



Oaklands College & Land south of Sandpit Lane, St Albans

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
(incl. Green Belt Assessment)

October 2025





Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

**Oaklands Blossom & Oaklands College,
St Albans**

2 October 2025

Oaklands Blossom & Oaklands College, St Albans:

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

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Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Site Context	4
3.0	Designations	6
4.0	Planning Policy	7
5.0	Landscape Character	15
6.0	Site Appraisal	21
7.0	Visual Appraisal	24
8.0	The Proposed Development.....	28
9.0	Likely Landscape and Visual Effects	35
10.0	Green Belt Assessment	48
11.0	Summary	58

Figures

Figure 1: Site Context Plan

Figure 2: Topographic Features Plan

Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan

Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan

Figure 5: Zone of Theoretical Visibility

Figure 6: Viewpoint Location Plan

Appendix

Appendix 1: LVIA Methodology

Appendix 2 : Green Belt Assessment Methodology

Appendix 3: Site Context Photographs

Appendix 4: Wireline Visualisations

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Julia Goodwin Landscape Architects (JGLA) have been commissioned by the Applicant to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Green Belt Assessment (GBA) of the land at Oaklands Blossom and Oaklands College (the Site), in St Albans.
- 1.2 The LVIA has been prepared in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments Edition 3 (GLVIA3), and as such comprises an assessment of landscape and visual effects.
- 1.3 A landscape appraisal is the systematic description and analysis of the features within the wider landscape, such as landform, vegetation cover, settlement and transport patterns and land use that culminate in a sense of place. A visual appraisal assesses visual receptors, which are the viewers of the landscape, and could include locations such as public buildings, roads, public open space, cycle routes, footpaths and Core Paths.
- 1.4 The LVIA identifies landscape and visual receptors likely to be affected by the Proposed Development, determines their sensitivity to the type of development proposed; and makes judgements regarding the magnitude of effect likely to occur and the level of effect on the landscape and visual receptors.
- 1.5 A detailed LVIA methodology is provided in Appendix 1.
- 1.6 The Green Belt Assessment has been informed by St Alban's Green Belt Studies and the latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and guidance, and has been based on a clear methodology, as set out in Appendix 2. Where the proposed methodology differs from those used in the St Alban's Green Belt Studies, this is highlighted and the justification for an alternative approach has been set out.

2.0 Site Context

2.1 As illustrated on Figure 1: Site Context Plan, the Site is located on the eastern edge of St Albans. The Site is accessed off Sandpit Lane to the north, Oaklands Lane to the east, and Hatfield Road (A1057) to the south. The Site comprises part of Oaklands College and the associated grounds that formerly comprised the grounds of Mansion House. There are two main areas within the Site:

- Oaklands Blossom: land referred to by the Council as “Site B4 East St Albans”; and
- Oaklands College: Oaklands College and its associated facilities and sports pitches.

2.2 The Site includes North Drive and East Drive, and part of South Drive. The remaining area of land within the blue lines are within the ownership of Oaklands College, but do not form part of the Site.

Topography and Hydrology

2.3 The landform within the Study Area is dominated by the broader undulating plateau within which it is located. St Albans is sited on higher ground to the north-west, with the landform falling towards the River Colne to the south-east, as illustrated by Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan. Hatfield lies beyond the River Colne.

2.4 Butterwick Brook, a tributary of the River Colne, flows along the south-eastern edge of the land within ownership and the edge of the College land. This is fed by drainage ditches that run along the southern edges of Sandpit Lane and Oaklands Lane.

2.5 To the north-east of the Site, the landform rises up at Symondshyde to approximately 110m above ordnance datum (AOD).

2.6 The Site lies between approximately 95m AOD to the west and falls to approximately 77m AOD. There is a subtle east-west ridgeline that extends from Oaklands Grange to the west of the Site and tapers off to the east beyond the Site.

Vegetation and Land Cover

2.7 Outwith the urban areas, landcover within the wider Study Area is predominantly agricultural, although this has been fragmented and is subject to urban fringe influences. On the periphery of St Albans there are numerous recreational uses, including sports pitches within the College grounds and beyond. Within the Site and land within ownership, the former designed landscape of Mansion House introduces a parkland character to the Site, including woodland blocks and mature parkland trees. A mix of pastoral and recreational fields surround the College Campus.

- 2.8 To the north-east of the Site, the agricultural pattern has been eroded by the former aerodrome and existing and former mining uses. Ellenbrook Fields Country Park includes the restoration of some of these areas on the edge of Hatfield.
- 2.9 There are field boundaries defined by remnant hedgerows and hedgerow trees, but they are unmanaged in places. Woodland blocks are a feature of the landcover within the Site and its immediate vicinity.

Settlement Pattern and Access

- 2.10 The Study Area is well settled, located on the periphery of London. St Albans extends into the western part of the Study Area, and Hatfield extends into the eastern edge of the Study Area. The village of Smallford lies to the east of the Site and the Butterwick Brook.
- 2.11 Hatfield Road A1057 is the main movement route through the Study Area, linking St Albans and Hatfield to the south of the Site. A linear extension of St Albans extends to the south of the Site, between Hatfield Road and the former railway line. Residential uses to the south give way to industrial uses to the east.
- 2.12 There is a dense network of PRoW, including bridleways within the Study Area, including through the Site. National Cycle Route (NCR) 61 and the Alban Way path run along a former railway line to the south of the Site. To the north-west of the Site, Jersey Lane is a traffic free road between Marshalswick, in St Albans, and Sandridge, used for active travel and recreational uses.

3.0 Designations

- 3.1 The Site is not subject to any national or local landscape designations.
- 3.2 Whilst not a designation, the presence of Ancient Woodlands contributes to our understanding of the landscape and influences development capacity and potential mitigation proposals. There are no Ancient Woodlands within the Site, as identified by the Ancient Woodland Inventory (England), however, Home Wood is a semi-natural Ancient Woodland, and Local Wildlife Site (LWS), immediately adjacent to the western boundary and within the ownership of Oaklands College. Oaklands Wood LWS, an old broadleaf woodland, lies to the east of the Site and adjacent to the land within the College's ownership. The entire Oaklands College grounds is subject to a blanket Tree Preservation Order (TPO).
- 3.3 There are no listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments within the College grounds.

Cultural Heritage Designations

- 3.4 There are no listed buildings, Conservation Areas (CA) or Scheduled Monuments within the Site or land within ownership. Sleapshyde CA lies to the south-east of the Site, beyond the Albans Way. St Albans CA lies predominantly outwith the Study Area to the west. Sandridge CA lies to the north of the Site, just beyond the Study Area.
- 3.5 Mansion House was constructed around 1782 as a private residence, and altered and extended in the Victorian Era. In 1920 it was bought by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and was brought into educational use, with an agricultural college established in the 1920s. This ultimately became Oaklands College. Whilst Mansion House is not a listed building and the associated former designed landscape is not a Registered Park and Garden, the house and associated parkland landscape are local heritage features.

4.0 Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was last updated in February 2025, and sets out the government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. It sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Chapter 8 sets out the principles for promoting healthy and safe communities, including access to open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity. Chapter 12 Achieving well-designed spaces sets out criteria for well-designed spaces, including that they are visually attractive with effective landscaping; and are sympathetic to local character and history; and have a strong sense of place. The importance of trees is highlighted.
- 4.2 Chapter 13 Protecting Green Belt land sets out the purposes of the Green Belt and how Green Belt boundaries should be reviewed where necessary, with the focus on PDL and Grey Belt land when considering the need for development in the Green Belt.
- 4.3 The need to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment is set out in Chapter 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- 4.4 Planning Practice Guidance provides additional and current guidance for various topics, including BNG, Design: process and tools; Green Belt; and open space, sports and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space.

Local Planning Policy

Adopted Local Plan

- 4.5 St Albans Local Plan was adopted in November 1994, and a Saved and Deleted Policies Version was published in July 2020. However, the Local Plan is out of date, and the emerging Local Plan is sufficiently progressed to carry significant weight.
- 4.6 The Adopted Local Plan identifies the Site as being within the Metropolitan Green Belt, which wraps around St Albans, as illustrated on Policy Map 4. The Policy Map was produced in 1994, and does not reflect the current baseline, which includes Orchards Grange to the immediate west of the Oaklands Blossom site. Key Structuring Policy 1: Metropolitan Green Belt identifies the whole of St Albans District as lying within the Metropolitan Green Belt, with the exception of certain settlements and areas; and that inappropriate development will not be permitted within the Green Belt except in very special circumstances. The policy recognises the five purposes of the Green Belt, as originally set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note PPG2: Green Belts.

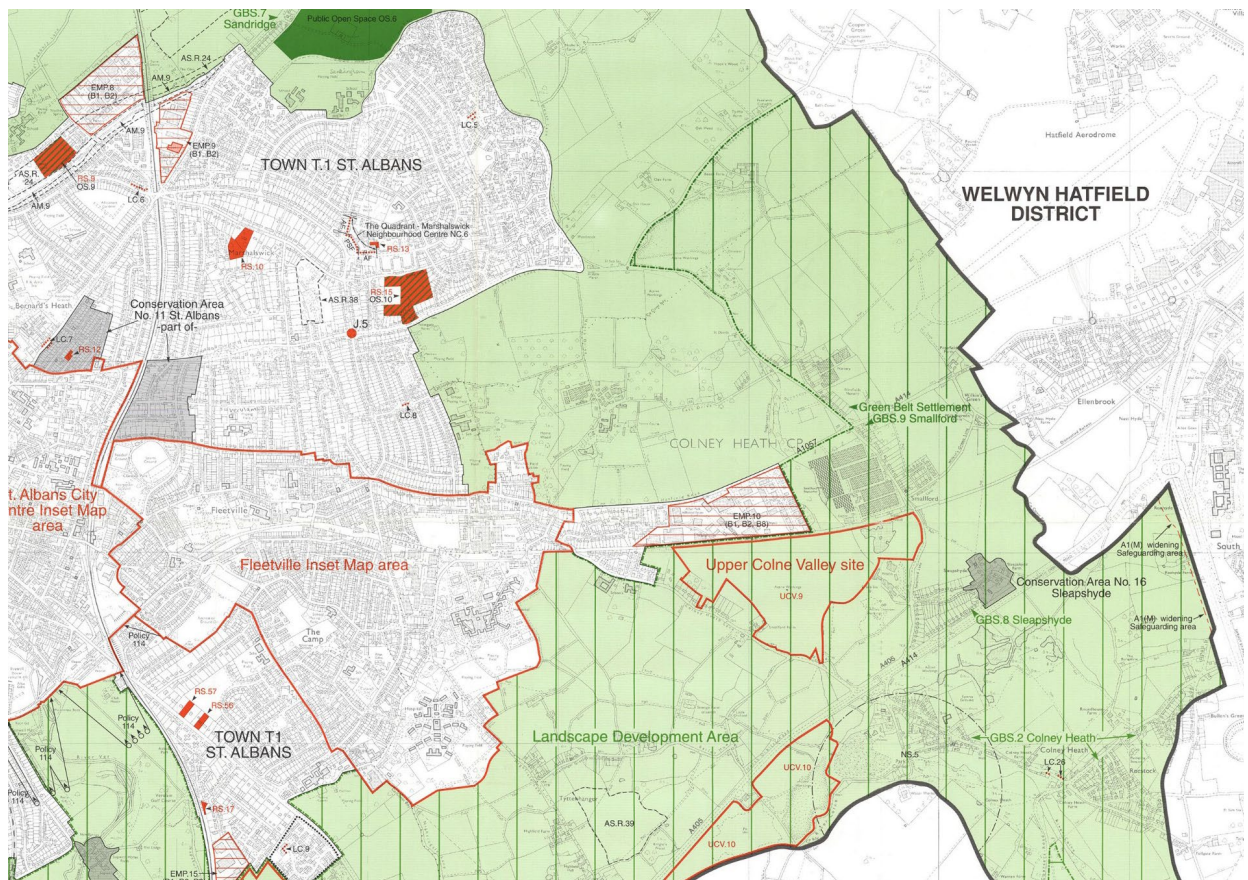


Plate 4.1: Adopted Local Plan Policy Map 4 extract

Emerging Local Plan

- 4.7 St Albans is developing a new Local Plan to replace the outdated Local Plan, which is well progressed and therefore carries greater weight than the outdated adopted Local Plan.
- 4.8 The emerging Local Plan allocates the north-western part of the Site for housing as BM4 and its release from the Green Belt. Oaklands College is identified as a Sports and Community Zone and a Development Zone (Policy DOM1).
- 4.9 Draft Strategic Policy SP1: A Spatial Strategy for St Albans District directs growth to make the most sustainable use of land in urban areas and then in the Green Belt. The Settlement Hierarchy identifies St Albans as a Tier 1 City / Large Town. Broad Locations are identified as large urban extensions, including the north-eastern part of the Site. The Local Plan also supports:

- *“Significantly increasing tree cover in the District due to the role of trees in mitigating Climate Change emissions and providing other biodiversity and wellbeing benefits;*

- *Community infrastructure – provision of new and improvements to existing facilities, including schools, healthcare and for recreation;*
- *Biodiversity Net Gain (10%+) for relevant new development;*
- *The aims and delivery of Hertfordshire’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy as it applies to the District;*
- *Green Belt compensatory improvements - including significant new country parks, better access to the countryside via new and improved rights of way, new and improved habitat connectivity;*
- *Significantly improved infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport”.*

4.10 Draft Strategic Policy SP2 – Responding to the Climate Emergency supports proposals that help combat Climate Change, including where proposals:

- *“d) Use the most sustainable locations for growth and so minimising the need to travel while encouraging walking, cycling and the use of public transport;*
- *e) Provide on-site renewables, high standards of energy efficiency, and low carbon energy;*
- *f) Prioritise the use of sustainable and active modes of travel in new and existing developments;*
- *g) Deliver biodiversity net gain;*
- *h) Mitigate increasing flood risk;*
- *i) Include Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SuDS) where appropriate;*
- *j) Demonstrate tree planting”*

4.11 Chapter 3 of the Emerging Local Plan sets out the policy for the sustainable use of land and Green Belt. The District’s Green Belt is highly valued, and performs an important national and local role. Over 81% of the District’s area is classified as Green Belt.

