficially or adversely. An indirect effect will occur as a result of associated development i.e. a development may result in an increase of traffic on a particular route.
  - Short, Medium or Long Term – this relates to the expected duration and magnitude of a development. Within this assessment the potential effects are assessed during the Construction Phase, then at Years 1 and 15, of the Operational Phase.
  - Reversible or Irreversible – this is the assessment of whether the resulting effect of a development can be mitigated or not, and the effectiveness of the proposed mitigation at reducing the effect.

#### **Significance of Effects (EIA only)**

- 3.3. A final judgment is then made as to whether the identified effect is likely to be significant, as required by the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2011. In summarising the effects consideration should be given to the key issues, and an identification of the scope for reducing any negative/adverse effects will be undertaken. Mitigation measures should be identified in order to reduce, where possible, the final judgement on the significance of any residual adverse effects in the long term.

## 4. METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSING LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

### Identifying and Assessing the Landscape Baseline

- 4.1. In order to accurately define the quality and character of the receiving landscaping it is important to identify and assess those landscape receptors and/or features that form part of the landscape and help to characterise it.
- 4.2. The identification of these features will be informed through:
  - Review of Ordnance Survey mapping, historical map data and aerial and other remote sensing imagery where appropriate;
  - Review of relevant published landscape character assessment at national, regional and local levels as appropriate;
  - Identification of landscape-based designations;
  - Identification and description of individual elements, features, aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape which contribute to its character;
  - Assessment of the general condition of the receiving landscape;
  - Assessment of the relative value of the receiving landscape (see below);
  - Judgement of the susceptibility of the receiving landscape to a change of the type proposed (see below).
- 4.3. Where appropriate, and where the published character assessments do not reflect the specific characteristics of the receiving environment at a relevant scale, the LVIA will identify local landscape character areas for assessment. These character areas are determined through the site assessment, and will make reference to published landscape character assessments and the application of sound professional judgement based upon the evidence at hand.
- 4.4. Criteria for the selection of local landscape character areas within the likely study area include:
  - Proximity and influence on the site;
  - Physical connections with the site (for example public rights of way, roads, vegetation and vegetation belts); and
  - Visual connection with the site (particularly where the view is a key characteristic of the local area).

### Assessing Landscape Sensitivity

- 4.5. The sensitivity of the landscape is determined by combining the value of the landscape with its susceptibility to the type of change proposed.
- 4.6. **Susceptibility** is defined as the inherent sensitivity of the landscape and its ability to accommodate a particular change, and can apply to specific landscape features, the character of the site as a whole, or the character of the surrounding landscape, and other Landscape Character Areas defined within the published assessments or similar.

**Table 1: Landscape Susceptibility to Change**

Susceptibility	Assessment Criteria
<b>Very High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No or very few detracting features;</li> <li>• Townscapes are likely to include a high proportion of historic assets;</li> <li>• Typical examples may be nationally designated e.g. World Heritage Sites, National Parks, Heritage Coasts, AONB's etc.</li> </ul>
<b>High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscapes would be considered to have a high degree of intimacy, generally strong landscape structure, a high level of intactness and contain features worthy of protection;</li> <li>• Few detracting features;</li> <li>• Has some potential to accommodate change which is in keeping with the positive aspects of local character.</li> <li>• Townscapes may include a high proportion of historic assets;</li> <li>• Typical examples may be of Regional or County importance e.g. within the setting of National Parks, AONB's, Conservation Areas etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscapes would be considered of good landscape structure, with some detracting features or evidence of recent change.</li> <li>• Townscapes may include a proportion of historic assets or of cultural value locally.</li> <li>• Demonstrates some potential to accommodate change through appropriate mitigation.</li> </ul>
<b>Low</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscapes that contain strong evidence of previous landscape change and little representation of their former character;</li> <li>• Degraded landscape structure, characteristic patterns and combinations of landform and land cover are compromised by land use.</li> </ul>
<b>Negligible</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typical landscapes are likely to be heavily degraded, of weak landscape structure, support intensive land uses, and require landscape restoration.</li> </ul>



### **Landscape Value**

- 4.7. The value of a landscape is derived from the value or importance given to the area by society, statutory bodies, local and national government, local communities and society at large. National designations include National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 4.8. At a local level, Local Planning Authorities may have local landscape designations in their Local Plans. However, GLVIA 3 notes that the fact that an area is not covered by such a designation does not mean that it is not valued and in this case reference should be made to published character assessments, local planning policies and guidance. GLVIA 3 also notes that there should not be an over-reliance on designations, favouring a process of assessment and the application of sound, evidence-based professional judgement.
- 4.9. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) however, places greater weight on the importance of National level designations such as AONB's and National Parks. At a local level, any assessment of local value should be supported by a prescriptive, criteria based, NPPF compliant assessment. In the absence of such an assessment, it is the role of the professional as part of the LVIA process to objectively assess the value of the receiving landscape in relation to a set of appropriate criteria, such as those suggested in Table 1 of the Landscape Institute TGN 02/21, an evolution of the criteria laid out in Box 5.1 of GLVIA3.

**Table 2: Landscape Value**

Value	Typical Criteria	Typical Scale	Examples
<b>Very High</b>	Landscape is recognised as an area of great importance, quality and rarity.  Almost always recognised by national or international designation.	International National	World Heritage Sites National Parks Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<b>High</b>	Landscape is recognised as being of high quality, importance and rarity, representing a number of recognised value criteria.  Often identified through local landscape designations.	Regional Local	Wild or picturesque landscapes. Settings of designated landscapes.  Areas whose value is expressed through published assessments or cultural celebration, e.g. art, history or literature.
<b>Medium</b>	Landscape is recognised as being of medium quality, importance and rarity.  Typically undesignated but value may be expressed through published assessment.  Represents some recognised value criteria.	Regional Local	Generally intact rural landscapes.  Landscapes that are representative of published character.
<b>Low</b>	Landscape is of low quality, importance and rarity.  Typically degraded with detracting features and in poor condition, but with some potential for restoration or improvement.	Local	Intensive arable landscapes.  Landscapes with strong human influence or intensive management, e.g. golf courses.
<b>Negligible</b>	Landscape is of very low quality, importance and rarity.  Typically degraded with many detracting features, and poorly managed.  Change is likely to improve these landscapes.	Site	Unrestored mineral workings.  Industrial landscapes.

**Table 3: Overall Landscape Sensitivity**

Vs.		Identified Landscape Value					Sensitivity
Identified Susceptibility		Very High Value	High Value	Medium Value	Low Value	Very Low Value	
	Very High Susceptibility	Very High	High	High / Medium	X	X	
	High Susceptibility	High	High	Medium / High	Medium / Low	X	
	Medium Susceptibility	High / Medium	Medium / High	Medium	Low / Medium	Low	
	Low Susceptibility	X	Medium / Low	Low / Medium	Low	Low / Negligible	
	Negligible Susceptibility	X	X	Low	Low / Negligible	Negligible	
Sensitivity							

### Landscape Magnitude of Change

- 4.10. The magnitude of change relates to the degree in which proposed development alters the fabric of the receiving landscape. This change is characterised as high, medium, low, negligible or none.

**Table 4: Magnitude to Change to Landscape Receptors**

Magnitude	Definition
<b>High</b>	Change resulting in a high degree of deterioration or improvement, or introduction of prominent new elements that are considered to fundamentally change the character of a landscape.
<b>Medium</b>	Change resulting in a moderate degree of deterioration or improvement, or constitutes a perceptible change within a landscape.
<b>Low</b>	Change resulting in a low degree of deterioration or improvement to a landscape or view, or constitutes only a minor component within a landscape.
<b>Negligible</b>	Change resulting in a barely perceptible degree of deterioration or improvement to a landscape.

4.11. When assessing the magnitude of change consideration will be given to:

- **The size or scale of the development:** the extent of the change to existing landscape receptors is considered, with weight given to the proportion of the total extent of the site that this represents and the contribution that the receptor makes to the overall character of the landscape;
- **The extent of the development** – consideration is given to the geographical area within which the landscape effects may be perceived. This is assessed at:
  - Site level;
  - Immediate setting;
  - At the scale of the local landscape character area; and
  - On a larger scale affecting a number of local landscape areas or National Character Areas (if required).
- **The permanency of the development:** consideration is given to whether the proposals will result in a long term or short term effect; whether the development is reversible or changes the status of the site (for example to previously developed land); and whether for example restoration to baseline conditions is envisaged at the end of this term;
- **The change to the key characteristics of the receiving landscape:** taking into account:
  - Changes to the appearance of the site;
  - Changes to identified landscape features;
  - Changes to key or special qualities or characteristics of the landscape; and
  - Changes in the landscape setting of heritage assets and landscape-related designations.
- **The proposed mitigation:** consideration should be given to the extent to which the development effects can be mitigated, through positive design, the provision of replacement or enhanced landscape features, or limiting effects on the wider landscape.

#### **Significance of Landscape Effect**

4.12. The level of effect upon the receptor should be identified in respect of the different components of the proposed development. In order to assess the significance of the effect on the receiving environment, it is necessary to consider the magnitude, i.e. the degree of change, together with the sensitivity of each identified receptor.

4.13. This will identify whether the effects are:

- **Adverse or Beneficial** - beneficial effects would typically occur where a development could positively contribute to the landscape character. Neutral effects would include changes that neither add nor detract from the quality and character of an area or view. Adverse effects would typically occur where there is loss of characteristic landscape elements, or the proposal detracts from the landscape quality and character of an area or view;
- **Direct or Indirect** – A direct effect is where a development will affect the character of an area either beneficially or adversely. An indirect effect would be associated with a development, i.e. an increase of traffic on a particular route.
- **Short, Medium or Long Term** – this relates to the expected duration and magnitude of a development. Within this assessment the potential effects are assessed during the construction phase, then at years 1 and 10 following completion of the development.

- **Reversible or Irreversible** – This is the judgement of whether the resulting effect of a development can be mitigated or not, and whether the result of the mitigation is beneficial.

4.14. The significance of landscape effect is determined by cross-referencing the sensitivity of the receptor with the magnitude of change expected as a result of the development. Table 5 below outlines how the assessment of significance is undertaken.

**Table 5: Landscape Significance of Effect\***

Vs.		Sensitivity of Landscape Receptor				
Magnitude of Change		Very High	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
	High	Substantial	Major	Major / Moderate	Moderate	Moderate / Minor
	Medium	Major	Major / Moderate	Moderate	Moderate / Minor	Minor
	Low	Major / Moderate	Moderate	Moderate / Minor	Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Moderate	Moderate / Minor	Minor	Negligible	Negligible / None
		Significance of Landscape Effect				

\* To be read in conjunction with Table 9 below.

## 5. METHODOLOGY FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS

- 5.1. As set out within section 2 above, the visual baseline is identified through a process of desk study, Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), the extent of the visual envelope is then defined and tested through field assessment.
- 5.2. On the basis of the baseline assessment and field survey analysis, visual receptors are identified and classified as to their sensitivity to change. This will involve the identification of the visual receptors through:
  - Identification of the area in which the development may be visible (the visual envelope;
  - Identification of publicly accessible, representative, viewpoints where views will be affected and the nature of those views;
  - Identification of any recognised viewpoints (i.e. known viewpoints from a key landmark or local feature);
  - Identification of the different groups of people who may experience views of the development.

### **Sensitivity of Visual Receptors**

- 5.3. The sensitivity of a visual receptor should be established. This sensitivity will be dependent on the value attached to the view and the susceptibility of the visual receptor(s) to a change of the type proposed. This may be linked to the type of activity that the person is engaged in – for example someone walking in the countryside would be more sensitive to a change to the view than a person working in an office.
- 5.4. **Susceptibility** is defined as the ability of a defined visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue consequences. Regard should be given to the activity of the people experiencing the view, and the extent to which their attention or interest may be focused on the views, as well as the visual amenity that they experience at particular locations.