4.12 Draft Strategic Policy SP3 – Land and the Green Belt sets out a revised Green Belt boundary and identifies Broad Locations as areas of significant urban extension (over 250 homes). This includes the Site as East St Albans with a minimum capacity of 472 plus 60 to 80 extra care units.

4.13 Draft Policy LG1 – Broad Locations sets out the requirements for proposals within the defined Broad Locations, including:

- *“Demonstrate a coordinated, Masterplanned approach to development with appropriate input from the District and County Council, statutory consultees, local communities, landowners and other stakeholders; including Dacorum Borough Council for Hemel Garden Communities. The approach should be in accordance with the District’s Strategic Sites Design Guidance;...*
- *j) Make efficient and effective use of the site, with a minimum overall net density of 40 dwellings per hectare; utilising a range of densities that take account of adjacent character, uses and identity;...*

- *l) Demonstrate how the proposal integrates with and where appropriate seeks to improve the existing transport network with reference to the LCWIP. Proposals should include excellent walking and cycling links, including accessible routes and public transport services upgrades / improvements;*
- *m) Normally retain significant healthy trees and other important landscape features;*
- *n) Plant at least 1 semi-mature tree for each dwelling; for C2 accommodation plant 1 semi-mature tree for every 2.5 dwelling equivalent bed spaces;*
- *o) Provide new or provide contributions to enhance existing strategic, sports facilities, local and recreational public open space, including managed woodland and ecological network links;*
- *p) Positively relate and integrate the development to the surrounding buildings and landscape, and be informed by a comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment which addresses the recommendations of the Council's Landscape and Visual Appraisal 2024;...*
- *r) Ensure that land use, density, landscaping and form have regard to the topography of the site and identified landscape impacts;*
- *s) Establish an appropriate Community Stewardship and Legacy body with sufficient assets to provide long term sustainable management of community facilities and / or open spaces;*
- *t) Have due regard to any relevant Neighbourhood plan(s);*
- *u) Demonstrate the co-location of community facilities (such as schools, shops, community centres, strategic public open space) in order to reduce the number of trips that residents have to make and encourage the use of active travel modes..."*

4.14 Draft Policy LG5 – Green Belt states that proposals in the Green Belt will be assessed in accordance with national policy. Where proposals are consistent with Green Belt purposes and objectives the Council will support in principle:

- *"a) Opportunities that arise through development to proactively manage Green Belt land to:*
 - *i. Protect and create attractive landscapes and countryside;*
 - *ii. Promote healthy ecosystem services;*
 - *iii. Support productive and sustainable farming and forestry; and*
 - *iv. Provide space for local and wider recreational needs.*
- *b) Infrastructure provision identified in this Plan that is essential to ensure sustainable development across the District and beyond, that demonstrates 'very special circumstances', namely:*
 - *i. New state schools;*
 - *ii. The creation of new transport infrastructure; and*
 - *iii. Small scale, largely open forms of infrastructure development such as outdoor sport and recreation facilities and uses (including detached playing fields for schools), drainage areas and utilities installations."*

4.15 Draft Policy LG6 – Green Belt Compensatory Improvements sets out the requirements for compensatory improvements where the loss of Green Belt land for development is deemed necessary. These include:

- *“a) Submit a Green Belt compensation strategy that sets out compensatory measures that align with national planning guidance, relating to:*
 - *i. New or enhanced green infrastructure;*
 - *ii. Woodland planting;*
 - *iii. Landscape and visual enhancements (beyond those needed to mitigate the immediate impacts of the proposal);*
 - *iv. Improvements to biodiversity, habitat connectivity and natural capital;*
 - *v. New or enhanced walking cycling or equestrian routes; or*
 - *vi. Improved access to new, enhanced or existing recreational and playing field provision.*
- *b) Retain existing hedgerows and trees and other areas of biodiversity value such as ponds;*
- *c) Enhance existing green and blue infrastructure links within their sites, and connect any fragmented links, to provide biodiversity (also known as wildlife corridors). Development must also take account of green and blue infrastructure links beyond their sites and try to integrate their designs with them and not create severance through poor design;*
- *d) Maintain any Rights of Way across / through the site, ensuring provision of a route that is safe and overlooked, is sufficient in width to easily allow the passing of two people, and is carefully designed to become a positive landscape feature. Should a diversion to any Rights of Way be unavoidable, replacement routes must be provided to the satisfaction of the Council and the relevant highway authority;*
- *e) Ensure access to adjacent Rights of Way are facilitated in a safe and direct manner and maintain linkages that provide for appropriate utility and recreational use, and ensure that improvements are enabled so as to mitigate for the increased user impact of the development on the fabric of the network, including through good design;*
- *f) Provide woodland buffer planting when adjacent to established urban areas overlooking what was once open countryside.”*

4.16 Draft Strategic Policy SP10 – Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Green and Blue Infrastructure seeks the protection and enhancement of green and blue infrastructure for its role in combating Climate Change and supporting biodiversity as well as its value for recreation, health and wellbeing, and landscape value. Tree planting and tree care are a priority for the Council.

4.17 Draft Policy NEB1 – Woodlands, Trees and Landscape Features seeks to enhance tree cover in the District and protect existing woodlands, trees and landscape features. Development proposals for Broad Locations are required to deliver a minimum of at least 1 semi-mature tree for each dwelling, predominantly of native local species, and a tree survey must be provided, conforming with the requirements of BS5837 (2012). The Site is

covered by a blanket Tree Preservation Order (TPO). Ancient Woodland must be protected from removal or damage, Home Wood on the south-western boundary of the Site is Ancient Woodland.

- 4.18 Draft Policy NEB6 – Biodiversity and Biodiversity Net Gain requires the protection of designated areas and species of national and local importance for biodiversity, including County and Local Wildlife Sites. Home Wood to the south-west of the Site is a CWS. The mitigation hierarchy should be applied, and Biodiversity Net Gain of 10% is required with the long term management and maintenance secured. Criteria (d) requires proposals to take opportunities to link or reconnect fragmented wildlife habitats.
- 4.19 Draft Policy NEB7 – Biodiversity Provision in the Design of New Buildings and Open Spaces sets out requirements for development proposals, including having regard to the existing biodiversity within the site; opportunities to maximise the provision for biodiversity; the inclusion of features such as swift bricks and bat and insect boxes; and the creation of new wildlife habitats and features.
- 4.20 With respect to managing flood risk, Draft Policy NEB8 – Managing Flood Risk, SuDS should be designed to provide multiple benefits, such as biodiversity, and integrate into the green infrastructure network, and be appropriately managed.
- 4.21 Draft Policy NEB10 – Landscape and Design states that the Council considers that the landscaping elements of development area essential to creating sustainable and attractive places; and proposals must demonstrate:
- *“i. How the landscaping contributes to delivering an attractive and sustainable place that enhances the area for new and existing residents;*
 - *ii. For major developments, how the existing landscape will be protected, enhanced and integrated into the development, detailed in a Landscape Strategy, along with new tree planting as part of any new green space provision;*
 - *iii. That the landscaping will not adversely affect the outlook and amenity of existing and future residents;*
 - *iv. The planting of trees along new streets, roads and public places, as appropriate;*
 - *v. That opportunities are taken for biodiversity net gain, and making connections to existing biodiversity and habitat networks outside of the site;*
 - *vi. The use of appropriate native species with all stock sourced and where possible grown entirely in the UK;*
 - *vii. That where changes to landscape may be required, details be provided of existing landscaping, trees and shrubs trees to be removed; the planting of new trees, shrubs and grass; alongside details of and level changes, enclosure, screening and paving; significant healthy trees and other important landscape features shall normally be retained;*
 - *viii. Provision for ongoing management and maintenance; and*
 - *ix. That opportunities are taken to provide above ground Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) where appropriate.”*

4.22 Development proposals in a Landscape Character Area must:

- *“i. Conserve, restore or enhance the prevailing quality, character and condition of the natural and historic landscape; and*
- *ii. Be accompanied by a statement to demonstrate how the proposal responds to managing change, including restoration of historic field, transport, settlement and built forms where appropriate.”*

4.23 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments will be required for all major development.

4.24 Draft Policy NEB12 – Green Space Standards and New Green Space Provision sets out the open space standards. This sets out principles for new green space and quantity standards. The quantity standards require 57sqm per person for multi-functional green space (broken down into amenity green space; natural and semi-natural green spaces; and parks and gardens); 4.5sqm per person for allotments and 0.6sqm per person for children’s play areas. Playing pitch provision and/or financial contributions are to be in accordance with the Sport England Playing Pitch Calculator.

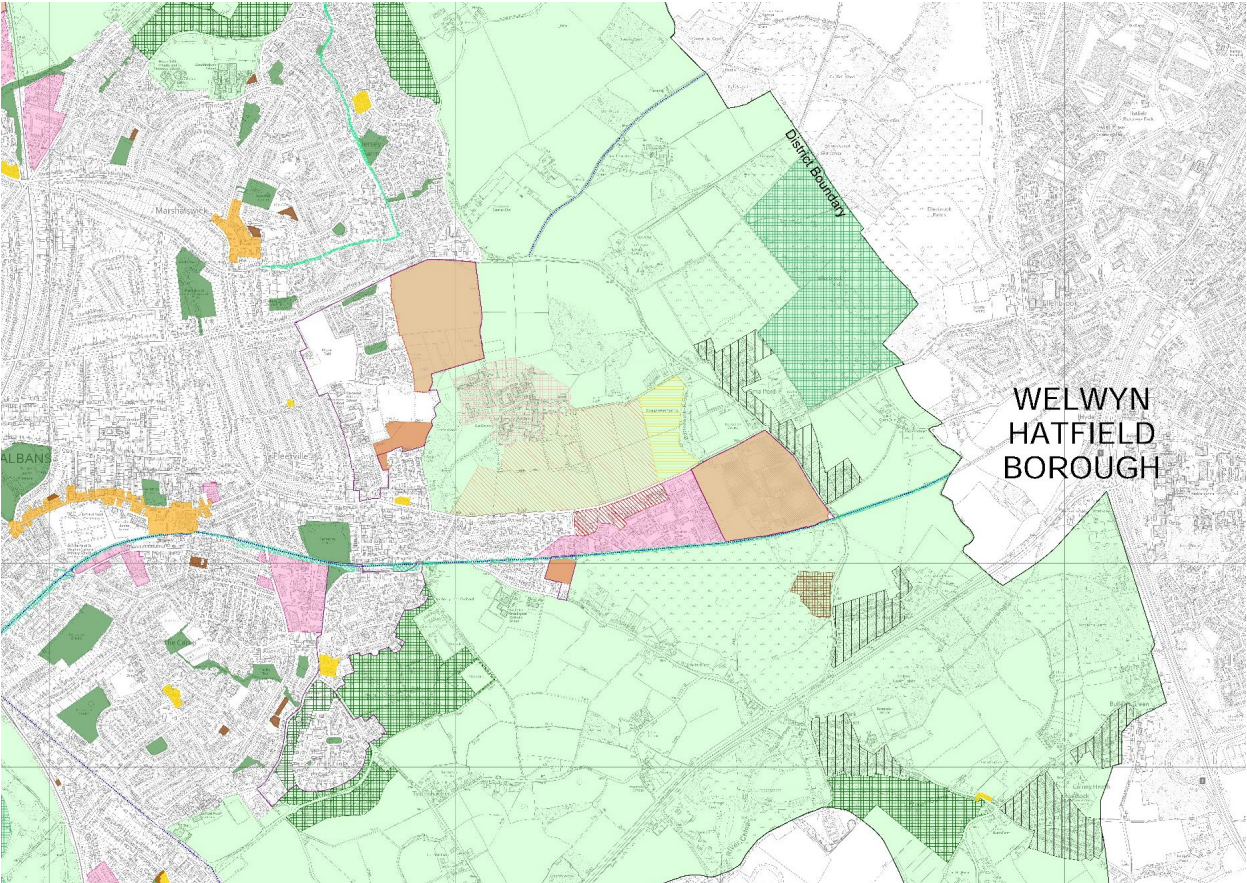


Plate 4.1: Draft Policy Map 4 extract

5.0 Landscape Character

5.1 As illustrated on Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan, the Site and Study Area are entirely within the Northern Thames Basin National Character Area (NCA), which washes over the urban settlements including St Albans and Hatfield. The Site is within the De Havilland Plain Landscape Character Area (LCA) at a more local level.