**Table 6: Visual Susceptibility to Change**

Susceptibility	Assessment Criteria
<b>Very High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No or very few detracting features within the view.</li> <li>• Type of development is out of keeping with its setting.</li> <li>• The view has little or no potential to accommodate the type of change proposed.</li> <li>• Users' sole focus is on appreciation of the view.</li> </ul>
<b>High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views would be considered to have a high level of intactness and few detracting features, e.g. a public footpath within the countryside.</li> <li>• The view has limited potential to accommodate the type of change proposed.</li> <li>• Users' main focus is on appreciation of the view.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views would be comprised of good landscape structure, with some detracting features or evidence of recent change, e.g. a public footpath near to a settlement or rural public highway.</li> <li>• Views would demonstrate some potential to accommodate change through appropriate mitigation.</li> <li>• Users would have some appreciation of the view whilst passing through.</li> </ul>
<b>Low</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views of landscapes that contain strong evidence of previous change and some degraded features.</li> <li>• Views encompassing a high degree of human activity.</li> <li>• Users would be mainly focused on their activity.</li> </ul>
<b>Negligible</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views of degraded landscapes or highly intensive human uses, e.g. industrial areas.</li> <li>• Users would typically have their sole focus on their activity, with no appreciation of the view.</li> </ul>

### **Visual Value**

- 5.5. The value of a view is derived from the value or importance given to that view by society at large.
- 5.6. Value can be derived from the value given to the view by visitors to an area, for example through guidebooks, tourist maps, interpretation signs, as well as reference in literature or art.



**Table 7: Visual Value**

Value	Typical Criteria	Typical Scale	Examples
<b>Very High</b>	Views within nationally designated landscapes such as National Parks or AONB's and users of National Trails where the focus is upon the landscape itself.	International National	World Heritage Sites National Parks. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Published routes.
<b>High</b>	Views are recognised as being of high quality, importance and rarity, representing a number of recognised value criteria.  Views within regional/local landscape designations, users of Long Distance Routes or Sustrans cycle routes.	Regional Local	Wild or picturesque landscapes. Settings of designated landscapes. Areas whose value is expressed through published assessments or cultural celebration, e.g. art, history or literature.
<b>Medium</b>	Views within moderate quality landscapes.  Typically undesignated but value may be expressed through published assessment.	Regional Local	Generally intact rural views. Views that are representative of published landscape character.
<b>Low</b>	Views within landscapes considered to be of low quality, importance and rarity.	Local	Strong human influence or intensive management within the view, e.g. major transport routes, golf courses.
<b>Negligible</b>	Views within landscape considered to be of very low quality, importance and rarity.  Typically degraded with many detracting features.	Site	Industrial/degraded landscapes.

**Table 8: Visual Sensitivity Thresholds**

Visual Sensitivity	Threshold Definition
<b>Very High</b>	Viewers on Public Rights of Way or accessible land whose prime focus is on the high quality of the surrounding landscape, and who are often very aware of its value. Examples include viewers within nationally designated landscapes such as National Parks or AONB's and users of National Trails.
<b>High</b>	Viewers on Public Rights of Way whose prime focus is on the landscape around, or occupiers of residential properties with primary views affected by the development. Examples include viewers within regional/local landscape designations, users of Long Distance Recreational Routes or Sustrans cycle routes.
<b>Medium</b>	Viewers engaged in outdoor recreation with some appreciation of the landscape, occupiers of residential properties with oblique views affected by the development, and users of rural lanes and roads. Examples include viewers within moderate quality landscapes and outdoor pursuits.
<b>Low</b>	Viewers engaged in outdoor sport or recreation whose prime focus is on their activity, or people passing through the area on main transport routes whose attention is focused away from an appreciation of the landscape.
<b>Negligible</b>	Viewers whose attention is focused on their work or activity and not susceptible to changes in the surrounding landscape, or people passing through heavily degraded or human influenced landscapes.

### **Magnitude of Change of Visual Receptors**

5.7. The following definitions are used to assess the magnitude of change to visual receptors. As with the assessment of the magnitude of change for landscape receptors, consideration is given to:

- **The size or scale of the development:** taking into account:
  - The mass and scale of the development visible and the change experienced from an identified location; and
  - The loss or addition of features within the view and the changes to the view's composition (including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposed development and the degree of contrast or integration of the proposed development within the context of the existing landscape elements) and the nature of the view in terms of duration and degree of visibility.
- **The extent of the development** – the extent of the development will vary between each identified viewpoint and will likely reflect the extent of the development visible in the view alongside the distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development.

- **The permanency of the development:** considering whether:
  - The proposals will result in a long term or short term effect;
  - The development is reversible or changes the status of the site (for example to previously developed land); and
  - Restoration to baseline conditions is envisaged at the end of this term.
- **The proposed mitigation:** Judging the extent to which the landscape proposals will be able to mitigate the visual effects of the development by screening, or through design of the development (e.g. siting, use of visually recessive colours and materials and location of open space).

**Table 9: Magnitude of Change to Visual Receptors**

Magnitude	Definition
<b>High</b>	Change resulting in a high degree of deterioration or improvement, or introduction of prominent new elements that are considered to make a major alteration to a view.
<b>Medium</b>	Change resulting in a moderate degree of deterioration or improvement, or constitutes a perceptible change within a view.
<b>Low</b>	Change resulting in a low degree of deterioration or improvement to a view, or constitutes only a minor component within a landscape.
<b>Negligible</b>	Change resulting in a barely perceptible degree of deterioration or improvement to a view.
<b>No Change</b>	It is also possible for a view to experience no change due to it being totally compatible with the character of the visual environment or not visible due to intervening structures or vegetation.

### Significance of Visual Effect

- 5.8. The significance of visual effect is determined by cross referencing the sensitivity of the receptor with the magnitude of change expected as a result of the development. Table 8 below outlines how the assessment of significance is undertaken.

**Table 8: Visual Significance of Effect\***

Vs.		Sensitivity of Visual Receptor				
Magnitude of Change		Very High	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
	High	Substantial	Major	Major / Moderate	Moderate	Moderate / Minor
	Medium	Major	Major / Moderate	Moderate	Moderate / Minor	Minor
	Low	Major / Moderate	Moderate	Moderate / Minor	Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Moderate	Moderate / Minor	Minor	Negligible	Negligible / None
	No Change	None	None	None	None	None
		Significance of Landscape Effect				

\* To be read in conjunction with Table 9 below.

## 6. UNDERSTANDING SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

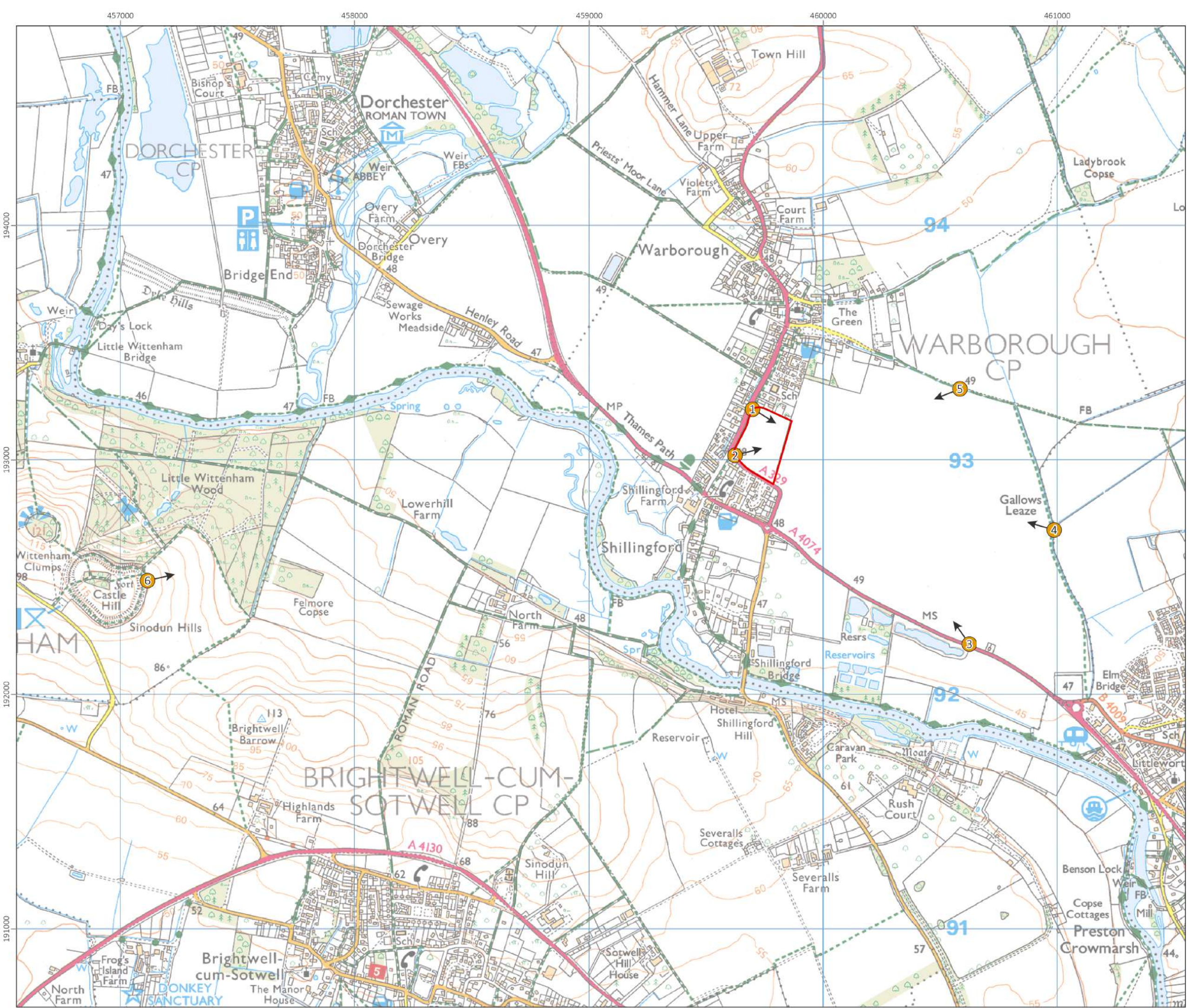
- 6.1. For the purposes of the impact assessment beneficial or adverse effects of substantial, major and major/moderate effects are considered to be significant and to be of key importance in decision making. Moderate adverse effects should also be taken into account when considering the overall effects of the development in decision making.
- 6.2. It is important to consider that change does not necessarily result in an adverse effect or harm to a particular landscape or visual environment.
- 6.3. The landscape assessor, in determining the significance of effect, will apply a defined assessment methodology, in combination with sound professional judgement upon which the identification of significant effects should be based.

### Definition of Significance Thresholds

Table 10: Significance Thresholds

Significance	Threshold Definition
<b>Substantial</b>	A very high magnitude of change that materially affects a landscape or view of national / international importance that has little or no ability to accommodate change.
<b>Major</b>	A high magnitude of change that materially affects a landscape or view that has limited ability to accommodate change.
<b>Moderate</b>	A medium magnitude of change that materially affects a landscape or view that may have the ability to accommodate change. Positive effects will typically occur in a lower quality landscape.
<b>Minor</b>	A low magnitude of change that materially affects a landscape that has the ability to accommodate change. Positive effects will typically occur in a lower quality landscape or view.
<b>Negligible</b>	A negligible magnitude of change that has little effect on a landscape that has the ability to accommodate change.
<b>None</b>	The receptor will experience no perceptible change at all.