Northern Thames Basin NCA

5.2 The Northern Thames Basin NCA covers a diverse area, extending from Hertfordshire in the west to the Essex coast in the east. It is separated from the North Sea and Thames Estuary by the narrow Greater Thames Estuary NCA. The NCA contains the suburbs of North London, historic towns including St Albans; and new and planned towns, including Hatfield. Urban expansion has long been a feature of this area, with new development reducing the tranquillity in the area.

5.3 There is a wide variety of semi-natural habitats, which have broken up over time. Increases in construction and intensive farming have also caused the main changes to the NCA.

5.4 Key characteristics of the NCA include:

- *“The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys. The prominent hills and ridges of the ‘Bagshot Hills’ are notable to the northwest and extensive tracts of flat land are found in the south.*
- *Characteristic of the area is a layer of thick clay producing heavy, acidic soils, resulting in retention of considerable areas of ancient woodland.*
- *Areas capped by glacial sands and gravels have resulted in nutrient-poor, free-draining soils which support remnant lowland heathlands, although these are now small. Areas that have alluvial deposits present are well drained and fertile.*
- *The water bearing underlying Chalk beds are a main source of recharge for the principal London Basin Chalk aquifer.*
- *A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea, and slightly steeper valleys of the rivers Stour, Colne and Roman. Numerous springs rise at the base of the Bagshot Beds and several reservoirs are dotted throughout the area*
- *The pattern of woodlands is varied across the area and includes considerable ancient semi-natural woodland. Hertfordshire is heavily wooded in some areas as are parts of Essex, while other areas within Essex are more open in character. Significant areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are also present.*
- *The field pattern is very varied across the basin reflecting historical activity. Informal patterns of 18th-century or earlier enclosure reflect medieval colonisation of the heaths. Regular planned enclosures dating from the Romano-British period are a subtle but nationally important feature*

on the flat land to the south-east of the area. In the Essex heathlands 18th- and 19th-century enclosure of heathlands and commons followed by extensive 20th-century field enlargement is dominant.

- *Mixed farming, with arable land predominating in the Hertfordshire plateaux, parts of the London Clay lowlands and Essex heathlands. Grasslands are characteristic of the river valleys throughout. Horticulture and market gardening are found on the light, sandy soils of former heaths in Essex, particularly around Colchester, along with orchards, meadow pasture and leys following numerous narrow rivers and streams.*
- *The diverse range of semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, lowland heath and floodplain grazing marsh and provide important habitats for a wide range of species including great crested newt, water vole, dormouse and otter.*
- *Rich archaeology including sites related to Roman occupation, with the Roman capital at Colchester and City of St Albans (Verulamium) and links to London. Landscape parklands surrounding 16th- and 17th-century rural estates and country houses built for London merchants are a particular feature in Hertfordshire.*
- *The medieval pattern of small villages and dispersed farming settlement remains central to the character of parts of Hertfordshire and Essex. Market towns have expanded over time as have the London suburbs and commuter settlements, with the creation of new settlements such as the pioneering garden city at Welwyn and the planned town at Basildon.*
- *Brick-built dwellings are characteristic from the late 17th century onwards. Prior to this dwellings and farm buildings tended to be timber built with weatherboarding, now mainly painted white but traditionally black or tarred, and whitewashed plaster walls."*

5.5 The Northern Thames Basin of today is described as being a large and diverse landscape, with an overarching character of agricultural land, interspersed with woodland. There are several distinct areas, including the Hertfordshire plateaux and river valleys, to the north-west, within which the Site is located, which are *"high, broad arable plateaux divided by wooded and pastured valleys which have a mainly rural feel"*. The plateaux are predominantly in arable use, with the valleys being more intimate in character and containing areas of pasture. The valleys contain all the main settlements within the area.

5.6 Drivers for landscape change include the urban edges moving towards London, and the existing lack of network connectivity make habitats more vulnerable.

5.7 The Statements of Environmental Opportunity include:

- *"SEO 3 Protect and appropriately manage the historic environment for its contribution to local character and sense of identity and as a framework for habitat restoration and sustainable development, ensuring high design standards (particularly in the London Green Belt) which respect the open and built character of the Thames Basin. Enhance and increase access*

between rural and urban areas through good green infrastructure links to allow local communities recreational, health and wellbeing benefits. For example by:

- *Creating better access to the countryside with an increased number of public footpaths and rights of way so that more of the area is open Enhancing current public access paths would also be beneficial to make the experience of the countryside more inviting and enjoyable.*
- *Restoring the connectivity of key habitats as well as expanding and creating new habitats which will maintain and enhance their attraction for Also, working to increase species diversity and density to increase this attraction for the community.*
- *Preserving the open landscape, enhancing geodiversity and biodiversity, for example the iconic species and habitats that attract visitors, to preserve their appeal to the wider community.*
- *Increasing awareness and raising understanding within the community of the natural environment to improve their appreciation of their landscape so as to help to enhance their experience. This will also help to instil a sense of place.*
- *Ensuring positive management of land that may be developed in the future to preserve the character of the area and not adversely affect the rural areas that provide many resources, including food provision, carbon sequestration and recreation for the rural and urban communities.”*
- *“SEO 4 Manage and expand the significant areas of broadleaf woodland and wood pasture, and increase tree cover within urban areas, for the green infrastructure links and important habitats that they provide, for the sense of tranquillity they bring, their ability to screen urban influences and their role in reducing heat island effect and sequestering and storing carbon. For example by:*
 - *Promoting the establishment of a coherent and resilient network of treescapes (native woodland, wood pasture, parkland, coppice, scrub, field trees and hedgerows) through expanding and linking existing woodland with areas of new planting.*
 - *Managing the area’s diverse range of historic woodlands, veteran trees and wood pasture and parklands to enhance landscape character and safeguard their biodiversity value while seeking opportunities to enhance access.*
 - *Expanding current woodlands to create a greater resource and re- introduce coppicing and other management back into woodlands so as to make wood available to be sold commercially.*

- *Creating new woodlands around or near to urban areas, which will, through carbon sequestration, help to counteract the carbon that is produced. Woodlands within urban areas will help to reduce the heat island effect.”*

De Havilland Plain Landscape Character Area

- 5.8 Hertfordshire Landscape Character Area Statements for St Albans District were prepared between 2000 & 2005. The Statement for De Havilland Plain identifies the area as running from Cromerhyde in the north, southwards across Hatfield Aerodrome, and up to the grounds of Oaklands College on the edge of St Albans.
- 5.9 The LCA is described as being an area dominated and unified by level topography with a diverse mix of uses and an incoherent pattern. To the north, arable cropping dominates, with the associated open views and limited vegetation; to the centre, the area is influenced by the disused aerodrome and new business park, with the associated visually dominant structures and areas of existing and redundant mineral extraction; and to the south there is a mix of extraction and urban fringe development and Oaklands College, resulting in a disjointed and mixed character. There is generally poor access within and to the area.
- 5.10 Key characteristics of the LCA include:
- *“an extensive level plain*
 - *large open arable landscape to the north on high quality agricultural land*
 - *disused Hatfield aerodrome with associated industrial and commercial development and aeronautical structures*
 - *parkland and horticultural landscape of Oaklands College*
 - *existing and restored mineral workings*
 - *urban-fringe development and glasshouses*
 - *incoherent and jumbled landscape, particularly to the south and centre”*
- 5.11 Distinctive features include Oaklands College house, restored arable fields and mineral extraction plant.
- 5.12 The land form of the LCA comprises of a virtually flat plain, representing a subtle watershed between the Colne and the Lea, with levels varying by as little as 2-3m over 6km. The land rises locally to the west and the south. The LCA is typically around 80m AOD, falling to 70m AOD at Ellenbrook and rising up to 100m AOD within the undulating grounds of Oaklands College on the edge of St Albans.
- 5.13 The area is drained by a number of streams, including Butterwick Brook. The streams flow slowly to the east to connect with the River Colne in the south, or to the River Lea in the north-east.
- 5.14 Land cover is varied. To the north, land cover is dominated by arable cropping. The airfield site to the centre comprises extensive areas of grassland and considerable built development. Oaklands College has a mix of land uses, including a small area of parkland.

- 5.15 There is very limited woodland cover. Home Wood is ancient natural oak/ hornbeam woodland. There are some younger plantings associated with mineral restoration sites, as well as flooded gravel pits, scrub and marshland habitats. There are few hedgerows except to some of the roads, where they have often grown out.
- 5.16 Historical and cultural influences include small parcels of pre-18th century enclosure; sinuous secondary roads; and a dispersed estate settlement pattern with isolated farmsteads. Oaklands College is centred on the Victorian house (1888) and modest parkland. To the east, the area is defined by the western edge of Hatfield, including the large aircraft hangers and residential areas at Hatfield Garden Village. Retail, horticultural and industrial premises dominate to the south of Oaklands.
- 5.17 With respect to visual and sensory perception, the LCA is described as being a largely open and exposed landscape, with a private and remote feel in places. It is clearly visible from elevated locations outside the area. Within the area, there are views of the arable landscape from the local roads, including Coopers Green Lane and Green Lane. To the middle, tall hedges, crude earth bunds and modern built development restrict or frame views of this “*rather incoherent landscape*”. Within Oaklands many of the views are described as being contained.
- 5.18 The major intrusive built elements within the area are the Hatfield Business Park warehouses. Other significant features include the former De Havilland flight sheds and control tower; the batching plant on Oaklands Lane, glasshouses and nurseries. There is a sense of semi-dereliction and poor management across much of the area.
- 5.19 There are few rights of way across the area, partly due to past aviation uses.

SADC Local Plan Site Appraisals: B4

- 5.20 The St Albans Local Plan Site Assessments identifies B4 as being well related to the existing settlement edge and overlapping and coalescing with Oakland College and its associated grounds, which are open. Open North Drive forms the eastern edge. There are no existing buildings or settlements within the Site. In terms of the visual baseline, the landform is relatively flat, sloping from south to north, and there are open views across the site and the open area to the east.
- 5.21 The potential development effects of B4 could affect the open landscape character; the small copse in the north-east corner of the Site; Home Wood to the south; existing field / site boundary hedgerows and trees; and the rural character of Sandpit Lane. The development of the Site could also affect the coherence of Oaklands College and its setting. A Large Area TPO is across the whole site. With respect to visual amenity, development of the Site could affect the visual amenity of users of the bridleway Sandridge 051 along North Drive; receptors at Oaklands College; and residents of St Albans to the north and west.
- 5.22 Mitigation and enhancement potential for the Site includes responding to context and character; retaining and protecting important landscape features and views; creating multifunctional green/blue infrastructure and open space networks for people and/or wildlife; and providing new structural native planting.

5.23 Specific site measures include:

- *“The site is defined by the existing settlement edge to the north and west, and North Drive provides a logical limit to the extension of development eastwards. In addition, development here would mirror the extent of development on the other (northern) side of Sandpit Lane.*
- *To the south, the site overlaps a distinct group of smaller field enclosures associated with Oaklands College. Opportunity to create new woodland along eastern and southern site boundaries to link with copse (in northeast corner of site) and Home Wood (to the south of the site) and redefine setting of Oaklands College.*
- *Assess and mitigate impact on views from the wider area to the southeast (East Drive), in particular new eastern and southern settlement edges - create new robust landscape buffer to Green Belt.*
- *Consider opportunity for links with wider network of green infrastructure routes and assets such as open space in neighbouring development at Osprey Drive and Verulam playing fields beyond, Oaklands College, and Alban Way beyond.”*

6.0 Site Appraisal

- 6.1 Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan illustrates the extent of the Site, and land within College ownership, and its character and features. The Site comprises an area of approximately 130.8 hectares (ha). The Site comprises the Oaklands College Campus and some of the open fields surrounding the Campus; and includes North and East Drive, part of South Drive and Hatfield Road, incorporates part of Sandpit Lane; and a number of linear corridors around the periphery of Oaklands College.
- 6.2 The Site is very gently undulating, with a subtle local ridgeline extending into the Site from Oaklands Grange to the west and extending east beyond the Site. This falls from a high point of approximately 95m AOD on the north-western boundary of the Site. To the north of the local ridgeline, the Site falls towards the Sandpit Lane, to the north-east, falling to approximately 78m AOD at the north-eastern corner of Oaklands Blossom, and 77m AOD in the north-eastern corner of the Site.

Tree Survey

- 6.3 The Tree Survey, carried out in 2025, identified the trees, tree groups, hedges and woodland within the Site. To the north, the trees and vegetation are largely confined to the field boundaries, with the occasional open grown tree. To the south, within and immediately adjacent to the College campus, the density of trees increases, with high quantities of trees within the campus. High Quality Category A trees are generally located within the central part of the Site, and are predominantly Oak. Many of the trees within the Site are Category B, being of Moderate Quality.
- 6.4 The Tree Survey identified a total of 222 individual trees and tree groups within the Site and its periphery. Tree species are varied, but common species include Oak, Field Maple, Sycamore, Ash, Beech, Poplar, Cherry, Lime, Willow, Horse Chestnut, Birch, Hawthorn and Alder; and there are species associated with Mansion House former parkland, such as Sequoia, Eucalyptus and Cypress.
- 6.5 Wooded areas are located to the east and west of the Site. The Site is covered by a site-wide TPO, reference TPO1474 (A1) from 2008. Home Wood, to the west of the Site is designated as Ancient Woodland.

Preliminary Ecological Survey

- 6.6 The Preliminary Ecological Survey (PEA) identified the main habitat within the Site and land within ownership as modified grassland, associated with the pastoral grazing (horses, sheep and llamas) and recreational use (sports pitches and amenity grassland). The College Campus at the centre of the Site includes substantial areas of developed land, including existing buildings and sealed surfaces comprising paved courtyards, roads, parking courts and footpaths.

- 6.7 Distinctive habitats within the Site include an area of wood-pasture and parkland, associated with the former designed landscape of Mansion House. A small area of traditional orchard is present on the Site, between Home Wood and the College Campus.
- 6.8 There are a number of native hedgerows within the Site, although they are not sufficiently diverse to be considered species rich. In less actively managed parts of the Site, bramble scrub, mixed scrub, willow scrub and ruderal or ephemeral vegetation were recorded.
- 6.9 Eight ponds were identified within the land within ownership, although they supported limited vegetation. Three of the ponds were associated with woodland blocks, with the remaining five located in the vicinity of the College campus.
- 6.10 Urban trees within the Site range in age from immature trees that have been recently planted through to large and mature trees. There are lines of trees associated with field boundaries and along roads. Five blocks of other lowland mixed deciduous woodland were identified across the Site. Home Wood is a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and ancient semi-natural woodland notable for woodland flora, to the south-west of the Site, and within the College ownership. Oaklands Wood LWS lies to the east of the Site, and is designated for supporting ancient woodland habitat, including ponds.

Oaklands College

- 6.11 The Oaklands College Campus has evolved over time in a somewhat piecemeal manner, with a historic core around the Mansion House and garden, and expanding out to the north, west and east. There are a number of key landscape features within the Campus, including remnants of the historic landscape in the form of a parkland landscape and walled garden, with several Category A specimen trees scattered around the Campus and its perimeter, and Home Wood, an Ancient Woodland and LWS. Parts of East Drive and South Drive are lined by avenue trees and there is an orchard to the west of the Campus.
- 6.12 The built form of the College is a mix of styles, with the majority of the education buildings dating back to the late 1950s. The College grounds are accessed via two roads: South Drive off Hatfield Road; and East Drive off Oaklands Lane; and via a path along North Drive. North and South Drive are bridleways, and East Drive is currently a PRoW, but is to be upgraded to a bridleway as part of the Oaklands Grange development proposals. There is no vehicular access along North Drive.
- 6.13 Home Wood LWS, a semi-natural ancient woodland, lies to the south-west of the Site, within College ownership, and Oaklands Wood LWS, an old broadleaf woodland, lies to the east of the Site. The entire Oaklands College grounds is subject to a blanket TPO.

- 6.14 There are no listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments within the College grounds. The majority of the grounds are within Flood Zone 1, with the exception of Boggymead Spring to the south-east. Overland flooding routes affect parts of the Site.

Oaklands Blossom

- 6.15 The Oaklands Blossom site is located in the north-western fields immediately adjacent to Orchards Grove and south of Jersey Farm and Sandpitt Lane. Oaklands Blossom comprises fallow fields and horse paddocks, and a former nursery area that is used for open air storage and has become overgrown. There are informal routes around the B4 Site used by horse riders within the College, and by local walkers.
- 6.16 North Drive, a bridleway, forms the eastern edge of the B4 Site, although this boundary is predominantly open, with some mixed vegetation along the perimeter to the south-east. A mature belt of closely planted and uniform trees is a key feature within the Site, subdividing the larger open field from the smaller paddocks and former nursery to the south.
- 6.17 A small copse of native trees is located on the north-east corner of the Site, along a drainage ditch that feeds into Butterwick Brook beyond the Site. Mixed outgrown hedgerow and hedgerow trees line Sandpitt Lane on the northern edge of the B4 Site.
- 6.18 A vegetated embankment separates the B4 Site and Oaklands Grange to the west, with a mix of trees along the field boundary. To the south of the central tree belt, the western boundary is more open, defined by residential properties and open space at Oaklands Grange.
- 6.19 To the south, Home Wood and mature tree belts contain the B4 Site, with an access track to the south-east, and paddocks beyond.

7.0 Visual Appraisal

- 7.1 A visual appraisal was undertaken, based on the baseline review of the Site and its context, from publicly accessible viewpoints. Visual receptors are people, and consideration was given to the different ways in which people are likely to experience views of the Site, including residents, commuters, people engaged in recreation and tourists visiting the area for its scenic qualities and visitor attractions.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

- 7.2 Figure 5: Zone of Theoretical Visibility illustrates the zones of theoretical visibility (ZTV) of the proposed residential development within the Site to the north-west and the proposed new buildings within the College Campus. The ZTV is based on a bare earth model and therefore reflects a worst case scenario that does not include existing buildings, infrastructure or vegetation.

Visual Appraisal

- 7.3 Site visits were carried out in January, April and June 2025. 23 representative viewpoint have been selected to illustrate the landscape and visual baseline (Appendix 2), which were agreed with SACDC and HCC.
- 7.4 Site Context Photographs 1 and 2 illustrate views from Sandpit Lane and Oaklands Grange to the north-west of the Site. The outgrown hedgerow and tree belt along the northern and western boundaries of the Site filter views into the Site itself. The landform within the Site falls towards the north-east, and is therefore partially screened by the rising landform around the Sandpit Lane and Barnfield Road intersection. The existing built form of Oaklands Grange screens the majority of the Site. The Site is seen in the context of the existing houses, including Jersey Farm, along Sandpit Lane to the north of the Site.
- 7.5 Moving south into Oaklands Grange, Site Context Photograph 3 is taken from the Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) on Osprey Drive, looking east towards the Site. This represents a slightly elevated view from the central open space through Oaklands Grange. Existing built form screens views into the majority of the Site, including of Oaklands College Campus. Existing trees and a small woodland block within Oaklands Grange filter views into the Site, even in winter, when the vegetation is relatively open. Where glimpsed views into the Site are possible, it is seen against the backdrop of rising ground and woodland to the north-east and east, respectively.
- 7.6 Site Context Photographs 4, 5 and 6 illustrate sequential views from North Drive Bridleway 051, travelling along the eastern boundary of Oaklands Blossom. The existing bridleway is an unsurfaced vehicle-free path, used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. There are predominantly open views into Oaklands Blossom and the College Campus from North Drive. The College Campus is seen beyond existing grazing fields and paddocks, with a mix of buildings set within a well-treed landscape. Within Oaklands Blossom, the regular, densely spaced tree belt screens the southern part of Oaklands Blossom. Views across the Oaklands Blossom Site are contained by the houses on

Oaklands Grange, which are slightly elevated relative to the Site. Views into the southern part of Oaklands Blossom are more screened by a mix of outgrown hedgerow and regenerated vegetation within the former nursery area.

- 7.7 Site Context Photograph 7 illustrates a view from within Oaklands Blossom, north of the tree belt. The field is a simple, open grassland field, contained by existing vegetation along the western boundary and along Sandpit Lane to the north. There are mix of backs and sides, with occasional frontage, along the western boundary within Oaklands Grange.
- 7.8 Site Context Photograph 8 is taken from the paddocks track on the southern edge of Oaklands Blossom. The northern edge of Home Wood encloses the south-eastern edge of Oaklands Blossom. The tree belt within Oaklands Blossom is a distinctive feature on the skyline, with mixed vegetation associated with the former nursery.
- 7.9 Site Context Photographs 9, 10 and 11 illustrate views from within the College Campus. Site Context Photograph 9 illustrates the main arrival into the Campus along South Drive. Mature avenue trees line the route, which passes through Home Wood, which can be seen to the west of South Drive (left of the view). Existing vegetation filter views of the Homestead and Mansion House, even in winter when the vegetation is generally bare of leaves and relatively open. Site Context Photograph 10 is taken from South Drive where it arrives into the Central Square of the College. This space is currently dominated by roads and parking, and loosely defined by a mix of one and two storey buildings. When arriving into the College Campus along East Drive, views open up beyond the existing residential house and are predominantly of the existing sports pitches and sports zone, as illustrated by Site Context Photograph 11.
- 7.10 Site Context Photographs 12 and 13 illustrate sequential views towards the College Campus from East Drive and PRoW 004. The views illustrate the physical and visual enclosure provided by the existing roadside hedgerows and mature avenue trees. Residential properties line the eastern end of East Drive.
- 7.11 A permissive footpath links East Drive and Hatfield Road on the eastern edge of the Site, adjacent to Boggymead Spring and Butterwick Brook. There are open views towards the College Campus from the footpath. The College Campus is seen against the backdrop of Home Wood, and scattered trees of varied ages and species create a wooded setting for the Campus buildings, in contrast with the open fields that surround the campus, as illustrated by Site Context Photograph 14.
- 7.12 Views of the Site from Hatfield Road are generally limited to the vegetated periphery of the Site, with a hedgerow and a mix of mature and recently planted trees defining the southern boundary of the College. Views are more open in winter, when the vegetation is barer. Where there are views into the Site, there are occasional glimpsed views of Mansion House, as illustrated by Site Context Photograph 16, seen beyond the surrounding open fields along Hatfield Road. To the west, views into the Site are more heavily screened by Home Wood.
- 7.13 The relatively flat nature of the landscape, combined with layers of vegetation, result in limited views of the Site from the surrounding landscape. Site Context Photograph 18 illustrates a rare transient open view towards the

Site from Bridleway 001 where there is a break in the hedgerow. Views of the existing buildings within Oaklands Campus are screened by Oaklands Wood. There is a glimpsed view into part of the Oaklands Blossom Site, seen in the context of existing properties at Jersey Farm.

- 7.14 Site Context Photograph 19 illustrates a view towards the Site from the field access off Oaklands Lane, to the west of the CEMEX Hatfield Concrete Plant. Views into the Site from Oaklands Lane itself are screened by outgrown hedgerows along the road, as seen to the right of the view. Within the open field, Oaklands Blossom is visible in the foreground of Oaklands Grange, which extends along the gently rising landform, seen on the skyline. An existing field boundary hedgerow partially screens views into the Site. To the south, the Oaklands College campus is screened by Oaklands Wood and the gently undulating landform.
- 7.15 Site Context Photograph 20 is taken from Coopers Green, at the entrance to Oak House, looking south. This illustrates the enclosed nature of the hedgerow-lined lanes around the Site. Where glimpses of the Site are possible, it is seen in the context of the existing settlement edge of St Albans at Oaklands Grange and Jersey Farm.
- 7.16 In the immediate vicinity of the Site, the varied vegetation along Sandpit Lane enables some views into the Site, as illustrated by Site Context Photograph 21. North Drive is an open footpath off Sandpit Lane, adjacent to a woodland copse on the north-eastern corner of Oaklands Blossom. Views into Oaklands Blossom are screened by existing vegetation and houses.
- 7.17 Site Context Photographs 22 and 23 represent slightly elevated views from PRoW to the north-east of the Site, on the periphery of St Albans. The gentle local ridgeline that runs through the Site is legible from these open views. The Oaklands Blossom Site is seen between the houses on Jersey Farm, with the houses on the eastern edge of Oaklands Grange visible on the skyline beyond. The buildings within Oaklands College Campus are visible on the wooded skyline to the south (left of the view), including the large form of Mansion House.
- 7.18 As illustrated by the visual appraisal, views of the Site are very localised due to the relatively flat and well-treed nature of the Site's context.
- 7.19 Views into the Site from houses immediately adjacent, including at Oaklands Grange, north of Sandpit Lane, along East Drive, and south of Hatfield Road, are generally filtered or entirely screened, by existing vegetation. Only a small number of houses are oriented with views towards the Site. Where there are views into the Oaklands Blossom Site, the Site is seen in the context of the existing settlement edge of St Albans.
- 7.20 As a result of the visual appraisal, the visual receptors likely to experience significant visual effects as a result of the Proposed Development are very limited and include:
- A small number of residents of properties in the immediate vicinity of the Site;
 - Users of Bridleways and PRoW within the Site;
 - Users of open space in the immediate vicinity of the Site, at Oaklands Grange;
 - Receptors within Oaklands College Campus, including students, teachers and visitors; and

- Users of Sandpit Lane, Hatfield Road and Oaklands Lane.