### LEGEND

- Site Boundary
- Viewpoint Location
- Direction of View

## APPENDIX 2A

0

150

300

450

600

750 m

TITLE:  
Viewpoint Location Plan

PROJECT/SITE:  
Shillingford

CLIENT:  
South Oxfordshire District Council

VERSION:  
v1

DATE:  
20/12/2024

APPROVED BY:  
ID

MAP REF:  
SOU16640-01-NLA.100

SCALE:  
1:15,000 @ A3

PRODUCED BY:  
SF

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Receptor Viewpoint 1				
Location	Public Footpath Warborough 392/6/30, looking east into the Site			
Grid Ref	SU 59679 93174	Distance from Site:	Adjacent	Nature of Receptor: Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/6/30, Users of Thame Road
Description	<p>View into the Site through a gap in the Site’s western boundary hedgerow. The arable nature of the Site permits clear views across the Site towards the Chilterns National Landscape, with the Site’s eastern boundary hedgerow in the foreground.</p> <p>The Site occupies the full width of the view.</p>			
Public Footpath	Receptor Value:	High	Receptor Susceptibility to Change:	High      Receptor Sensitivity: High
Thame Road	Receptor Value:	Medium	Receptor Susceptibility to Change:	Medium      Receptor Sensitivity: Medium



N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 50mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 68° and when reproduced at A3, should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through an identical radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be used as a substitute for visiting the viewpoint.





Receptor Viewpoint 2				
Location	New Road, looking north-east across the Site			
Grid Ref	SU 59641 92980	Distance from Site:	10m	Nature of Receptor: Users of New Road
Description	<p>View into the Site across the southern boundary hedgerow. The open nature of the Site means that long views are available to the Chilterns National Landscape in the distance. To the right of the view, new dwellings on the edge of Benson can be seen.</p> <p>The Site occupies the full width of the view.</p>			
	Receptor Value:	Medium	Receptor Susceptibility to Change:	Medium      Receptor Sensitivity: Medium



N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 50mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 68° and when reproduced at A3, should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through an identical radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be used as a substitute for visiting the viewpoint.





Receptor Viewpoint 3				
Location	A4074 Henley Road, looking north-west towards the Site			
Grid Ref	SU 60530 92249	Distance from Site:	949m	Nature of Receptor: Users of A4074 Henley Road
Description	View towards the Site from a gap in the roadside hedgerow. The Site is clearly visible, flanked by the existing dwellings of Shillingford to the left of the view and Warborough to the right. The elevated ground of Town Hill is also visible to the right of the view.			
	Receptor Value:	Medium	Receptor Susceptibility to Change:	Medium      Receptor Sensitivity: Medium

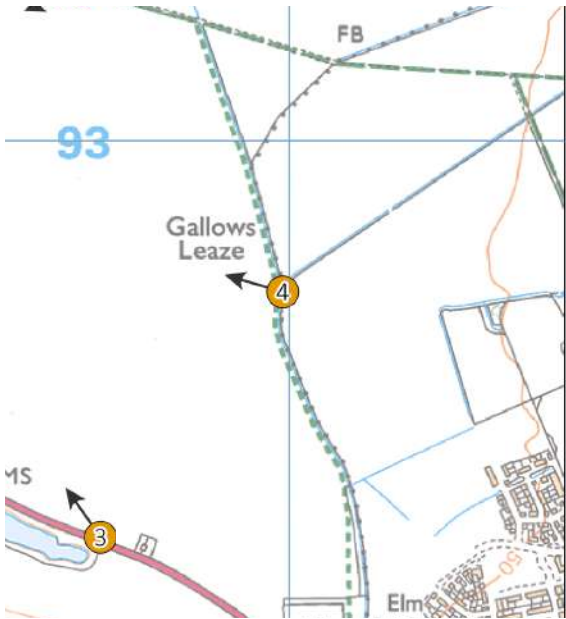


N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 50mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 68° and when reproduced at A3, should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through an identical radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be used as a substitute for visiting the viewpoint.





Receptor Viewpoint 4				
Location	Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10 looking north-west towards the Site			
Grid Ref	SU 60978 92633	Distance from Site:	1,215m	Nature of Receptor: Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10
Description	View towards the Site from Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10, which follows the eastern boundary of Plough Field. The Site is visible between the dwellings of Shillingford to the left and Warborough to the right. Wittenham Clumps is visible beyond Shillingford in the background of the view.			
	Receptor Value:	High	Receptor Susceptibility to Change:	High      Receptor Sensitivity: High



Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment

N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 50mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 68° and when reproduced at A3, should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through an identical radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be used as a substitute for visiting the viewpoint.



Approximate Site location



Receptor Viewpoint 5			
Location	Public Bridleway 392/16/10, looking south-west towards the Site		
Grid Ref	SU 60589 93302	Distance from Site: 815m	Nature of Receptor: Users of Public Bridleway 392/16/10
Description	View towards the Site from Public Bridleway 392/16/10, which follows an agricultural track on the northern side of Plough Field to connect with Warborough. The Site is visible for part of its width against the backdrop of Shillingford to the left due to the oblique angle of the view, but still appears as a gap between the settlements. The wooded hilltops of Brightwell Barrow and Wittenham Clumps within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape can be seen rising above the Site.		
	Receptor Value: High	Receptor Susceptibility to Change: High	Receptor Sensitivity: High



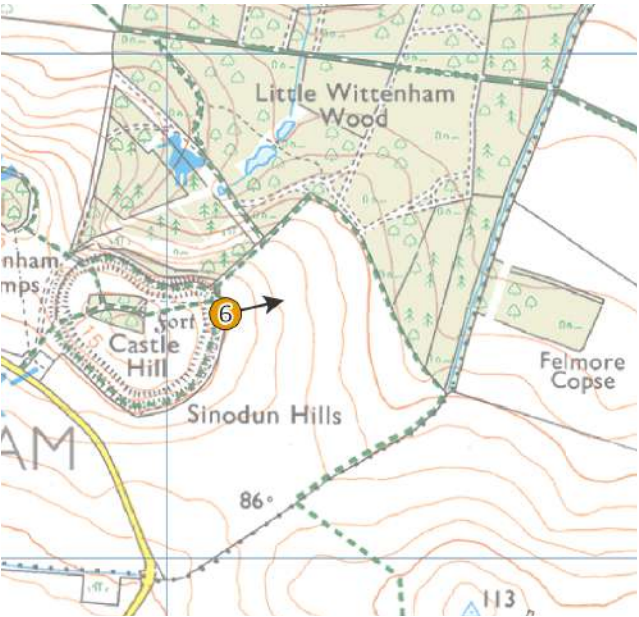
N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 50mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 68° and when reproduced at A3, should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through an identical radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be used as a substitute for visiting the viewpoint.



Approximate location of the Site



Receptor Viewpoint 6			
Location	Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20 at Wittenham Clumps, looking north-east towards the Site		
Grid Ref	SU 57094 9247	Distance from Site: 2,572m	Nature of Receptor: Users of Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20
Description	Distant view of the Site from Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20 at Castle Hill on Wittenham Clumps, within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. The Site can be seen between the villages of Warborough and Shillingford, partially obscured by the existing ribbon development on Thame Road. In the background, the Chiltern escarpment provides an elevated horizon.		
	Receptor Value: Very High	Receptor Susceptibility to Change: Very High	Receptor Sensitivity: Very High



Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment

N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 50mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 68° and when reproduced at A3, should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through an identical radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be used as a substitute for visiting the viewpoint.

# NICHOLSONS

## Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

South Oxfordshire Council

Land North of New Road, Shillingford

**Version:** 3

**Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024

**Author:** Ian Dudley

**Position:** Associate

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Personal Details

- 1.1 My name is Ian Dudley and I work for Nicholsons, an environmental consultancy and Landscape Institute Registered Practice with its headquarters in Oxfordshire.
- 1.2 I hold a Bachelor of Science honours degree in Forestry from Bangor University. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute, a Chartered Member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters, and a Chartered Member of the Society for the Environment.
- 1.3 My professional experience over the last 25 years has included land management, management planning, green infrastructure planning and assessment, landscape and visual impact assessment, landscape character assessment, Green Belt appraisal, landscape design and landscape planning. I have contributed to the landscape sector at regional and national levels, sitting on panels and committees for the Landscape Institute, Natural England and Defra on matters such as the development of the national Green Infrastructure Standards and Biodiversity Metric. I have served as the Chair of the Royal Forestry Society for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and I am currently the Vice Chair of the Landscape Institute's East Midlands Branch.
- 1.4 I am an experienced landscape witness, having acted on behalf of both public and private sector bodies for over 10 years and for a range of development types including residential, leisure and industrial developments. I am familiar with the site in question and its landscape setting, having undertaken a field survey in December 2024.

### Project Involvement

- 1.5 I have been appointed by South Oxfordshire District Council (the 'Council') in December 2024 to prepare landscape and visual evidence following the Appellant's submission of an appeal against the Council's refusal of outline planning permission for a residential development of up to 90 homes and associated uses upon land north of New Road, Shillingford (the 'Site') and to present this information at a forthcoming Public Inquiry.

### Recent Planning History

- 1.6 An outline planning application was submitted by the Appellant in 2017 for a residential development of up to 110 dwellings on the Site. The application was withdrawn on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024, prior to its determination.
- 1.7 The current application that is the subject of this appeal (Ref. P23/S4082/O) was submitted on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and refused planning permission on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024. The reasons for refusal were as follows:

*1. The proposed development fails to accord with the spatial strategy set out in the development plan as the application site is not a site allocated for development and the proposal would not constitute infill development. The site is outside of the built-up limits of the villages of Warborough and Shillingford and the proposal would not protect and enhance the countryside. As such, the proposed development is contrary to the NPPF and Policies STRAT1, STRAT2, H1, H8 and H16 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 and*

*policies VC1 and H3 of the Warborough and Shillingford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2033.*

*2. The application site is an important landscape feature as it provides a sense of separation between villages. The proposed development would erode this separation and result in the complete coalescence of Warborough and Shillingford. The proposals would result in harm to the rural character of the area, would adversely affect the setting of the villages and would detract from views within the wider setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and harm to views towards the Chilterns National Landscape. As such the proposal is contrary to the NPPF and Policies ENV1, DES1 and DES2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 and policy VC1 of the Warborough and Shillingford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2033.*

*3. The proposed development fails to provide sufficient safe and practical accessibility by sustainable transport modes. As such, the proposal is contrary to the NPPF and Policies DES1, TRANS2, TRANS4 and TRANS5 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 and policy H4 of the Warborough and Shillingford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2033.*

*4. The site is within Flood Zone 2. In the absence of any evidence to demonstrate that the proposed development could not be located in an area with a lower risk of flooding, the proposal would not provide a suitable site for housing with regard to flood risk. The Flood Risk Assessment has also not adequately assessed the risk of flooding to the site from all sources. As such, the proposal will not minimise the risk and impact of flooding by directing new development to areas with the lowest possibility of flooding or through ensuring that all new development addresses the effective management of all sources of flood risk and is therefore contrary to the NPPF and Policy EP4 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.*

*5. The proposed development would result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. The application does not demonstrate that the development of this land is the most sustainable choice from reasonable alternatives as there could be areas of poorer quality land that would be preferable to develop ahead of this 'very good' quality land. The proposal is therefore contrary to the NPPF and Policy DES7 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.*

*6. In the absence of a completed Section 106 legal agreement, the proposed development fails to secure affordable housing to meet the needs of the district. As such, the proposal is contrary to the NPPF and Policy H9 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.*

*7. In the absence of a completed Section 106 legal agreement, the proposed development fails to secure infrastructure necessary to meet the needs of the development. As such, the proposal is contrary to the NPPF and Policies INF1, TRANS4, TRANS5, EP3 and CF5 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.*

**Scope of Evidence**

- 1.8 This Proof of Evidence covers matters relating to the anticipated landscape and visual impacts of the proposed residential development upon the Site and its setting, to inform the Inspector's consideration of this appeal.
  
- 1.9 It will set out my independent appraisal of the Site and its landscape and visual characteristics, and the anticipated impacts of the proposed development, based upon the assessment framework within the Nicholsons Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Methodology presented at **Appendix 2**. This has been prepared in line with the nationally accepted guidance presented within Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, 2013) (CD6-001).
  
- 1.10 This evidence has been found to support the Council's second reason for refusal for the proposed residential development, as stated above.
  