7.21 No significant visual effects are anticipated for users of PRoW outwith the Site, due to the very transient and glimpsed nature of views, and the existing urban context of the Site in these views.

8.0 The Proposed Development

8.1 The description of the Proposed Development for the hybrid planning application is:

“A Hybrid planning application for a severable phased development comprising:

- *Full planning application for the construction of homes (use class C3); new local centre and community facility (use classes E(a to f) and F); a children’s home (use class C2); demolition and renovation of existing college buildings; construction of new college buildings (use class F1.); the creation of Active Travel Routes including footpaths for walking, cycling and equestrian activities; removal and planting of trees; along with the laying out of green infrastructure (including publicly accessible open space) and habitat creation; drainage infrastructure, earthworks, new means of access and alterations to existing access points.*
- *Outline planning application (access only, all other matters reserved) for the construction new homes (use class C3); new extra care home dwellings (use class C2); land for the construction of a new primary school (use class F.1); demolition and renovation of existing college buildings; construction of new college buildings (use class F1.); the construction of new sports facilities and pitches; the creation of Active Travel Routes including footpaths for walking, cycling and equestrian activities; removal and planting of trees; new energy centre; new recycling facilities; new car parking facilities; along with the laying out of green infrastructure and habitat creation; drainage infrastructure, earthworks, pedestrian and cycle routes, alterations to existing access points.*
- *The phasing of the development is indicative allowing different phases to commence at different times and independently (severable) from each other. The outline phases will be the subject of parameter plans and design codes”.*

8.2 The Illustrative Masterplan illustrates the site-wide masterplan proposals, which includes the provision of Active Travel Routes (ATRs). Details of the outline and detailed proposals are set out in the drawing packages, and described in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) and Design Codes.

Oaklands College Site - Proposals

8.3 Oaklands College is over 100 years old, and in many areas the campus environment is out of date and in poor condition, making use of structures that formed the original private estate and are poorly suited to their contemporary educational use. Some parts of the Campus have been upgraded with the construction of new buildings and a new car park to the west of the Campus, but the Proposed Development addresses the current need to replace and improve the College’s buildings and associated infrastructure.

8.4 The current landscape setting for Oaklands College has developed piecemeal since its inception, with a historic core around the mansion House and gardens. There is no one key landscape space for students and the setting has predominantly been given over to vehicles. The Proposed Development includes proposals to create a more legible, safe and uniform landscape with the creation of focal spaces and greater pedestrian priority.

Oaklands College Site – Detailed Proposals

8.5 The detailed proposals for the Oaklands College site include demolition works and renovation of existing buildings, as well as the construction of new buildings in the following zones:

- Creative Gateway
- Animal Management
- High Needs Centre
- Propellor Stage Studio
- Sports Hall & Martial Arts Centre
- Refectory and kitchen
- Estates and deliveries
- Improvements to the Mansion house
- Improvements to the Construction zone
- Improved pedestrian and vehicular routes, car park
- External learning and recreation landscaping

Oaklands College Site – Outline Proposals

8.6 The outline proposals for the Oaklands College site include the construction of a new energy centre, a new waste and recycling facility, and new external sports pitches and tracks, including:

- Covered Cricket lanes
- Cricket Pavilion
- Cricket Pitch
- Games courts
- All weather Rugby pitch
- Athletics track and field
- Cycle centre, pump track and skate park
- Hockey/ Cycle/ Athletics Pavilion

8.7 The net increase in education related floorspace on the Site equates to approximately +9,673 sqm and is estimated to be a 26.4% increase in floorspace. This comprises an existing Campus Area floor space of 36,686 sqm, with a total new build of 16,670 sqm and total demolition of 6,997 sqm. An increased parking of 155 car parking bays; 115 cycle parking spaces; and 6 coach parking bays is proposed, with a new parking lot proposed off East Drive to the east of the Campus Area.

Oaklands College Site – Landscape Proposals

8.8 In addition to the new and renovated buildings, the Proposed Development includes landscape proposals to improve access, drainage and SuDS, meet ecological requirements and enhance the public realm. Several new

external spaces are proposed, generally associated with the proposed buildings, as well as a series of ATRs. The landscape proposals include:

- Creation of legible routes, with greater pedestrian priority through the campus, including the creation of College Street and a pedestrianised core;
- Creation of designated gathering spaces, including three key spaces at College Square, the Sports Plaza, and High Needs plaza;
- Proposed planting responding to the different character and typologies of the different parts of the Campus;
- Sustainable drainage proposals including rain gardens, swales and attenuation basins; and
- Planting of 556 new trees and a proposed orchard.

Oaklands Blossom - Proposals

8.9 Oaklands Blossom will deliver 472 new homes, a new local centre, an extra care facility, open space, college improvements and new college facilities, along with new ATRs and other local infrastructure requested by the local community, SACDC, Sandridge Parish Council and HCC and the Ramblers Association, including:

- Commercial and community floorspace within the new local centre;
- A 4-bedroom children's home; and
- An extra care home containing up to 70 new dwellings.

Oaklands Blossom - Detailed Proposals

8.10 The detailed proposals for Phase 1 of Oaklands Blossom includes the following:

- Up to 167 homes;
- A children's home;
- New Local Centre; and
- Provision of open space, including SuDS basins, a locally equipped area of play (LEAP) and local areas of play (LAPs) and amenity planting.

Oaklands Blossom - Outline Proposals

8.11 The detailed proposals for Phase 1 of Oaklands Blossom includes the following:

- Up to 305 homes;
- Up to 70 Extra Care homes;
- Land for a new primary school; and
- Provision of open space.

Site-Wide Proposals

Active Travel Route Improvements (within the Site)

8.12 Improvements to the ATRs within the Site are proposed in order to help safeguard the pupils at the College; deliver better quality, direct, safe and permeable access to and through the Site for the surrounding community and future occupiers of and visitors to the Site; and to help support health and well-being of the local community and provide convenient access to local facilities. The improvement and connections have been designed to help deliver HCCs enhancements of the movement network. The improvements include:

- Upgrading parts of North Drive, South Drive and East Drive to meet HCC's guidance for Bridleways, which includes surfaced pedestrian and cycle paths and an unsurfaced bridleway for horse riders;
- Creating new ATRs through Oaklands Blossom and the College. These routes will meet HCC's guidance for Bridleways and will provide new access routes around the College campus; and
- Two new permissive footpaths are also proposed along the northern boundary, parallel to Sandpit Lane, and connecting south onto East Drive; and along the southern boundary of the College's land, running parallel to Hatfield Road. These will take the form of new informal rambling routes. These routes will remain as rural land and will not be the subject of hardstanding.

8.13 The existing PRoW through Oaklands College campus will remain in place as a key route of access to College facilities, however the proposal is to re-designate these as Permissive Routes. This will address safeguarding issues associated with unfettered public access through the campus. The College will retain the right to close these permissive routes during college opening hours and during events at which young people may be in attendance. These permissive routes will be open to use by the public during the evenings and weekends, with the ATRs diverting around the campus remaining open to the public at all times, so the connectivity between Hatfield Road, Sandpit Lane and Oaklands Lane will remain and be enhanced.

8.14 The procedure for PRoW diversion is separate to that of planning permission, and therefore a separate application(s) may be made in due course. This application for planning permission is, therefore, submitted without prejudice to the College seeking to mitigate the safeguarding hazard by means of formal diversion(s) of PRoW to the new ATRs and this forms part of the movement strategy for the Site.

Landscape & Visual Mitigation and Biodiversity Net Gain Strategy

8.15 The Proposed Development has been designed to incorporate landscape and visual mitigation measures and to deliver the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) strategy. Key principles that have been incorporated into the detailed and outline proposals include:

- The retention of important landscape features, wherever possible, including trees, tree belts and hedgerows, incorporating them into the proposed open space and habitat network;
- Proposed planting and enhancement of existing habitats to be retained to enhance biodiversity and habitat connectivity within the Site and the surrounding landscape features;
- Safeguarding Home Wood and Oaklands Wood through the creation of landscape buffers, setting development back from the existing woodland and incorporating habitat rich ecotones to the woodland edges;
- The creation of enhanced habitat corridors incorporating existing landscape features and SuDS to create multifunctional corridors that provide habitat and visual amenity, and enhanced access through the Site;
- The creation of new and enhanced walking, cycling and equestrian routes and enabling strategic connections beyond the Site including to the Alban Way, Jersey Lane and Osprey Drive;
- Reinforcing the well-treed character of the College Campus, in contrast with the surrounding open fields, through new and successional tree planting; and
- Reinstating and restoring native hedgerows and hedgerow trees to restore the fine grain of the landscape character, whilst maintaining key open views.

Indicative Phasing and Programme

- 8.16 An indicative delivery programme has been prepared, which anticipates decant and demolition works within the College Campus commencing in 2026/2027, along with some infrastructure upgrades and construction of the Energy Centre (outline phase). Construction within Oaklands Blossom is likely to commence in 2027/2028. Completion of the proposed development is anticipated in 2033/2034.

Landscape Strategy

- 8.17 The DAS and Design Codes set out the landscape proposals for Phase 1 of the Proposed Development and the landscape strategy for the outline proposals and the landscape mitigation and BNG strategy within the land within ownership. This LVIA is based on the assumption that the following principles will be implemented:
- Retain and enhance the existing trees and hedgerows wherever possible to safeguard landscape features that contribute positively to the local landscape character and improve the screening and containment of the Site.
 - Buffers and set-backs are to be created to existing woodland to allow for the retention of existing woodland and the creation of enhanced habitat buffers along woodland blocks.
 - The use of native species and species that support pollinators should be encouraged wherever possible and appropriate.

- A habitat corridor is proposed along the surface water flood route through the Site, supporting semi-natural planting, to provide a soft transition between the proposed homes at Oaklands Blossom and the College Campus, and reinforcing the treed setting of Oaklands College Campus.
- A habitat corridor is proposed along the western edge of Oaklands College Campus, as an enhanced buffer to Home Wood, and providing a safe setting for the proposed ATR.
- SuDS infrastructure is to be designed to incorporate a range of drainage solutions, including rain gardens, swales, dry SuDS basins and wet SuDS ponds. These should be designed as integrated elements within the wider open space network, to enhance their visual amenity, recreational and habitat value, wherever possible.

Oaklands Blossom

- Trees are proposed along Sandpit Lane to create a well-treed open space that provides filtered views of the Proposed Development when arriving into / departing from St Albans, and to replace trees removed to accommodate access and sight lines.
- The open space along Sandpit Lane is to be designed to create an attractive gateway into St Albans, and a habitat corridor that supports enhanced connectivity.
- The central tree belt is to be retained as a key feature within a central open space, with tree removed to accommodate access and vegetation to be cleared, and canopies to be lifted, where appropriate to create enhance the tree belt and the proposed open space.
- A low mixed native hedgerow and informally spaced trees are to be provided along the eastern boundary of Oaklands Blossom to create an attractive settlement edge that is in keeping with local character.