- 1.11 The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this appeal in this Statement is true and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

## 2. POLICY BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

### Relevant National Planning Policy

#### *National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)*

- 2.1 The latest version of the NPPF (CD12-003) was published in December 2024, replacing a previous version of this document. It sets out the Government's planning policies for England, and how these should be applied, as well as setting out a framework for the production of locally prepared housing and development plans.
- 2.2 Chapter 8 of the NPPF relates to the promotion of healthy and safe communities. It states at Paragraph 96 that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places that promote social interaction, are safe and accessible, and enable and support healthy lifestyles. Measures to achieve these objectives include street layouts enabling easy pedestrian and cycle connections, active street frontages, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, high quality public spaces that encourage active and continual use, and the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure.
- 2.3 Paragraph 103 recognises the importance of access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity for the health and well-being of communities.
- 2.4 Paragraph 105 states that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance Public Rights of Way and access, including taking opportunities to improve users' facilities and to create additional connections to existing networks.
- 2.5 Chapter 12 of the NPPF relates to the achievement of well-designed places. In particular, it recognises that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps to make development acceptable to communities, and it establishes the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable places as a fundamental goal of the planning and development process.
- 2.6 Paragraph 135 sets out a number of positive design criteria that planning policies and decisions should ensure. These include contributing to the overall character of an area in the long term, being visually attractive, being sympathetic to local character and history, establishing or maintaining a strong sense of place, and creating safe, inclusive and accessible places that promote health and well-being.
- 2.7 Paragraph 136 recognises the importance of trees in creating high quality places and contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation. It recommends that planning policies and decisions ensure that new streets are tree-lined unless there are clear, justifiable and compelling reasons why this is not appropriate, and also promotes the incorporation of trees elsewhere in developments. To ensure the sustainability of these benefits, it recommends that appropriate measures should be in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible.

- 2.8 Paragraph 139 states that development that is not well designed should be refused, and it attributes significant weight to development that is in compliance with local design guidance, and/or which is outstanding or innovative, promoting high levels of sustainability.
- 2.9 Chapter 15 of the NPPF relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Paragraph 187 states that planning policies should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by a range of measures including protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan) and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

#### **Relevant Local Planning Policy**

##### ***South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035***

- 2.10 The following policies within the adopted Local Plan (CD4-001) are cited in the second reason for refusal:

##### ***Policy ENV1: Landscape and Countryside***

*1. The highest level of protection will be given to the landscape and scenic beauty of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs):*

- *Development in an AONB or affecting the setting of an AONB will only be permitted where it conserves, and where possible, enhances the character and natural beauty of the AONB;*
- *Development in an AONB will only be permitted where it is appropriate to the economic and environmental wellbeing of the area or promotes understanding or enjoyment of the AONB;*
- *Major development in an AONB will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest; and*
- *Development proposals that could affect the special qualities of an AONB (including the setting of an AONB) either individually or in combination with other developments, should be accompanied by a proportionate Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. AONB Management Plans will be a material consideration in decision making.*

*2. South Oxfordshire's landscape, countryside and rural areas will be protected against harmful development. Development will only be permitted where it protects and, where possible enhances, features that contribute to the nature and quality of South Oxfordshire's landscapes, in particular:*

- i) trees (including individual trees, groups of trees and woodlands), hedgerows and field boundaries;*
- ii) irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland;*
- iii) the landscapes, waterscapes, cultural heritage and user enjoyment of the River Thames, its tributaries and flood plains;*
- iv) other watercourse and water bodies;*
- v) the landscape setting of settlements or the special character and landscape setting of Oxford;*

- vi) topographical features;*
- vii) areas or features of cultural and historic value;*
- viii) important views and visually sensitive skylines; and*
- ix) aesthetic and perceptual factors such as tranquillity, wildness, intactness, rarity and enclosure.*

*3. Development which supports economic growth in rural areas will be supported provided it conserves and enhances the landscape, countryside and rural areas.*

*4. The Council will seek the retention of important hedgerows. Where retention is not possible and a proposal seeks the removal of a hedgerow, the Council will require compensatory planting with a mixture of native hedgerow species.*

***Policy DES1: Delivering High Quality Development***

*All new development must be of a high quality design that:*

- i) uses land efficiently while respecting the existing landscape character;*
- ii) enhances biodiversity and, as a minimum, leads to no net loss of habitat;*
- iii) incorporates and/or links to a well-defined network of Green and Blue Infrastructure;*
- iv) is sustainable and resilient to climate change;*
- v) minimises energy consumption;*
- vi) mitigates water run-off and flood risks;*
- vii) takes into account landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping;*
- viii) provides a clear and permeable hierarchy of streets, routes and spaces to create safe and convenient ease of movement by all users;*
- ix) ensures that streets and spaces are well overlooked creating a positive relationship between fronts and backs of buildings;*
- x) clearly defines public and private spaces;*
- xi) provides access to local services and facilities and, where needed, incorporates mixed uses, facilities and co-locates services as appropriate with good access to public transport;*
- xii) provides a wide range of house types and tenures;*
- xiii) respects the local context working with and complementing the scale, height, density, grain, massing, type, and details of the surrounding area;*
- xiv) secures a high quality public realm that is interesting and aesthetically pleasing; and designed to support an active life for everyone with well managed and maintained public areas;*
- xv) does not differentiate between the design quality of market and affordable housing or the adjacent public realm;*
- xvi) is designed to take account of possible future development in the local area;*
- xvii) understands and addresses the needs of all potential users by ensuring that buildings and their surroundings can be accessed and used by everyone;*
- xviii) creates safe communities and reduces the likelihood of crime and antisocial behaviour as well as the fear of crime itself; and*
- xix) ensures a sufficient level of well-integrated and imaginative solutions for car and bicycle parking and external storage including bins.*

*2. Where development sites are located adjacent to sites that have a reasonable prospect of coming forward in the future, integration with the neighbouring site should form part of the proposal's design.*

*3. Where the Council is aware that adjacent or closely related sites with similar delivery timescales are coming forward together, a coordinated, integrated and comprehensive masterplan will be required to be prepared across all the sites.*

**Policy DES2: Enhancing Local Character**

*1. All new development must be designed to reflect the positive features that make up the character of the local area and should both physically and visually enhance and complement the surroundings.*

*2. All proposals for new development should be informed by a contextual analysis that demonstrates how the design:*

- i) has been informed by and responds positively to the site and its surroundings; and*
- ii) reinforces place-identity by enhancing local character.*

*3. Where a Character Assessment has been prepared as part of a made Neighbourhood Development Plan, a proposal must demonstrate that the positive features identified in the Assessment have been incorporated into the design of the development.*

*4. Where there is no local Character Assessment a comprehensive contextual analysis of the local character should be prepared as part of an application. This should identify the positive features that make up the character of the area. The proposal must demonstrate that these positive features have been incorporated into the design of the development.*

*5. Proposals that have the potential to impact upon a Conservation Area or the setting of a Conservation Area should also take account of the relevant Conservation Character Appraisal.*

**Relevant Neighbourhood Planning Policy**

***Warborough and Shillingford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2033 [CD4-003]***

2.11 This Neighbourhood Plan was made in September 2019 following a period of consultation and a public referendum.

2.12 Policy VC1 of the Neighbourhood Plan relates to development principles and the character of the two villages. Its stated objectives are as follows:

- 1. To enhance our strong sense of place, community and local identity.*
- 2. To ensure that new housing development is in character with the villages, protects the greenbelt and offers a high quality of design within the villages whilst minimising impact on views.*
- 3. To protect the aesthetic beauty of the villages and the income it generates.*

2.13 The policy reads as follows:



*Proposals for new residential development within the built-up areas of the villages will be supported where they accord with the policies of this Plan and the development plan for the District and subject to the following criteria:*

- A. They reflect the scale and character of the village concerned*
- B. They preserve or enhance local character, taking full account of the character areas described in the Warborough and Shillingford Character Assessment;*
- C. Their materials are appropriate to the surrounding environment, with reference paid to the Character Assessment and Warborough Conservation Area Appraisal 2011;*
- D. The parish's designated historic heritage assets and their settings, both above and below ground, including listed buildings, scheduled monuments and their conservation areas will be conserved or enhanced for their historic significance and their important contribution to local distinctiveness, character and sense of place;*
- E. Any impacts on non-designated historic assets take account of the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset;*
- F. They should not result in harm to tourism, particularly in relation to the Neighbourhood Area's importance as a filming location;*
- G. Proposals that require the establishment of a new boundary should incorporate, where possible, boundary features consisting of native or biodiversity-enhancing hedgerow species and schemes. The use of fencing and walls, where required, should reflect the traditional, rural context of the village and be of a height that preserves open views within the village;*
- H. Proposals should not result in unacceptable impacts on noise, odour, air pollution and light pollution in the immediate locality and should provide sufficient outdoor storage space for refuse, recycling and parking of cars and bicycles.*

*New residential development in the neighbourhood area will be focused in the housing allocation at Six Acres and as set out in Policy H2 of this Plan.*

*Proposals for new residential development outside the built-up areas of the villages or outside the allocated housing site (H2) in this Plan will only be supported if they are suitable for a countryside location and are consistent with the policies in this Plan and the Development Plan for the District.*

*Innovative design that enhances local character will be supported.*

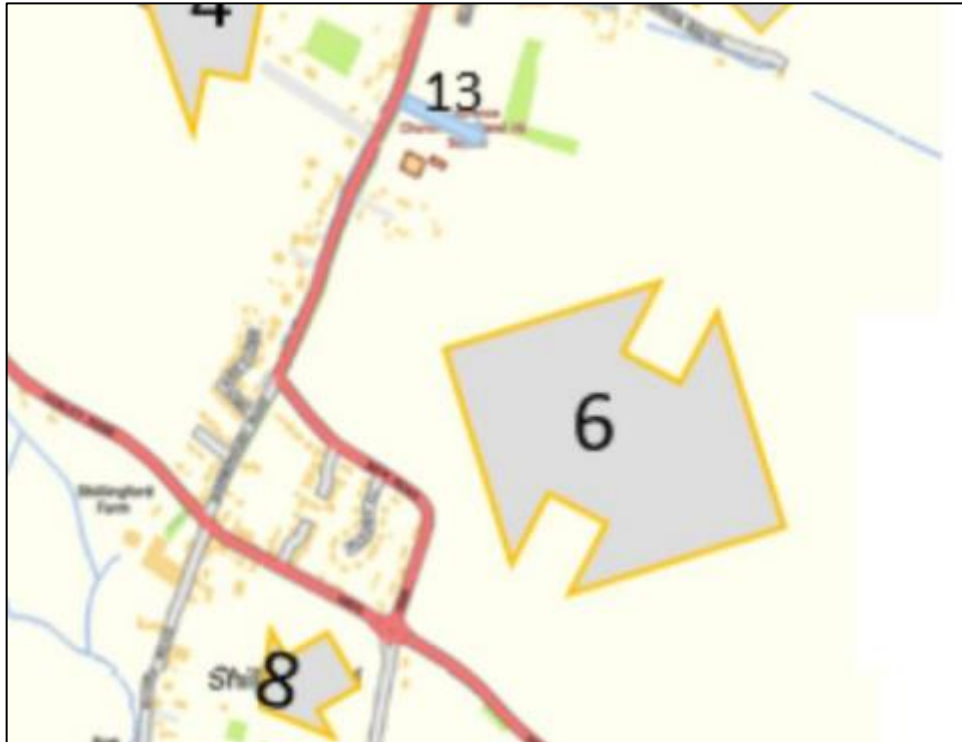
***Warborough and Shillingford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2033: Appendix A Character Assessment***

- 2.14 The Neighbourhood Plan is supported by a Parish Character Appraisal (CD4-004), which forms Appendix A to the Plan.
- 2.15 Section 3 of the Character Assessment addresses Key Community Views. These are described as being "available from public spaces and therefore of value to members of the public and the community as a whole".