8.18 Appendix 4: Wireline Visualisations illustrate the massing and location of the Proposed Development as seen from 10 representative Viewpoints:

- VP01: View from Sandpit Lane, at Barnfield Road intersection
- VP04: View from North Drive Bridleway 051, opposite Oaklands Blossom
- VP06: View from North Drive Bridleway 051, through Oaklands College
- VP09: View from South Drive Bridleway 003
- VP10: View from Oaklands College Square
- VP11: View from East Drive PRoW 004
- VP14: View from footpath along Boggymead on eastern boundary of Site
- VP16: View from Hatfield Road A1057, opposite PRoW 011 to Alban Way
- VP21: View from footpath between Sandpit Lane and House Lane
- VP22: View from PRoW 010, off Nashes Farm Lane

9.0 Likely Landscape and Visual Effects

- 9.1 The Proposed Development will introduce new built form and associated infrastructure and open space into the Site, resulting in the loss of open fields or their change in use from pastoral and paddocks to built form or recreational uses. The Proposed Development comprises of new residential development within the Oaklands Blossom Site, and new educational buildings and infrastructure within Oaklands College Campus.
- 9.2 The residential development in the north-western part of the Site will effectively be an infilling of the existing settlement edge of St Albans, bound by Oaklands Grange to the west and Jersey Farm to the north, replacing a large open field, horse paddocks and a former nursery area. Residentially-led built development will be introduced into the Oaklands Blossom Site, including open space that incorporates ATRs and leisure routes, formal and informal play, SuDS and existing and proposed planting. Overall, there will be a change from open fields to built development, although this would be in keeping with the existing urban context, and built development is set back from Sandpit Lane, North Drive and Oaklands Grange.
- 9.3 The Proposed Development within the Oaklands College Campus will include the demolition and renovation of existing buildings, and the construction of new buildings. In addition to the proposed buildings, there are proposals for new sports pitches, tracks, and courts; and landscape proposals to upgrade and improve the public realm of the College. Overall, there will be an increase in built form and massing within the campus.
- 9.4 Throughout the Site, existing trees will be removed to accommodate the Proposed Development, including access and associated sight lines; new built form; and services. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) identifies that a total of 35 individual trees and tree groups will be removed and 16 tree groups will be partially removed to accommodate the Proposed Development. No Category A trees will be removed, with six Category B trees removed and 5 Category B tree groups partially removed, the remaining trees are Category C, with 1 Category U tree identified to be removed. As a result of the Proposed Development, 34 trees will be removed, with 17 tree groups partially removed out of 222 survey items. Over 850 new trees and 7,500sqm of woodland will be planted as a result of the detailed and outline proposals. Whilst the landscape proposals include tree and woodland planting to offset the loss of existing trees, in the short to medium term there will be a loss of existing canopy within the Site as a result of the Proposed Development. The removal of existing trees along Sandpit Lane to accommodate access and drainage proposals will temporarily open up views into the Site when arriving into / departing from St Albans.

Landscape Effects

- 9.5 The main landscape effects likely to arise as a result of the Proposed Development is the loss of open fields and increase of built development within the Site. This comprises a extension of the existing settlement edge into the Site, which will comprise an infilling of the settlement edge adjacent to Oaklands Grange and Sandpit Lane; and an

intensification and modernisation of Oaklands College Campus, and increased recreational use within the surrounding fields.

- 9.6 As summarised above, there will be a loss of existing trees and tree groups, particularly along Sandpit Lane, within the former nursery in Oaklands Blossom, and within the College Campus.

Northern Thames Basin NCA

- 9.7 The Northern Thames Basin NCA covers a diverse area, and urban expansion is a long established feature of the area, although there is an overarching character of agricultural land, interspersed with woodland. The valleys are identified as being more intimate in character and containing areas of pasture, and containing all the main settlements. The Site is within the more intimate, wooded and settled part of the NCA. The susceptibility of the landscape to the type of development proposed varies across the NCA, influenced by local landform, vegetation patterns and the varied relationships of different parts of the NCA to existing settlements. On balance, the susceptibility is Medium-Low.
- 9.8 A very small part of the Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Landscapes (formerly known as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) extend into the Northern Thames Basin NCA (covering less than 1% of the NCA) to the far north-east of the NCA beyond Colchester. There are a number of RPG within the NCA (2% of the NCA comprising 60 RPGs), and heritage designations reflecting the long settled nature of the area. The condition and intactness of the NCA is varied, generally fragmented by urban expansion. The tranquillity of the NCA is low in areas associated with urban centres such as the north London suburbs, and the coastal towns to the east, with disturbance associated with the main transport routes linking these centres. The landscape value of the Northern Thames NCA is considered to be Medium-Low, reflecting the diverse nature of the NCA and the broad area it covers.
- 9.9 Overall, the NCA is considered to be of Medium-Low sensitivity to the type of development proposed.
- 9.10 The Proposed Development will introduce additional development, infilling the existing settlement edge of St Albans and redeveloping and expanding built form and recreational uses at Oaklands College. The part of the NCA that will be affected is not representative of the overarching character of agricultural land, but has been modified by the Mansion House estate and educational use of the College over the past 100 years.
- 9.11 The Proposed Development will result in the loss of some an open field and paddocks and pasture, and some existing trees and tree groups. However, the Proposed Development has been designed to respect the legibility of Oaklands College Campus as a cluster of buildings and mature trees set within open fields. The Proposed Development includes proposals for better access to the countryside with increased public footpaths and restoring habitat connectivity (SEO 3). The Proposed Development includes planting of over 800 trees to offset the loss of trees to accommodate new buildings, access and servicing, and habitat corridors linking Home Wood and Oaklands Wood (SEO 4).

- 9.12 The Proposed Development will result in a limited change to the North Thames NCA, that is very localised, being contained by the surrounding landform, built form and structural vegetation and closely associated with the eastern settlement edge of St Albans. A Small magnitude of change is likely to occur at Year 1, resulting in a **Minor-Negligible adverse** level of effect, which is not significant. Over time, the proposed planting and creation of habitat corridors would result in some beneficial effects on the NCA, and a Negligible Neutral residual effect is anticipated at Year 15.

De Havilland Plain LCA

- 9.13 The De Havilland Plain LCA is described as being an area with a diverse mix of uses and incoherent pattern that is dominated and unified by the level topography. There are three distinct areas within the LCA, arable to the north; a central area influenced by the disused aerodrome, now a country park, and new business park; and the southern area with a mix of extraction and urban fringe development and Oaklands College, which result in a disjointed and mixed character. The southern part of the LCA is closely associated with St Albans, with the central area closely associated with Hatfield. The De Havilland Plain LCA is therefore considered to have Low susceptibility to the type of development proposed, particularly in the southern and central areas.
- 9.14 Access within the area is described as generally poor, and there is generally a sense of semi-dereliction and poor management. The restoration of the former aerodrome and creation of a country park is restoring the central area and improving recreational access, although the area remains distinct from the agricultural land to the north. There are limited conservation interests within the LCA. Oaklands College is not representative of the wider LCA, which is typically a largely open and exposed landscape, with views within Oaklands generally contained and experienced in the context of the mixed urban and urban fringes uses that dominate to the south of Oaklands. The LCA is considered to be of Low value, with the estate landscape of Oaklands College recognised as being of local value.
- 9.15 Overall, the De Havilland Plain LCT is considered to be of Low sensitivity to the type of development proposed.
- 9.16 The Proposed Development will increase the extent of built development within the LCA, although this is localised, with built development located immediately adjacent to the existing edge of St Albans and within the existing Oaklands College Campus. The open fields surrounding the campus will predominantly be retained, although additional recreational uses, such as a cricket pitch, playing fields and tracks will result in a change from the existing pastoral fields. The Proposed Development will result in the loss of trees, and upgrading of existing accesses, including of PRow, along with the creation of additional recreational and active travel routes. The main landscape features, including Mansion House and the surrounding mature parkland trees, the avenues along South and East Drive and the enclosing woodlands will be retained and integrated into the open space and habitat network.
- 9.17 The Proposed Development will result in a limited change to the De Havilland Plain LCT, that is contained within the enclosed Oaklands College area, on the edge of St Albans.. A Small magnitude of change is therefore likely to occur at Year 1, resulting in a **Negligible adverse** level of effect, which is not significant. Over time, the proposed

planting and creation of habitat corridors would result in some beneficial effects on the LCA, and a Negligible Neutral residual effect is anticipated at Year 15.

Visual Effects

- 9.18 The visual appraisal has identified limited potential for effects on visual amenity due to the visual enclosure and containment of the Site created by the landform, structural vegetation and existing built form. Where the Site is seen from the wider landscape, views are limited to transient partial views, where the Site is seen in the context of the existing settlement edge of St Albans, as illustrated by the representative Site Context Photographs.
- 9.19 Wireline visualisations have been prepared to illustrate the nature of views from 10 of the representative Site Context Photographs (see Appendix 4). These illustrate the position, scale and massing of the Proposed Development, in the context of the views. For the outline elements, the wireline model is based on an illustrative layout and the building heights parameters, with the detailed elements illustrating the fixed proposed heights and positions.
- 9.20 Visual effects have been assessed for the following visual receptors, based on the Proposed Development and the detail and outline proposals as set out in the Design and Access Statement and supporting plans. The likely effects on visual amenity have been assessed for the following receptors, who have been scoped into the LVA:
- A small number of residents of properties in the immediate vicinity of the Site;
 - Users of Bridleways and PRoW within the Site;
 - Users of open space in the immediate vicinity of the Site, at Oaklands Grange;
 - Receptors within Oaklands College Campus, including students, teachers and visitors; and
 - Users of Sandpit Lane, Hatfield Road and Oaklands Lane.

Residents in the immediate vicinity of the Site

- 9.21 The judgements made regarding likely visual effects on residents are based on views from the Site and publicly accessible roads and tracks, and a review of aerial maps to determine orientation and aspect.
- 9.22 The residential properties in the immediate vicinity of the Site are not within any landscape designations. Residential properties with views towards the Site generally have views out across the countryside or Oaklands College grounds, but these views are experienced in the context of the existing settlement edge of St Albans, and in the context of Sandpit Lane and Hatfield Road, for residents to the north and south of the Site. The value of views is considered to be Medium-Low, recognising that there is some local cultural association with the parkland landscape of Mansion House and the edge of settlement location.
- 9.23 Residents at home are considered to have High susceptibility to changes in visual amenity. Therefore, residents in the vicinity of the Site are considered to have Medium sensitivity to the type of development proposed.

Oaklands Grange

- 9.24 Residents of Oaklands Grange are located in the closest proximity to the Site. In the northern part of Oaklands Grange, most properties side onto the Site, with a small number of homes (approximately 5) fronting onto the

Site. A mature tree belt along the western boundary of the Site, along a sloped embankment, generally screen views into the Site, with the properties in the northern part of Oaklands Grange elevated in relation to the Site levels.

- 9.25 To the south of Oaklands Grange, the boundary with the Site is open, with no existing trees, and a number of properties are oriented towards the Site (approximately 6). Buildings fronting onto the Site are generally set back by at least 20m from the Site boundary.
- 9.26 For residents of Oaklands Grange, the Proposed Development will introduce residential development into the open field or paddocks adjacent to Oaklands Grange. Houses within Oaklands Blossom are set back by at least 20m, fronting onto the western boundary. The existing tree belt along the northern part of the Site boundary is retained and reinforced through additional planting, with proposed planting extending the tree belt to the south. The proposed habitat corridor in the southern part of the Oaklands Blossom Site will create an additional buffer in views from properties to the south of Oaklands Grange.
- 9.27 The Proposed Development will result in a change in visual amenity for up to 11 properties. For the 5 properties to the north, a Small magnitude of change is likely to occur, with a limited change in the view which is generally enclosed by existing vegetation. Residents with more open views across paddocks to the south are likely to experience a Medium-Small magnitude of change, as the open views are more strongly influenced by urban fringe uses associated with the College campus.
- 9.28 Overall, residents at Oaklands Grange are likely to experience a **Moderate-Minor to Minor adverse** level of effect at Year 1, when the Proposed Development is newly completed, which are not significant. By Year 15, the proposed planting along the western boundary will have become established and be starting to mature, and the new homes and infrastructure will have weathered and become less visually prominent. A **Minor adverse** residual effect is anticipated at Year 15.

Sandpit Lane

- 9.29 Houses fronting onto Sandpit Lane are oriented towards the Site. To the west, there are open views, from approximately 10 properties, with a tree belt to the east filtering and partially screening views of the Site further east, from approximately 4 more properties. The houses off Newgate Close generally side onto Sandpit Lane, and are set back behind a dense tree belt. A small number of houses back onto the Site, although these are deeply set back from Sandpit Lane.
- 9.30 The Proposed Development will result in amendments to Sandpit Lane, including a new pedestrian crossing, footpath, new accesses into the Site with a turning lane, and the removal of the majority of the trees and outgrown hedgerow that currently screens views into the Site. The existing trees along Sandpit Lane are predominantly outgrown hedgerows comprising Category C tree groups and trees, with 3 individual Category B trees to be removed and part of a Category B tree group to the east.

- 9.31 The Proposed Development is set back by at least 30m from Sandpit Lane, with 55m between the nearest existing and proposed residential properties. The larger built forms of the Local Centre and Extra Care Home (up to 4 storeys and 19m in height) are set back by approximately 75m, set beyond the proposed Northern Open Space and Site Gateway which will reintroduce trees and tree groups along Sandpit Lane, within a semi-natural parkland setting.
- 9.32 When the Proposed Development is newly completed, approximately 10 properties will have open views into the Site, with views of new housing and a new Local Centre. The remaining properties will have filtered views of the Proposed Development. The change in view will be experienced in the context of the existing edge of Oaklands Grange, which is visible on the skyline beyond the Site. Therefore a Medium to Small magnitude of change is likely to be experienced by up to 14 properties, resulting in a **Moderate to Minor adverse** level of effect at Year 1. A Moderate adverse level of effect is considered to be significant, although the nature of change in visual amenity is not out of keeping with an urban setting.
- 9.33 At Year 15, the proposed built form will be seen beyond an established and maturing open space that will re-establish the treed character of Sandpit Lane, that has a less derelict and unmanaged character. A **Moderate-Minor to Minor-Negligible adverse** residual effect is anticipated at Year 15, which is not significant.

Hatfield Road

- 9.34 Approximately 40 residential properties front onto Hatfield Road, with views towards the Site. Views into the Site are seen across the busy A-road, and filtered by the roadside hedgerows and tree line. Views are typically of Mansion House and associated college buildings set back beyond existing pastoral and recreational fields. The parkland woodland to the south-west of Mansion House screens views from houses to the west. The College campus is set back by over 350m from Hatfield Road.
- 9.35 The Proposed Development will result in additional built form being introduced into Oaklands College Campus, the majority of which sits beyond Mansion House, which remains the main façade facing onto Hatfield Road. The Wireline Visualisations for Viewpoint 16 illustrate the position and massing of the proposed buildings within the College Campus. In the summer, these are almost entirely screened by the roadside hedgerow and trees, although there are more open views in the winter, as illustrated by Site Context Photograph 16. Potential upgrades to the bus stop to the north of Hatfield Road would result in the removal of a section of the hedgerow, as illustrated by the AIA, although the trees beyond would be retained. This would partially open up views across the Site, although the parkland woodland would screen views of the Proposed Development.
- 9.36 The Proposed Development will therefore result in a very Small magnitude of change, and a **Minor adverse** level of effect is likely to occur at Year 1. At Year 15, the reinstated hedgerow would reinstate the roadside screening, and a **Negligible** residual effect is anticipated.

East Drive

- 9.37 There are approximately 13 residential properties along the tree lined avenue section of East Drive. The Proposed Development will introduce a new one-way road to the south of the existing road, along with an upgraded bridleway, set beyond the hedgerow that lines East Drive. For the majority of the properties, there will be a very slight change associated with the introduction of street lights along the bridleway, with the proposed road and bridleway screened by the hedgerow and trees. For the properties on the western end of East Drive, the proposed athletics track and cycle and pump track will introduce additional sport and recreation infrastructure into the views from the residential properties, and peripheral views of new buildings including the Sports Hall. Site Context Photographs 11 and 12 illustrate views from the western end of East Drive, with Visualisation for Viewpoint 11 illustrating the scale and position of the Proposed Development in the vicinity of the residential properties, although this is an oblique view from the western-most property.
- 9.38 Residents of properties on East Drive are likely to experience a Small magnitude of change, and a **Minor adverse** level of effect at Year 1, which is not Significant. A **Minor-Negligible adverse** residual effect is anticipated at Year 15.

Users of Bridleways and PRow within the Site

- 9.39 Users of bridleways and PRow within the Site may include people using North, South and East Drive to commute, but are also likely to be used by people engaged in outdoor recreation, whose attention is likely to be focussed on the landscape. They are therefore considered to have high susceptibility to changes in visual amenity. The bridleways and ProW within the Site are located on the edge of St Albans and within the grounds of Oaklands College. This introduces an urban fringe and parkland character to the countryside on the periphery of St Albans. The value of views is therefore considered to be Medium-Low, as the landscape is not designed but there is some local importance associated with the Mansion House estate and its landscape. Overall, users of bridleways and ProW within the Site are considered to have Medium sensitivity to the type of development proposed.

North Drive

- 9.40 The Proposed Development will introduce new residential built development along the western edge of North Drive bridleway, replacing open views across a pastoral field to the north, and opening up existing vegetation to the south. The Proposed Development is set back from North Drive by at least 20m, beyond a linear open space buffer that provides a low hedgerow, mixed native trees and SuDS features. Positive frontage is proposed facing onto the open space and North Drive.
- 9.41 The section of North Drive adjacent to Oaklands Blossom will be upgraded to meet HCC standards for a bridleway, with a lit and surfaced cycle and footpath of 3m and an unsurfaced equestrian path of 3m created. This will result in a change in the character of the bridleway, becoming slightly more urbanised, but also enhancing the accessibility and safety of the route and its useability by a wider range of users and throughout the seasons. To the south of Oaklands Blossom, new ATRs will provide accessible and lit alternative routes around the Campus,

liking into East Drive and South Drive. To the north, an informal permissive path is proposed along Sandpit Lane and the edge of Oaklands Wood, creating a range of informal and formal routes through Oaklands College.

- 9.42 Beyond Oaklands Blossom, North Drive will extend south into the College Campus and the new civic spaces created around the High Needs Building and Creative Gateway, terminating at College Square. The Proposed Development will enhance pedestrian priority along this route and introduce two key new buildings to the east, although public access will be restricted during College hours once this part of North Drive becomes a permissive route.
- 9.43 The Proposed Development will therefore result in a variety of different changes in visual amenity for users of North Drive, with a stronger urban fringe setting to the majority of the route, although open views across the pastoral fields will be retained, and an improved experience through the College Campus, with attractive alternative routes that skirt the campus core and are set within landscaped corridors.
- 9.44 Overall, the proposals will cause a distinct change in the view, with the composition of the view to the east, across the surrounding countryside largely unchanged, but the view towards the urban edge of St Albans having a pronounced change. A Large-Medium magnitude of change is likely to occur at Year 1, resulting in a **Major-Moderate** level of effect, which is significant, and has both adverse and beneficial aspects.
- 9.45 At Year 15, the proposed planting will have established and hedgerows will be mature, with trees starting to mature, helping to integrate the eastern edge of the Proposed Development into the wider landscape setting, and filtering open views of the proposed buildings. Given the nature of the changes, a **Moderate** residual effect is likely to remain, which is significant, and has both adverse and beneficial aspects.

South Drive

- 9.46 The Proposed Development will introduce some road improvements to the existing main access into the Site to better accommodate vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. The Proposed Development will introduce a new 3m wide route along the western side of South Drive to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists, with a new dropped kerb crossing to allow cyclists to continue east on Hatfield Road. The works have been designed to avoid tree removal or works. A proposed ATR will connect onto South Drive, to the north of Home Wood, providing an alternative route north and north-west that skirts Oaklands College Campus and is set within a habitat corridor.
- 9.47 Within the campus, South Drive will terminate in Central Square, with new buildings and a sensory garden creating an enhanced setting and sense of arrival into the College. New built development will generally be screened by existing vegetation along South Drive, until within the College Campus, as illustrated by the Wireline Visualisations from Viewpoints 9 and 10. Public access along South Drive will be affected once this is changed to a permissive route during College hours, with users redirected onto the new ATRs that skirt the central campus.
- 9.48 The Proposals will result in a Small magnitude of change, with a limited change in the view that would not materially alter the composition of the sequential views along South Drive, although the arrival into the campus

will be noticeably enhanced. A **Minor beneficial** level of effect is therefore anticipated, at Year 1, and is expected to persist as a **Minor beneficial** residual effect at Year 15.

East Drive

- 9.49 A new one way carriageway is proposed on the southern side of East Drive, beyond the existing avenue trees, grass verge and hedgerow. This will include upgrading the East Drive PRow to a bridleway, in accordance with HCC standards. A new 2m wide footpath will continue on the western side of Oaklands Lane south of East Drive to connect to a new dropped kerb pedestrian crossing and the network of PRow to the east of Oaklands College. Several trees to the east will need to be removed from the Category B tree group to facilitate the new access and new highway path, but the avenue along East Drive, and woodland along Butterwick Brook, will be retained.
- 9.50 The Proposed Development will extend built form within the College Campus further east, and will introduce additional sports and recreation tracks and pitches into the open fields along the western part of East Drive. The Proposed Development will introduce a new, more formalised parking court off East Drive. The accessibility and legibility of arrival into the campus from East Drive will be enhanced through the provision of all weather paths and clear signage to routes. A new ATR route will link off East Drive, providing an alternative route to North Drive and Oaklands Blossom, and to an informal walking route along Oaklands Wood and Sandpit Lane to the north. General public users of East Drive will be diverted onto the alternative route during College hours once the permissive route is implemented.
- 9.51 The main new building off East Drive is the Sports Hall, and new fencing and lighting for the proposed pitches and tracks will be introduced into the fields around East Drive, as illustrated by the Viewpoint 11 Wireline Visualisations.
- 9.52 For much of East Drive, there will be a limited change in the view, with the key composition of the view retained. To the west of East Drive, there will be greater sense of arrival into the College Campus and an expansion of the College. A Medium-Small magnitude of change is likely to be experienced by users of East Drive, resulting in a **Moderate-Minor neutral** level of effect, which is not significant. The effect is considered to be neutral as there will be an intensification of the College Campus to the west, but this will include improvements to the quality of this section of East Drive and improved access, with the area more positively managed. The improved access along the main portion of East Drive has been designed to retain the landscape character of East Drive. A **Minor beneficial** residual effect is anticipated at Year 15, as the proposed planting becomes more established.

Users of the open space in the immediate vicinity of the Site, at Oaklands Grange

- 9.53 Users of the open space within the central open space of Oaklands Grange are located within a residential development and not within any designated landscape. The open space accommodates equipped play and informal recreation and amenity, and is of local value. Users of the open space are engaged in recreation, where their appreciation of their surroundings is likely to be of some interest, albeit it is a designed and suburban

landscape setting. Users of the open space are therefore considered to be of Medium susceptibility to the type of development proposed and of Low value, with a Medium-Low sensitivity to changes in visual amenity.

- 9.54 Site Context Photograph 3 illustrates the nature of views from the open space, with a framed view of the Oaklands Blossom Site between existing residential properties, and tree groups and the Field Maple tree belt within the Site screening views into the Site.
- 9.55 The Proposed Development will introduce new residential properties into the view, set back by at least 20m from the western boundary of the Site, and with frontage onto the western boundary, and the proposed Central Open Space within Oaklands Blossom. The houses will be of a similar scale and local character, and will be set slightly lower within the Site which falls away to the north-east and south-east.
- 9.56 A Small magnitude of change is therefore likely to occur, resulting in a **Minor-Negligible adverse** level of effect, which is not significant. Over time, the establishment of the proposed planting along the Western Boundary and within the Central Open Space will further screen views of the Proposed Development, and a **Negligible** residual effect is anticipated at Year 15.

Receptors within Oaklands College Campus, including students, teachers and visitors

- 9.57 Visual receptors within Oaklands College Campus include students, teachers and visitors. They are engaged in educational or sporting activities and therefore an appreciation of the landscape or townscape is likely to be incidental to their enjoyment, and they are considered to be of Medium susceptibility to changes in visual amenity. They are within an undesignated, educational landscape and therefore the value of views is Low. Receptors within Oaklands College Campus are therefore of Medium-Low sensitivity to the type of development proposed.
- 9.58 Users of Oaklands College Campus will experience a change in the campus environment as a result of the demolition of existing buildings and construction of new buildings, plazas, streets and a parking area. The changes will introduce additional built form into the Campus, with an increase of approximately 25% of the existing massing. The Proposed Development will introduce new residential properties into views from the north-western part of the Campus, although this will be partially screened by Home Wood and existing and proposed buildings and vegetation.
- 9.59 The proposed residential development will increase the proximity of the Campus to the settlement edge of St Albans, particularly at Year 1. In general, the Proposed Development result in an enhanced environment within the Campus and is considered to have a beneficial effect on visual amenity for users of Oaklands College Campus. A Large to Medium magnitude of change is anticipated, resulting in a **Major-Moderate to Moderate-Minor beneficial** effect at Year 1. This is likely to persist at Year 15, as the proposed planting establishes and matures, further enhancing the improvements to the campus.

Users of Sandpit Lane, Hatfield Road and Oaklands Lane.

- 9.60 Users of local roads, outwith designated landscapes, are considered to be of Low Value of View. Users of local roads with a rural or lane character have Medium susceptibility to the type of development proposed, with users of A-roads and urban roads having Low susceptibility. Therefore, users of Sandpit and Oaklands Lane have Medium-Low sensitivity and users of Hatfield Road have Low sensitivity to visual change.