- 2.16 A plan showing the location of these views in relation to the Site is reproduced as Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Extract from Neighbourhood Plan Appendix A, Figure 55 showing Key Community Views in the vicinity of the Site**



- 2.17 As Figure 1 shows, Key Community View 6 is of direct relevance to the Site. Section 3.3 of Appendix A specifically addresses this view, and reads as follows:

*“The main important view in this area is towards the south and the Chiltern Hills in the distance across Plough Field (figure 59). This is an important landscape feature in creating a separation between Warborough and Shillingford villages. Although seasonally partially obscured by overgrown hedges, this is very valued by villagers as it is the clearest and most expansive view out of the village toward the Chiltern Hills (North Wessex Downs AONB) and a very popular walk for walkers and dog owners. It contributes significantly to the rural feel of the village which is so highly valued by the residents, and is key to the inwards view of the village from the adjacent arterial road, A 4074.”*

- 2.18 Section 4 of the Character Assessment covers green spaces within the Parish. It specifically references the Site as an “important landscape feature” as set out in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Extract from Neighbourhood Plan Appendix A**

The large Plough Field (facilitating Community View 6 in Section 3 and outlined in red, in Figure 68) has also been identified as an important landscape feature. It defines the separation between Warborough and Shillingford villages, and prevents their complete coalescence.

*"Landscapes on the fringes of settlements are particularly vulnerable to change and special attention should be paid to ..... reduce the urbanising influences of development on adjacent countryside and to prevent the coalescence of settlements"*<sup>2</sup>. This open field, part of the Thames Valley flood plain offers panoramic views out towards the North Wessex Downs AONB.

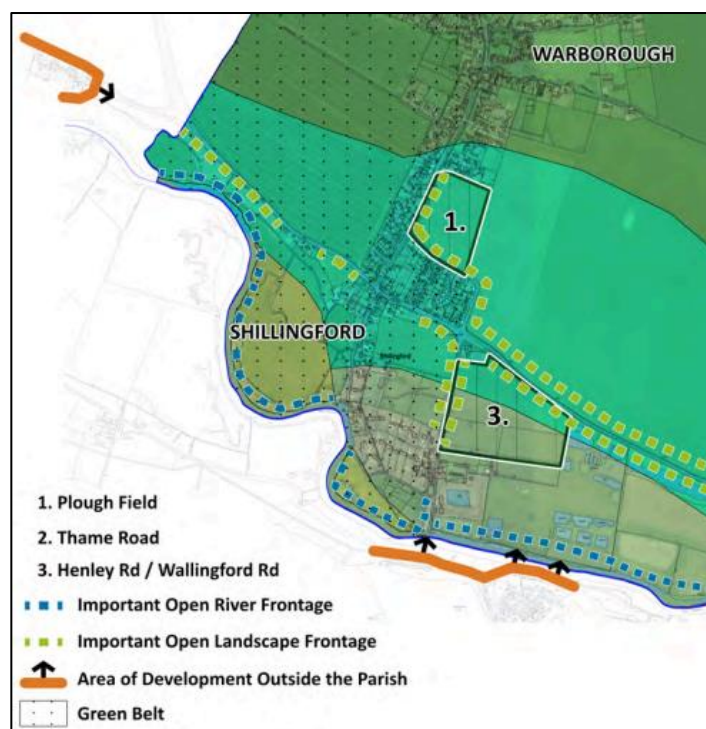


Figure 68 Plough Field, outlined in red

**Warborough and Shillingford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2033: Appendix A pre-submission Regulation 14 draft (CD4-006)**

- 2.19 The Parish Council has prepared a draft revision of Appendix A, dated October 2024, which is part of an overall revision of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.20 Pages 11-15 of the draft Character Appraisal deal with 'Green Gaps', and the Site is named as 'Plough Field' and identified as a Green Gap. Its frontage to Thame Road and New Road is also identified as an 'Important Open Landscape Frontage' as shown on Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Extract from Warborough and Shillingford Parish Character Appraisal**



- 2.21 Green Gaps are described as being “essential to ensure that the villages do not merge and/or lead to further merger from other settlement”. The stated purposes of the Green Gaps are as follows:
- Preservation of open space within and between settlements.
  - Prevention of sprawl and creep of development.
  - Flood prevention.
  - Noise and pollution reduction.
  - Biodiversity conservation.
  - Visual amenity.
- 2.22 Plough Field is identified as being “the last remaining gap between the villages of Warborough and Shillingford. The gap extends over a flat area of land, which currently provides a clear visual separation between the two settlements as one approaches from the east.” The Appraisal further states that “it is key that this should not be developed to maintain the separate identities of the settlements, which are distinctly different.”
- 2.23 Plough Field is of such relative importance to the Parish that three pages of the Appraisal are dedicated to its analysis and history. No other individual site is subject to the same level of attention.
- 2.24 The analysis pages discuss the contribution of Plough Field to the perceived separation of the settlements. It presents a photographic progression of views when travelling northwards on New Road and then Thame Road, demonstrating that there is still a sense of passing between settlements.
- 2.25 The historical analysis page documents its historical and cultural importance as the venue for the World Ploughing Contest in 1956, an event commemorated by a monument near to the Site on New Road. This is also a reflection of the high quality of the soil within the Site, which is of the highest possible agricultural classification (Grade 1). An extract of the event map is reproduced as Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Extract from World Ploughing Contest event map including the Site



### North Wessex Downs National Landscape Planning Policy

#### *North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024* (CD5-008)

- 2.26 The Management Plan provides policy for this National Landscape. It has been temporarily extended with a Light Touch Review to cover the period to 2025, with a new version expected in November 2025.
- 2.27 Theme 1 of the Management Plan relates to the landscape. It states the landscape Special Qualities of the National Landscape to be:
- Remote high chalk plains, plunging scarps and open downlands filled with flowers.
  - Scattered farmsteads and settlements in a landscape seemingly unchanged for centuries.
  - Mixed fields and arable production.
  - A rich mix of ancient semi-natural woodlands, wood pasture with veteran trees, and plantations.
  - River valleys with grazed pastures, water meadows and wetlands.
- 2.28 The Management Plan identifies a number of key issues that have the potential to have significant influence on the AONB's Landscape Special Qualities, which include the following (with my emphasis):
- The potential for development beyond the AONB boundary to visually damage or undermine the scale and critical qualities of landscape character areas.
  - Intense pressure for development throughout the AONB and its setting that threatens the character and quality of its landscape and **risks merging of small settlements**, encroachment by larger settlements and changes to the scale and nature of development boundaries.
- 2.29 To address these issues, the Management Plan sets out seven landscape policies. Policy LA 06 reads as follows:

*Ensure that all development in or affecting the setting of the AONB conserves and enhances the character, qualities and heritage of the North Wessex Downs landscape.*

### Description and Review of the Proposed Development Design

- 2.30 The Appellant has submitted a Land Use Parameter Plan (CD1-004) showing the broad arrangement of the proposed development of up to 90 residential dwellings, with an extract reproduced as Figure 5 below. It is unclear whether this has been submitted for approval. The following comments are based upon the Parameter Plan, however, as the clearest interpretation of the likely development layout.

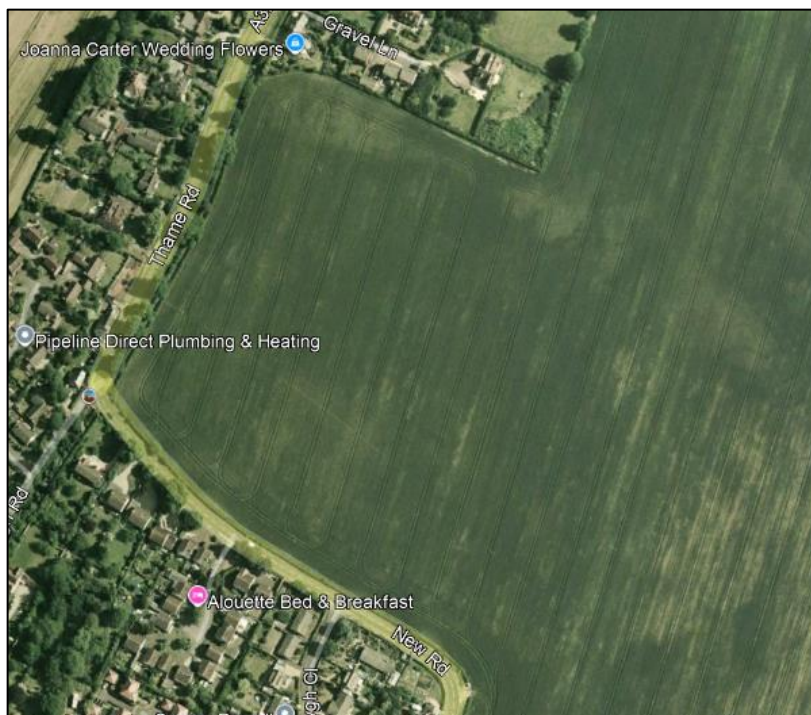
**Figure 5: Extract from submitted Parameter Plan**





- 2.31 The residential areas are shown to be divided into two areas: a larger northern block and a smaller southern block. The legend on the plan states that the dwellings will be typically 1.5-2 storeys with up to 20% 2.5 storey (maximum 10.5m ridge height) to provide “*townscape variation*”. It is unclear why this variation would be needed on the edge of rural villages, and the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment includes a key design objective in paragraph 5.3 that dwellings should be no more than 2 storeys in height. This would suggest that the submitted assessment has not considered correct development parameters and that its impacts may be under-stated as a result.
- 2.32 Vehicular access to the development is proposed via a new entrance onto New Road, with an indicative street layout suggesting a perimeter block layout to the residential parcels. A cycle link is shown along the main internal access route, and pedestrian links are shown to New Road and Thame Road. An additional ‘enhanced footpath’ connection is shown outside of the main body of the Site and running parallel to its eastern boundary, connecting New Road with The Green South.
- 2.33 The Parameter Plan includes three main areas of green infrastructure: two areas along the eastern and western boundaries respectively, and a central strip connecting these as shown on Figure 3.
- 2.34 The eastern area comprises a combination of amenity green space and orchards, as well as a copse of native woodland. The existing Site boundary hedgerow is proposed to be retained with additional tree planting, although it is notable that this hedgerow is a relatively recent addition, having been shown by historic aerial photography to be planted between 2005 and 2009, as demonstrated by Figure 6 below. Prior to this, Plough Field was historically a single arable field. Pedestrian links are indicated connecting with the new ‘enhanced footpath’ and the internal network, and an electricity sub-station is shown at the northern end.

**Figure 6: Google Earth aerial image dated 2005 showing the Site as part of Plough Field**



- 2.35 The western area mostly comprises 'natural green space' with a significant proportion taken up by drainage basins. Pedestrian links provide access through this area, with decking shown where these routes pass through the drainage basins. A large electricity sub-station is located in the southern part of this area. The northern part of this space is identified as a 'welcome area and social space' with an electricity sub-station at its centre and a pedestrian connection to Thame Road.
- 2.36 The existing hedgerow and trees on the Site's western boundary are proposed to be retained, with the exception of a possible length of hedgerow removal in association with the 'welcome area' at the northern end, and a shorter length at the southern end to facilitate access. The hedgerow along the southern boundary is proposed to be retained, with new trees planted along the majority of its length.
- 2.37 The central open space is described as a 'view corridor' within the Parameter Plan, although it is unclear how this would function for several reasons. Firstly, the only point outside the Site from which views could be gained along the corridor is through the narrow pedestrian access gap on the junction of New Road and Thame Road. Secondly, the Parameter Plan shows a LEAP, an 'outdoor activity area' and the main internal access road within the corridor and these are likely to impede visibility. Thirdly there is a row of trees proposed within the Site's eastern boundary hedgerow at the end of the corridor that would further impede visibility.
- 2.38 All of these factors indicate that response to the prevailing character, especially the sensitivities set out in the Neighbourhood Plan, and the creation of high-quality places were not significant considerations in the design of this scheme.

### 3. LANDSCAPE BASELINE APPRAISAL

#### Introduction

- 3.1 This section will present the results of my independent analysis of the landscape characteristics of the Site and its setting.
- 3.2 It will set out the baseline context against which I have reviewed the Parameter Plan as submitted with the planning application, and it will conclude with a list of what I consider to be relevant landscape receptors of the proposed development. That said, with regard to building heights I have considered a maximum building height of 2 storeys, as set out in the appellants LVIA 'Landscape Design and GI Objectives' at 5.3 [third bullet point on page 25], where they state:
- Using an appropriate form, scale and height for new homes (e.g., no more than 2 storeys in height) that reflect the surrounding built form, and to adopt a palette of locally distinct building materials that would assist in sensitivity assimilating buildings within this landscape context.

#### National Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.3 Natural England's National Character Assessment places the Site within the Upper Thames Clay Vale National Character Area (NCA 108). This is broadly described as a broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays with contrasting landscapes, including enclosed pastures of the claylands with wet valleys, mixed farming, hedges, hedge trees and field trees and more settled, open, arable lands. Three National Landscapes occur within this area, the most prevalent being the North Wessex Downs.
- 3.4 The key characteristics of this NCA are as follows, with those considered to be representative of the Site and its setting highlighted in bold text:
- **Low-lying clay-based flood plains encircle the Midvale Ridge. Superficial deposits, including alluvium and gravel terraces, spread over 40 per cent of the area, creating gently undulating topography. The Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous clays and the wet valley bottoms give rise to enclosed pasture, contrasting with the more settled, open, arable lands of the gravel.**
  - **The large river system of the River Thames drains the Vales, their headwaters flowing off the Cotswolds to the north or emitting from the springline along the Chilterns and Downs escarpments.** Where mineral extraction takes place, pits naturally fill with water, and limestone gravels from the Cotswolds give rise to marl formation. There are a high number of nationally important geological sites.
  - **Woodland cover is low at only about 3 per cent, but hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent. Watercourses are often marked by lines of willows and, particularly in the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park, native black poplar.**



- Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. **Fields are regular and hedged, except near the Cotswolds, where there can be stone walls.** The Vale of White Horse is made distinct by large arable fields, and there are relict orchards on the Greensand.
  - In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates, with limited areas of historic wetland habitats including wet woodland, fen, reedbed and flood meadow. There are two areas of flood meadow designated for their importance at a European level as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). **There are also rich and extensive ditch systems.**
  - Gravel extraction has left a legacy of geological exposures, numerous waterbodies and, at the Cotswold Water Park, a nationally important complex of marl lakes.
  - Wetland habitat attracts regionally important numbers of birds including snipe, redshank, curlew and lapwing and wintering wildfowl such as pochard. Snake's head fritillary thrives in the internationally important meadows. The area also supports typical farmland wildlife such as brown hare, bats, barn owl, tree sparrow and skylark.
  - Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, including its Capability Brown landscape, is the finest of many examples of historic parkland in this NCA. There are many heritage features, including nationally important survivals of ridge and furrow, Roman roads, deserted medieval villages and historic bridges.
  - **Brick and tile from local clays, timber and thatch are traditional building materials across the area, combined with limestone near the Cotswolds and occasional clunch and wickert near the Chilterns.**
  - **Settlement is sparse on flood plains, apart from at river crossings, where there can be large towns, such as Abingdon.** Aylesbury and Bicester are major urban centres, and the outer suburbs of Oxford and Swindon spread into this NCA. Market towns and villages are strung along the springlines of the Chilterns and Downs. Major routes include mainline rail, canals, a network of roads including the M40 and M4 and The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.
- 3.5 Based upon the above analysis, the Site and its setting are considered to be moderately representative of the Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area.

#### Local Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.6 The most up to date local assessment of landscape character is the Landscape Character Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, published in September 2024 as part of the evidence base for the emerging Joint Local Plan 2041 (CD5-002).
- 3.7 This assessment places the Site within the East Thames Lower Vale Landscape Character Area (LCA), in land associated with the Lower Vale Landscape Character Type (LCT).
- 3.8 The key characteristics of the East Thames Lower Vale LCA are as follows, with those considered representative of the Site and its setting highlighted in bold text:

- **A flat, low-lying landscape associated with the River Thames and River Thame and several of their small tributaries; underlain by clay and alluvium near the river channels but better-drained gravel terraces elsewhere.**
  - **Land use is predominantly arable, although there are some areas of smaller-scale pasture generally concentrated on the wetter, poorly draining land adjacent to the river.**
  - **Widespread semi-natural habitats, which include extensive floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, lowland fens and semi-improved grassland.**
  - **Sparsely wooded, enabling long views across the landscape towards the surrounding hills. However, riparian woodland along the rivers and other small pockets of woodland result in a local sense of enclosure.**
  - **Settlements are generally located close to watercourses, many of which retain a substantial number of Listed Buildings and have Conservation Areas; the local vernacular includes timber framing and thatched roofs with occasional examples of cob walling. The 'new' village at Berinsfield, created in the 1960s, has a more modern urban influence.**
  - **A dense network of public rights of way enables recreational access to the landscape, including the Shakespeare's Way long distance footpath and Thames Path National Trail.**
  - **An overall rural character with some intrusion of 20th century built form around Berinsfield, including a recent solar farm development, and at Culham Science Centre. Busy transport corridors such as the A4074, A329 and A4130 cross the area.**
- 3.9 Based upon the above assessment, the Site and its setting are considered to be strongly representative of the East Thames Lower Vale LCA.
- 3.10 The assessment identifies a number of 'Valued Qualities' associated with the LCA, including the following:
- The wider LCA forms part of the rural, northern setting of the National Landscape, having some intervisibility with the designated area, in particular Wittenham Clumps.
  - Recreational access to the landscape via a network of public rights of way, including the Shakespeare's Way long distance footpath and Thames Path National Trail. Water-based recreation along the River Thames.
  - Open landscape forms gaps between the settlements, helping to retain their individual identities.
  - Provides a rural setting to settlements, many of which retain a number of Listed Buildings and have Conservation Areas; distinctive local vernacular includes the use of timber framing and thatched roofs with occasional examples of cob walling.
  - Open views are available across much of the landscape, including south towards the distinctive Wittenham Clumps.

- 3.11 Under the heading 'Forces for Change', the assessment notes the pressure for increased development on the edges of a number of settlements, including Warborough, which would affect the rural character of the surrounding landscape and the setting it provides to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- 3.12 The assessment provides a number of guidelines for this LCA, which include the following:
- Consider impact of development on both close and distant views from the National Landscape, and how any new development would impact on the setting of the National Landscape.
  - Retain the distinct character of each settlement. Avoid any perceived coalescence due to roadside ribbon development between the riverside settlements.
  - Respect the setting to Conservation Areas and sensitivity of historic settlement edges, by resisting changes to the landscape which are not in keeping with the landscape character, including intensive equestrian activities and unsympathetic housing developments.

### **Appraisal of Site and Context Character**

#### ***Overview of the Site***

- 3.13 The Site comprises a single arable field that until relatively recently formed part of a much larger field. It contains no internal features.
- 3.14 It is bound to the west, south and east by established hedgerows, and to the north by domestic garden boundaries of the properties on Gravel Lane. The western hedgerow is tall with frequent mature trees, whereas the southern and eastern hedgerows are clipped enabling views over them. The eastern hedgerow contains frequent young trees.
- 3.15 The Site expresses a level topography, consistent with the wider landscape in which it is located. Outward views to elevated land within the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes are available.

#### ***Overview of the landscape context of the Site***

- 3.16 The Site is located between the historic villages of Warborough to the north and Shillingford to the south, and it forms the last remaining area of separation between these settlements, as identified within the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.17 The immediate context to the north comprises a cluster of mostly detached dwellings of varying ages on Gravel Lane, whose rear gardens face the Site. Beyond this lies the picturesque, nucleated village of Warborough, which is used for filming on account of its character, and which also attracts tourists for this reason. The village is set within large-scale farmland typical of the prevailing Landscape Character Type, although smaller areas of pasture occur at the village edge. A small hill named Town Hill rises to the north of the village, forming an outlier of the Chilterns.

- 3.18 The corridor of the A329 Thame Road is located to the west of the Site, although the Site is separated from the highway by a mature treed hedgerow, a pedestrian footway (incorporating Public Footpath 392/6/30), and an open drainage ditch. Further vegetation is present between the footway and ditch in places. A belt of ribbon development is located to the west of the highway, often comprising large, detached dwellings. Beyond the village edge lies large-scale farmland and the Roman town of Dorchester, located at the confluence of the rivers Thame and Thames and set within extensive water bodies arising from gravel extraction.
- 3.19 The village of Shillingford lies to the south of the Site beyond New Road, comprising a combination of historic and more modern dwellings, including the notable Shillingford Court on the waterfront. The River Thames lies directly to the south of the village, crossed by the historic Shillingford Bridge. A hotel and park home development are located directly south of the river and beyond this, medium to large arable fields with scattered woodland located within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape rise steeply towards the Sinodun Hills, a line of hilltops including Brightwell Barrow and Wittenham Clumps. From these hills, panoramic views of the vale and Chiltern Hills beyond are available, framed by areas of woodland.
- 3.20 Beyond the eastern Site boundary hedgerow, Plough Field extends approximately 1.3km to the edge of the village of Benson, which is marked by a treed watercourse beyond which lies a large area of recent residential development. North of Benson, the countryside comprises medium sized pastoral fields and larger arable fields, divided by treed watercourses and expressing the typical character of the Flat Open Farmland Landscape Character Type. This landscape is crossed by a network of Public Rights of Way that experience views of the North Wessex Downs with the Site and adjacent villages in the foreground. At the edge of the vale, the landform rises steeply to the nationally important Chiltern escarpment, which forms a strong horizon to the east of the Site.

#### **Relevant Landscape Receptors**

- 3.21 Landscape receptors are defined by the current guidelines (CD6-001, page 157) as *“Defined aspects of the landscape resource that have the potential to be affected by a proposal”*. They are further noted (CD6-001, paragraph 3.21) as *“including the constituent elements of the landscape, its specific aesthetic or perceptual qualities and the character of the landscape in different areas.”*
- 3.22 Based upon the above analysis I propose that the physical and perceptual characteristics of the Site and its setting, and geographic areas, which have the potential to be affected by the proposed development, and therefore form landscape receptors, are as follows:
- The Site and wider Plough Field.
  - Relationship with the adjacent settlements.
  - Relationship with the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes.
  - East Thames Lower Vale Landscape Character Area.

- 3.23 This differs from the Appellant's approach, which has utilised geographic receptors at various scales, from the National Character Area to the Site and its immediate context. In my opinion, the above approach is more helpful because it reflects a more tailored approach that considers specific perceptual aspects of the Site and its relationship to its wider setting, as well as how the Site relates at geographic scales.
- 3.24 I have not considered the effects of the Appeal Scheme upon the National Character Area because the character of these areas is more accurately expressed in the local level assessments. It is also the case that this receptor has been readily dismissed as receiving minimal impacts due to the comparative scale between the Site and the National Character Area. However, this risks a 'death by a thousand cuts' loss of the overall countryside character, as numerous small schemes result in an overall cumulative effect that tips the balance in the character of this area.

## 4. APPRAISAL OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

### Introduction

- 4.1 This section will present my appraisal of the anticipated effects of the proposed development upon the defining characteristics of the Site and its setting, based upon the design information submitted by the Appellant and the assessment framework presented at **Appendix 1**. As I have made clear in 3.2 above, I have considered a maximum building height of 2 storeys, as set out in the appellants LVIA 'Landscape Design and GI Objectives' at 5.3.
- 4.2 Each identified receptor will be considered in turn, with assessments made of their susceptibility to change, value and overall sensitivity. The magnitude of change upon each receptor will then be appraised based upon the submitted design information, and this will be compared with the sensitivity score to derive an overall level of impact significance.
- 4.3 When judging the value of landscape receptors, regard will be given to Table 2 of **Appendix 1**, and also the suggested criteria in Table 1 of Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing landscape value outside national designations (CD6-002), which are as follows:
- Natural heritage
  - Cultural heritage
  - Landscape condition
  - Associations
  - Distinctiveness
  - Recreational
  - Perceptual (scenic)
  - Perceptual (wilderness and tranquillity)
  - Functional
- 4.4 It is important to note that this set of receptors is an examination of the interaction of the proposed scheme with its setting from a variety of facets, and therefore some degree of repetition and cross-over is inevitable. As such, the results of this appraisal should not be aggregated, but rather considered individually as a comprehensive examination of the potential impacts.

## Appraisal of Landscape Effects in Relation to Identified Receptors

### *Arable use of the Site and wider Plough Field*

- 4.5 The Site represents an area of arable land enclosed by hedgerows that until relatively recently formed part of the much larger Plough Field. It is strongly influenced by the adjacent settlement areas, forming the only remaining gap between Warborough and Shillingford.
- 4.6 With regard to the susceptibility of this receptor to the type of change proposed, this is an intensively managed area of land that adjoins existing settlements. It also makes a notable contribution to the large-scale arable character of this landscape, however, and historically was part of the wider arable unit. This land use is therefore judged to be of **Medium** susceptibility to the type of change proposed.
- 4.7 With regard to the value of this receptor, this field demonstrates cultural heritage through its association with competitive ploughing, both at national and international level. It is well-managed arable land and is in good condition and representative of the published character. It possesses a degree of scenic value because its open character facilitates long views into the surrounding vale landscape. In terms of its function, the production of food crops is a key environmental service, especially as an area of best and most versatile arable land, and it is also located within a flood plain landscape so will be part of a hydrological system. Taking these factors into account, the value of this receptor is judged to be **Medium**.
- 4.8 The overall sensitivity of this receptor is therefore judged to be **Medium**.
- 4.9 The proposed development is anticipated to result in the fundamental loss of this characteristic, changing the rural land use to an urban one and presenting a continuous settlement edge to the wider Plough Field. It is recognised that the Site boundary hedgerows are proposed to be retained and enhanced with trees, although an element of the value currently placed upon the Site relates to the availability of views across it into the wider landscape and particularly the elevated ground of the National Landscapes. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **High**.
- 4.10 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in an adverse effect of **Major/Moderate** significance upon this receptor at all stages of development. I do not consider it possible to further mitigate this impact, or that it will reduce with time, because the loss of the arable land and reduction in the integrity of Plough Field will be permanent.

### *Relationship with Adjacent Settlements*

- 4.11 The Site currently represents the last remaining open space between the historic settlements of Warborough to the north and Shillingford to the south, because ribbon development is present on the western side of Thame Road. Its arable nature with no internal features means that views across it to the wider countryside are readily available.
- 4.12 With regard to the susceptibility of this receptor to the type of change proposed, the complete coalescence of the villages is specifically advised against in the Neighbourhood Plan, and the guidelines for the local Landscape Character Area require the perceived

coalescence of settlements to be avoided. The susceptibility of this receptor to the type of change proposed is therefore judged to be **High**.

- 4.13 With regard to the value of this receptor, there is a strong association with the historic separation of the settlements, and the adopted Neighbourhood Plan identifies the Site as an 'important landscape feature'. The emerging Neighbourhood Plan places even greater emphasis on this role of the Site, identifying it as a Green Gap and part of an Important Landscape Frontage. Furthermore, the contribution of the landscape to the gaps between settlements is a 'Valued Quality' in the latest landscape character assessment (CD5-002). The value of this receptor is therefore judged to be **High**.
- 4.14 The overall sensitivity of this receptor is therefore judged to be **High**.
- 4.15 The Proposed Development would result in the complete coalescence of Warborough and Shillingford, presenting a continuous line of development to Thame Road with the exception of a 20-metre gap within the 'view corridor' that would contain formal recreational uses. Whilst the dwellings are proposed to be set back from Thame Road via the western open space, this is unlikely to diminish loss of the sense of separation because this space is proposed to be largely open for drainage purposes, or as a 'welcome space', with development beyond it. The merged settlements would create a single greater mass that is likely to be perceived as a single larger settlement in elevated views, and in views across the vale from the recreational network to the east. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **High**.
- 4.16 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in an adverse effect of **Major** significance upon this receptor. I do not consider it possible to further mitigate this impact, or that it will reduce with time, because the coalescence of the settlements and the loss of their individual identity would be permanent.

***Relationship with the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes***

- 4.17 The two National Landscapes form a visual backdrop to the Site. The North Wessex Downs are present as an undulating ridge line to the south-west comprising Brightwell Barrow and the two wooded hills of Wittenham Clumps, which collectively form the Sinodun Hills. These are obscured by structures and vegetation from the northern part of the Site, but visible from the southern part. They are also present in views towards the Site from the Public Right of Way network to the east, which offers circular walking opportunities for residents and connections to the village of Benson. In these views, the Site is perceived as the gap between the settlements.
- 4.18 The Chilterns escarpment forms a continuous distant topographic backdrop to the east of the vale, with views currently available across the Site from Thame Road and New Road that are attributed value in both the adopted Neighbourhood Plan and the emerging draft Plan.
- 4.19 I therefore consider the Site to be within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, and the wider setting of the Chilterns National Landscape. This view is supported by the latest landscape character assessment (CD5-002), which states that the East Thames



Lower Vale Landscape Character Area *“forms part of the rural, northern setting of the National Landscape.”*

- 4.20 With regard to the susceptibility of this receptor to the type of change proposed, this receptor reflects the Site’s relationship with two National Landscapes. Within the North Wessex Downs Management Plan (CD5-008), the risk of small settlements merging is a key issue that has the potential to significantly influence the Special Qualities of the National Landscape. The open nature of the Site is also identified in the adopted Neighbourhood Plan as being important in maintaining the visual connectivity between Shillingford and the Chilterns National Landscape. The susceptibility of this receptor to the residential development of the Site and the complete coalescence of the settlements is therefore judged to be **High**.
- 4.21 With regard to the value of this receptor, it is reflective of the Site’s location within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and the wider setting of the Chilterns National Landscape. The Site currently provides the only remaining separation between Warborough and Shillingford, and therefore it is judged to be of **High** value.
- 4.22 The overall sensitivity of this receptor is therefore judged to be **High**.
- 4.23 The proposed development would result in the complete coalescence of Warborough and Shillingford, which would be perceptible from the North Wessex Downs, and which is identified as a key issue. It is also likely to result in the loss of the existing views of the Downs from the Site, and an increased settlement mass in the foreground of public views to the Downs from the east. Furthermore, it would reduce the visual relationship between Shillingford and the Chilterns National Landscape to possible glimpsed views along a narrow corridor between built areas, with equipped play and exercise areas and one of the development’s main access routes in the foreground. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **High**.
- 4.24 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in an adverse effect of **Major** significance upon this receptor. I do not consider this effect to diminish with time and I do not consider it possible to further mitigate this effect because it relates to the loss of separation of the settlements creating a greater mass in the setting of the North Wessex Downs, and loss of views towards the Chiltern Hills.

***East Thames Lower Vale Landscape Character Area***

- 4.25 The Site and its setting have been determined to be strongly representative of this Landscape Character Area. It is therefore the case that the Site and its setting currently make a positive contribution to the local prevailing landscape character.
- 4.26 With regard to the susceptibility of this receptor to the type of change proposed, the Site is a representative area of countryside within this landscape, that forms part of an open expanse of arable land. The perceived coalescence of settlements is specifically advised against in the landscape character assessment. This receptor is therefore judged to be of **Medium** susceptibility to the type of change proposed.

- 4.27 With regard to the value of this receptor, the Site and its setting are highly representative of the published character and are located within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and the wider setting of the Chilterns National Landscape. The contribution of the open landscape within this Landscape Character Area to the gap between settlements and the retention of their individual identities is a 'Valued Quality', and this is also attributed value within the adopted Neighbourhood Plan. The value of this receptor is therefore judged to be **High**.
- 4.28 The overall sensitivity of this receptor is therefore judged to be **Medium/High**.
- 4.29 The proposed development will introduce a change in this landscape that is in opposition to the published guidance, coalescing Warborough and Shillingford into a single settlement mass with no discernible gap between them. Furthermore, it will result in a reduction in the Site's contribution to a number of key characteristics of both the Landscape Character Area and Landscape Character Type. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **Medium**.
- 4.30 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in an adverse effect of **Major/Moderate** significance. Given that the nature of the landscape effect arises mainly from the coalescence of settlements, the loss of rural character and the interruption of the relationship between parts of the Landscape Character Area and the National Landscapes, I do not consider that this effect can be mitigated or will diminish as the proposed planting matures.

#### Summary of Landscape Effects

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Effect Significance
The Site and wider Plough Field	Medium	High	Major/Moderate adverse
Relationship with the adjacent settlements	High	High	Major adverse
Relationship with the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes	High	High	Major adverse
Thames River Corridor Landscape Character Area	Medium/High	Medium	Major/Moderate adverse

## 5. APPRAISAL OF VISUAL EFFECTS

### Introduction

- 5.1 This section will present the results of my independent visual appraisal of the Site and its visual envelope.
- 5.2 This is based upon my field assessment of the Site and surrounding landscape, as well as the visual appraisal information submitted by the Appellant. Field surveys were undertaken in December 2024.
- 5.3 Photographs were taken using a Canon Eos 700D digital SLR camera with a 35mm focal length in line with the guidance published by the Landscape Institute to accurately represent the experience of the human eye. These are Type 1 visualisations under the Landscape Institute's current guidance<sup>1</sup> on the visual representation of development proposals.
- 5.4 The representative viewpoints for the proposed development are presented and their sensitivity assessed at **Appendix 2**, along with a plan showing the viewpoint locations. I have restricted my viewpoints to those public receptors from which I consider significant effects to be possible. It should be noted that private views of the Site are also available, and that other public receptors may experience lesser effects.
- 5.5 Each identified receptor will be considered in turn, with assessments made of the anticipated magnitude of change arising from the proposed development based upon the Appellant's submitted Parameter Plan, but using the maximum building height of 2 storeys recommended in their LVIA at 5.3. This will then be compared with the established sensitivity score to derive an overall level of impact significance.

### Summary of Visual Environment

- 5.6 The visual environment of the Site is largely defined by the adjacent settlement areas and prevailing topography.
- 5.7 Short and medium views to the north, west and south are restricted by the immediate presence of the settlements of Warborough and Shillingford, whilst views are available to the east across Plough Field, towards the nearby village of Benson where Public Rights of Way permit views back towards the Site.
- 5.8 To the west, longer views are available to the summits of Brightwell Barrow and Wittenham Clumps, which form a strong topographic backdrop above the rooftops and vegetation of Shillingford, while to the east, long views terminate in the dramatic scarp of the Chiltern Hills, which provides a consistent horizon. Public Footpaths crossing Wittenham Clumps experience views down towards the Site and the two villages.

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<sup>1</sup> Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals

### Summary of Visual Receptor Sensitivity

5.9 Based upon the viewpoint analysis presented at **Appendix 2**, the list of confirmed visual receptors and their respective sensitivity scores is as follows:

- Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/6/30 [VP1]: **High sensitivity**.
- Users of Thame Road [VP1]: **Medium sensitivity**.
- Users of New Road [VP2]: **Medium sensitivity**.
- Users of A4074 Henley Road [VP3]: **Medium sensitivity**.
- Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10 [VP4]: **High sensitivity**.
- Users of Public Bridleway 392/16/10 [VP5]: **High sensitivity**.
- Users of Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20 [VP6]: **Very High sensitivity**.

### Appraisal of Visual Effects in Relation to Identified Receptors

#### *Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/6/30 – Viewpoint 1*

5.10 Users of this public footpath currently experience glimpsed views through the mature Site boundary hedgerow across the Site and wider Plough Field towards the Chilterns National Landscape.

5.11 The proposed development would fundamentally alter this view, introducing short range views via a 'welcome and amenity area' and an area of sustainable drainage basins to new residential dwellings and an electricity sub-station. Whilst the maturation of any planting within the western open space would filter these views with time, the characteristic sense of openness of the Flat Open Farmland and the views towards the Chilterns would be permanently lost and the dwellings are likely to remain prominent elements. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **High** during the construction phase, reducing to **Medium/High** at Year 1 and **Medium** at Year 15.

5.12 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in the following visual effects:

- Construction phase: **Major adverse**.
- Year 1: **Major/Moderate adverse**.
- Year 15: **Major/Moderate adverse**.

#### *Users of Thame Road – Viewpoint 1*

5.13 Users of this public highway are anticipated to experience glimpsed views across the open Site and wider Plough Field towards the Chilterns National Landscape as they pass between the settlements.

5.14 The proposed development would obscure the views towards the Chiltern Hills and introduce new residential dwellings into the view, set behind the new western open space. In time, planting within the open space is anticipated to filter the views of the dwellings. The



magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **Medium/High** during the construction phase and at Year 1, reducing to **Medium** at Year 15.

5.15 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in the following visual effects:

- Construction phase: **Major/Moderate adverse**.
- Year 1: **Moderate adverse**.
- Year 15: **Moderate adverse**.

***Users of New Road – Viewpoint 2***

5.16 Users of this public highway travelling northwards currently experience clear views of the Chilterns National Landscape above the roadside hedgerow, via the open farmland of Plough Field.

5.17 The proposed development would obscure the existing views towards the Chilterns for the entire length of the Site boundary, replacing them with short-range views of residential dwellings behind a treed hedgerow. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **High** during the construction phase and at Year 1, reducing to **Medium** at Year 15.

5.18 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in the following visual effects:

- Construction phase: **Major/Moderate adverse**.
- Year 1: **Major/Moderate adverse**.
- Year 15: **Moderate adverse**.

***Users of A4074 Henley Road – Viewpoint 3***

5.19 Users of this public highway travelling southwards experience frequent glimpsed views of the two settlements of Warborough and Shillingford, with the Site providing the separation between them.

5.20 The proposed development would close this gap with residential dwellings, eliminating the perception of two smaller settlements and presenting a continuous development line. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **High** during the construction phase, reducing to **Medium** at Year 1 and Year 15.

5.21 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in the following visual effects:

- Construction phase: **Major/Moderate adverse**.
- Year 1: **Moderate adverse**.
- Year 15: **Moderate adverse**.

***Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10 – Viewpoint 4***

- 5.22 Users of this rural public footpath to the east of the Site currently experience uninterrupted views across Plough Field to the edges of Warborough and Shillingford, with the Site located between them, and with Wittenham Clumps forming an elevated horizon to the left.
- 5.23 The proposed development would close the gap between the settlements and introduce a prominent line of new residential dwellings into the view. This would represent a permanent change, and the proposed planting associated with the scheme would only serve in time to soften the edge of the coalesced settlement mass, which would appear in the foreground of the National Landscape. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **High** during the construction phase and Year 1, reducing to **Medium/High** by Year 15 as the edge vegetation matures.
- 5.24 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in the following visual effects:
- Construction phase: **Major adverse**.
  - Year 1: **Major adverse**.
  - Year 15: **Major/Moderate adverse**.

***Users of Public Bridleway 392/16/10 -Viewpoint 5***

- 5.25 Users of this rural bridleway that follows a surfaced farm track currently experience clear views towards the Site across the open expanse of Plough Field as they approach Warborough, with the Site visible between the two villages. The Site is framed by the elevated land of Brightwell Barrow to the left and Wittenham Clumps to the right, both within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- 5.26 The proposed development would introduce a continuous line of modern dwellings into this view, connecting the two existing settled areas. This would represent a permanent change, and the proposed planting associated with the scheme would only serve in time to soften the edge of the coalesced settlement mass, which would appear in the foreground of the National Landscape. The magnitude of change upon this receptor is therefore judged to be **High** during the construction phase and Year 1, reducing to **Medium/High** by Year 15 as the edge vegetation matures.
- 5.27 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in the following visual effects:
- Construction phase: **Major adverse**.
  - Year 1: **Major adverse**.
  - Year 15: **Major/Moderate adverse**.

***Users of Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20 – Viewpoint 6***

- 5.28 Users of this route, which skirts an Iron Age hillfort, experience panoramic views across the vale to the east, which include the villages of Warborough and Shillingfold. The Site is visible between the villages, but it is partially obscured by the existing ribbon development on Thame Road.
- 5.29 The proposed development would result in the full coalescence of the settlements within this view, creating a single larger settlement mass within the landscape. Given the distance from this receptor, however, the magnitude of change is judged to be **Low** at all phases of the development, because the elevated view is unlikely to be affected by vegetation at Year 15.
- 5.30 The proposed development is therefore judged to result in the following visual effects:
- Construction phase: **Major/Moderate adverse**.
  - Year 1: **Major/Moderate adverse**.
  - Year 15: **Major/Moderate adverse**.

#### Summary of Visual Effects: Construction Phase

VP	Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Effect Significance
1	Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/6/30	High	High	Major adverse
	Users of Thame Road	Medium	Medium/High	Major/Moderate adverse
2	Users of New Road	Medium	High	Major/Moderate adverse
3	Users of A4074 Henley Road	Medium	High	Major/Moderate adverse
4	Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10	High	High	Major adverse
5	Users of Public Bridleway 392/16/10	High	High	Major adverse
6	Users of Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20	Very High	Low	Major/Moderate adverse

**Summary of Visual Effects: Year 1**

<b>VP</b>	<b>Receptor</b>	<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>Magnitude</b>	<b>Effect Significance</b>
1	Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/6/30	High	Medium/High	Major/Moderate adverse
	Users of Thame Road	Medium	Medium/High	Moderate adverse
2	Users of New Road	Medium	High	Major/Moderate adverse
3	Users of A4074 Henley Road	Medium	Medium	Moderate adverse
4	Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10	High	High	Major adverse
5	Users of Public Bridleway 392/16/10	High	High	Major adverse
6	Users of Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20	Very High	Low	Major/Moderate adverse



**Summary of Visual Effects: Year 15**

<b>VP</b>	<b>Receptor</b>	<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>Magnitude</b>	<b>Effect Significance</b>
1	Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/6/30	High	Medium	Major/Moderate adverse
	Users of Thame Road	Medium	Medium	Moderate adverse
2	Users of New Road	Medium	Medium	Moderate adverse
3	Users of A4074 Henley Road	Medium	Medium	Moderate adverse
4	Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10	High	Medium/High	Major/Moderate adverse
5	Users of Public Bridleway 392/16/10	High	Medium/High	Major/Moderate adverse
6	Users of Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20	Very High	Low	Major/Moderate adverse

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### Baseline Context

- 6.1 The Site represents an area of open arable land that forms the only remaining separation between the villages of Warborough to the north and Shillingford to the south. The Site is located within an open vale landscape, and clear views are available across it to the slopes and ridgeline of the Chilterns National Landscape to the east. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape is located to the west, and its wooded hills are visible from the Site and vice versa.
- 6.2 The Site historically formed part of a large arable field known as Plough Field, which has some cultural value having hosted both national and international ploughing events. A monument is located on the roadside to the east of the Site commemorating the international event held in 1956.
- 6.3 The Site's wider context is that of an open vale that forms part of the floodplain of the River Thames and the settings of the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes. It has been found to be strongly representative of the East Thames Lower Vale Landscape Character Area in which it is located. Guidelines for this landscape include avoiding the perceived coalescence of settlements and considering the effects upon the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- 6.4 The adopted Neighbourhood Plan's Character Assessment identifies the Site as being an *"important landscape feature in creating a separation between Warborough and Shillingford villages"* and it highlights a Key Community View across the Site towards the Chilterns National Landscape.
- 6.5 The emerging Neighbourhood Plan goes further in terms of emphasising the value of the Site and protecting it from development, designating it as a 'Green Gap' and part of an 'Important Landscape Frontage' and saying of the Site *"it is key that this should not be developed to maintain the separate identities of the settlements."*
- 6.6 The Management Plan for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape also identifies the merging of small settlements within the setting of the National Landscape as a risk.

### Proposed Development

- 6.7 The proposed development comprises the construction of up to 90 residential dwellings upon the Site, accessed from New Road. A Parameter Plan has been submitted with the application, but it is unclear whether this has been submitted for approval.
- 6.8 The Parameter Plan shows the residential areas divided into two blocks with a narrow 'view corridor' between them, although this corridor is populated with formal recreation equipment, the main development internal access route and tree planting so it is unlikely to function effectively. The stated building height is 2.5 storeys, which is in excess of the recommendations within the Appellant's own Landscape and Visual Appraisal, which has considered a maximum of two storeys. I have considered the scheme based upon the LVIA

height of 2 storeys. Further open space areas are proposed on the Site's western and eastern boundaries.

### **Landscape Appraisal Results**

- 6.9 To assist the Inspector in understanding the full scale of impact of the proposed development, I have undertaken my own landscape appraisal. In this, I have considered the character of the Site, and its relationship with the context in which it sits, including the two National Landscapes.
- 6.10 For each of my identified receptors, I have considered the impacts of the proposed development.
- 6.11 The results of my landscape appraisal in terms of the long-term effects of the Appeal Scheme are as follows:
- The Site and wider Plough Field: **Major/Moderate adverse.**
  - Relationship with the adjacent settlements: **Major adverse.**
  - Relationship with the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns National Landscapes: **Major adverse.**
  - East Thames Lower Vale Landscape Character Area: **Major/Moderate adverse.**

### **Landscape Appraisal Conclusion**

- 6.12 The proposed development is anticipated to result in long-term adverse effects of Major and Major/Moderate significance, which cannot be reasonably mitigated.
- 6.13 I therefore conclude that the proposed development is inappropriate on landscape grounds, and fails to satisfy the requirements of and Policies ENV1, DES1 and DES2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 and policy VC1 of the Warborough and Shillingford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2033. My evidence therefore supports the Council's second reason for refusal.

### **Visual Appraisal Results**

- 6.14 I have also undertaken my own visual appraisal. In this, I have considered the effects of the scheme upon the users of Public Rights of Way and public highways. The Appellant has submitted a comprehensive visual appraisal and therefore my Appraisal is not exhaustive but has considered what I judge to be the key public receptors of the scheme. In particular, I have not considered private views, although I am in agreement with the Appellant that the occupants of private dwellings will be adversely affected.
- 6.15 The results of my visual appraisal in terms of the long-term effects of the Appeal Scheme are as follows:
- Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/6/30 [VP1]: **Major/Moderate adverse.**
  - Users of Thame Road [VP1]: **Moderate adverse.**
  - Users of New Road [VP2]: **Moderate adverse.**

- Users of A4074 Henley Road [VP3]: **Moderate adverse.**
- Users of Public Footpath Warborough 392/17/10 [VP4]: **Major/Moderate adverse.**
- Users of Public Bridleway 392/16/10 [VP5]: **Major/Moderate adverse.**
- Users of Public Footpath Little Wittenham 283/110/20 [VP6]: **Major/Moderate adverse.**

**Visual Appraisal Conclusion**

- 6.16 The proposed development is anticipated to result in long-term adverse effects of Major/Moderate and Moderate significance, which cannot be further mitigated.
- 6.17 I therefore conclude that the proposed development is inappropriate on visual grounds, and that my evidence supports the Council's second reason for refusal.



**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1: Methodology**

**Appendix 2: Viewpoint Analysis**

Comprising;

- A - SOU16640-01-NLA.100-Viewpoint Location Plan d1 SF 201224
- B - 241230 Receptor Viewpoints 1-6, V2 JT

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