Sandpit Lane

- 9.61 The Proposed Development will result in a very limited transient effect on users of Sandpit Lane. To the west, when leaving St Albans, the elevated landform and existing buildings screen views of the Site until in the immediate vicinity of the Barnfield Road intersection, as illustrated by Site Context Photograph 1 and the Wireline Visualisation. The Proposed Development is set on the gently falling landform, and therefore sits lower than the existing houses in the foreground, and is screened by the existing tree belt along the western boundary, which allows only glimpsed views of the Local Centre.
- 9.62 Open views of the Proposed Development will be possible where Sandpit Lane runs through the northern edge of the Site, particularly at Year 1, when existing roadside vegetation has been removed. The road will be upgraded to include a formalised pedestrian crossing, two new accesses into the Site and a turning lane. The proposed houses, Local Centre and Extra Care Home are set back from the road, beyond a proposed open space of at least 20m. Proposed planting will reinstate the tree-lined character of Sandpit Lane, and soften views of the Proposed Development. To the north-east, existing tree groups on the corner of the Site retained and reinforced by proposed planting to create a semi-natural gateway into St Albans when approaching from the east.
- 9.63 A proposed hedgerow and hedgerow trees and informal tree groupings along the eastern boundary of Oaklands Blossom and North Drive will soften views of the new settlement edge, where visible. To the east of Oaklands Blossom, views into the Site are screened by the outgrown hedgerow along the road. The Wireline Visualisation of Viewpoint 21 illustrates the limit nature of views into the Site from the roads to the east of Oaklands Blossom.
- 9.64 Overall, users of Sandpit Lane are likely to experience a transient perceptible change in visual amenity along approximately 575m of Sandpit Lane, in the context of existing houses and road infrastructure. The Proposed Development will replace an unmanaged outgrown hedgerow with a more managed semi-natural open space and residential development and a local centre opposite existing residential development to the north.
- 9.65 Therefore a Medium-Small magnitude of change is likely to occur, resulting a **Moderate-Minor adverse** level of effect at Year 1, which is not significant, predominantly due to the short to medium term loss of existing vegetation along Sandpit Lane. However, at Year 15, the proposed planting within the Northern Open Space and Site Gateway, and beneficial effects of dual frontage onto Sandpit Lane to create an attractive and legible entrance into St Albans are likely to result in beneficial effects, and a **Minor beneficial** residual effect is anticipated.

Oaklands Lane

- 9.66 Users of Oaklands Lane will experience very limited changes in visual amenity, due to the screening provided by outgrown roadside hedgerows and Oaklands Wood. Changes in visual amenity are limited to slight improvement to the East Drive access and the creation of a pedestrian crossing, which will have a slightly urbanising influence, although this is experienced in the context of the College entrance and Smallford.
- 9.67 Therefore, no discernible change in view is anticipated on transient views.

Hatfield Road

- 9.68 Users of Hatfield Road have very limited, peripheral views into the Site due to the enclosure provided by the roadside hedgerow and trees, and Home Wood. The Proposed Development will introduce a slightly widened access into the Site at South Drive, and improvements to the Colney Heath Lane bus stop which will temporarily open up views into the Site. The Wireline Visualisations for Viewpoint 16 illustrate the position and massing of the proposed buildings within the College Campus. In the summer, these are almost entirely screened by the roadside hedgerow and trees, although there are more open views in the winter, as illustrated by Site Context Photograph 16.
- 9.69 Overall, no discernible change in visual amenity for users of Hatfield Road is likely to occur, given the localised and transient nature of the Proposed Development on Hatfield Road.

10.0 Green Belt Assessment

- 10.1 A Green Belt Assessment (GBA) has been undertaken of the Site. This is based on current NPPF policy and guidance, and is informed by the St Albans Green Belt Studies. The GBA considers the contribution the Site itself makes to the first four purposes of the Green Belt, along with the effect that development of the Site would have on the essential characteristics of the remaining Green Belt. Consideration is also given to the existing and proposed Green Belt boundaries, should the Site be released from the Green Belt.
- 10.2 The GBA has been based on a robust methodology, using the NPPF methodology where available, and informed by the methodologies used in the SACDC Green Belt Reviews (GBR). The methodology is set out in Appendix 2. Where methodologies differ, the justification for an alternative approach has been set out. The GBA is informed by the LVIA, which establishes the landscape and visual baseline of the Site and its context.

Assessment of contribution to the Purposes of the Green Belt

- 10.3 Criteria have been used to assess the contribution made by the Site or Green Belt parcel to the purposes of the Green Belt are set out in Table 12.1 (Appendix 2), based on the current National Planning Policy Guidance for Green Belt where available.
- 10.4 With respect to Purpose C, *“to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment”*, NPPG does not provide explicit criteria, and therefore these have been developed based on the intention of Purpose C, informed by local authority methodologies and appeal decisions.
- 10.5 With respect to Purpose E, *“assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land”*, this is considered to apply equally to all areas of Green Belt which would be considered secondary to the development of derelict and urban land. There is no way in which to differentiate between different areas of Green Belt in encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. It is therefore considered that all Green Belt land / parcels contribute equally to purpose five. This is consistent with the SACDC Green Belt Studies.

Green Belt Policy and Assessment

Green Belt Policy

- 10.6 The Green Belt is one of the oldest planning policy instruments. The Greater London Plan in 1944 first designated a ‘Green Belt Ring’ around London, in response to urban expansion, covering a ring around the Capital south of a line roughly from Hemel Hempstead to St Albans and Hertford. This created the Metropolitan Green Belt, which is the largest of England’s Green Belts. The three main functions of the Green Belt at that time were:

“1) Checking growth of large built-up areas;

2) Preventing neighbouring settlements from merging; and,

3) Preserving the special character of towns.”

- 10.7 Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2) ‘Green Belts’ was first issued in 1988 and provided a policy framework to protect the Green Belt and added two purposes of the Green Belt:

“4) To safeguard the countryside; and,

5) To assist urban regeneration.”

- 10.8 The publication of NPPF in 2012 replaced PPG2, consolidating planning policy statements and guidance notes into a single framework. The five purposes of the Green Belt set out in PPG2 was retained. NPPF encourages Local Authorities to take into account the need to promote sustainable patterns of development when reviewing Green Belt boundaries.
- 10.9 The Hertfordshire County Development Plan (1958) designated the area in the south of the County as Green Belt. Green Belt was designated in adjacent Districts, and the Hertfordshire Structure Plans designated and extended Green Belt, ultimately extending the Metropolitan Green Belt outwards to preserve the historic settlement patterns within the overall Belt around London.
- 10.10 SACDC lies 20 miles north of London and over 81% of the City and District is covered by the Metropolitan Green Belt. National policy states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, with the essential characteristics of the Green Belt being its openness and permanence.
- 10.11 The emerging SACDC Local Plan identifies opportunities that can arise through development to proactively manage Green Belt land, such as to protect and create attractive landscapes and countryside; promote healthy ecosystem services; support productive and sustainable farming and forestry; and provide space for local and wider recreational needs (Emerging Policy LG5 – Green Belt). Emerging Policy LG6 – Green Belt Compensatory Improvements sets out a requirement for compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of Green Belt land where a loss of Green Belt land for development is considered necessary. This includes submitting a Green Belt compensation strategy, relating to visual enhancements, improvements to biodiversity and habitat connectivity; new or enhanced walking, cycling or equestrian routes; or improved access to new, enhanced or existing recreational and playing fields provision; retaining hedgerows, trees and areas of biodiversity value; enhancing green and blue infrastructure links; maintaining rights of way across/through a Site and ensuring access to adjacent Rights of Way are facilitated; and providing woodland buffer planting.

St Albans Green Belt Review Studies

- 10.12 SACDC prepared a Stage 1 GBR Purpose Assessment in 2013 and a Stage 2 GBR Boundaries Study in 2014 as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan. However, the Stage 2 GBR was questioned by Inspectors, and subsequently a new Stage 2 GBR was prepared in 2023.

- 10.13 The Stage 1 GBR assessed the performance of the entirety of the St Albans Green Belt against the NPPF (2012) Green Belt purposes. The findings from the Stage 1 GBR on the weakest performing Green Belt were drawn forward into the identification of sub-areas for the new Stage 2 GBR. To address previous criticisms of the original Stage 2 GBR, the new Stage 2 GBR takes a more granular and comprehensive approach to identifying sub-areas for assessment. These sub-areas were based on promoted sites within defined buffers around existing settlements. The sub-areas lie within both strongly and weakly performing strategic parcels, as identified in the Stage 1 GBR.
- 10.14 The new Stage 2 GBR (2023) notes that the Metropolitan Green Belt tightly constrains St Albans and has limited urban capacity. The 2023 Stage 2 GBR reviews the District's Green Belt and countryside, to inform the emerging Local Plan. The 2023 Stage 2 GBR was carried out in the context of the Green Belt purposes and policy set out in the 2021 NPPF.

Stage 1 GBR

- 10.15 The Stage 1 GBR identified the Site as being within Land Parcel 36 (out of 66 Land Parcels), a large area that extends from the north-eastern edge of St Albans to the western edge of Hatfield. The parcel boundaries are described as following main roads, including the A1057. There are few environmental features within Land Parcel 36, with only small pockets of Ancient Woodland within the large parcel, and no historic designations present.
- 10.16 In the Stage 1 GBR, Land Parcel 36 is considered to make a 'Limited or No Contribution' to Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas, with large built-up areas defined as London, Luton and Dunstable, and Stevenage for the purposes of the GBR.
- 10.17 Land Parcel 36 is considered to make a 'Significant Contribution' to Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns from merging as it lies within a strategic gap separating two Tier 1 Settlements St Albans and Hatfield. Almost half of all parcels were considered to make a significant or partial contribution towards maintaining strategic gaps. Gaps to the east of St Albans are described as generally being narrower, or containing a greater amount of large-scale development including 2nd and 3rd tier settlements. The perception or visibility of the Green Belt in strategic gaps is described as variable.
- 10.18 Land Parcel 36 is considered to make a 'Significant Contribution' to Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The majority of the parcels significantly contribute towards the purpose, with "strong, rural and countryside characteristics" evident throughout Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield. Countryside is considered to be open land with a general absence of built development and urbanising influences, and is characterised by rural land uses including agriculture and forestry. Open land uses include outdoor recreation although these are most frequent at settlement edges and represent typical urban fringe activities and a transition from built-up settlements to the open countryside. Land Parcel 36 was calculated as having 0.7% built development at the time of the Stage 1 GBR.

- 10.19 Land Parcel 36 is considered to make a 'Limited or No Contribution' to Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. Almost half of all parcels significantly contribute to this purpose, due to the rich and diverse historic environment.
- 10.20 The Stage 1 GBR assessed the parcels against the Local Purpose 'To maintain the existing settlement pattern'. Land Parcel 36 is considered to make a 'Significant Contribution' to this local purpose, being within a primary local gap separating 1st tier settlements as well as providing a gap between St Albans and Sandridge.
- 10.21 Within Land Parcel 36, a sub-area was identified (Reference SA-S3), that is enclosed by residential development at east St Albans along Sandpit Lane. On land to the east of St Albans, which penetrates into the settlement, urban influences were considered to be particularly strong, with the sub-area description noted that:

"It includes a number of built uses and urbanising influences. It is a relatively open landscape. On land to the east of St Albans which penetrates into the settlement, urban influences are particularly strong and there is significant built development within the Green Belt at Oaklands College, which has recently expanded. The land along Sandpit Lane is enclosed by three urban edges and this limits the contribution of this local area to the wider Green Belt and its important role in separating settlements. A reduction in the size of the strategic parcel at the sub-area location would have a limited impact on the overall role of the Green Belt and the physical separation of settlements. It would not reduce the existing minimum distance of the gap between St Albans and Hatfield which is 1.4km. This land makes a limited or no contribution towards checking sprawl, preserving setting or maintaining the existing settlement pattern."

- 10.22 The Site is partially within the strategic sub-area SA-S3, which includes Oaklands Grange, which has since been developed.
- 10.23 In addition to this strategic sub-area, a small-scale sub-area (Reference SA-SS1) bound by House Lane to the east and the settlement edge to the south and west, was also identified as making a limited or no contribution towards checking sprawl, preventing merging, preserving setting or maintaining local gaps.

Stage 2 GBR (2023)

- 10.24 The new Stage 2 GBR identified sub-areas for potential release from or addition to the Green Belt. This included applying a buffer around each settlement inset from the green belt to assist in encouraging sustainable patterns of development accessible to existing settlements and maintaining the integrity of the Green Belt. A 400m buffer was identified around main settlements, including St Albans. Most of the Site lies within this 400m buffer. Sites with major policy constraints were excluded. The sub-area boundaries were defined *"using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent"*, such as permanent man-made and natural features including A and B roads, railway lines, rivers and waterbodies. Some additional boundary features, that are not necessarily permanent, were also used, such as unclassified private and public roads; streams or other watercourses; and well-established tree belts and hedgerows.

10.25 The Site straddles four sub-areas: SA-77b, SA-77c, SA-78a and SA-79, as illustrated by Plate 11.1 below. SA-77c comprises the northern field of Oaklands Blossom, which is defined by a weaker Green Belt boundary to the south, being the tree belt boundary that subdivides Oaklands Blossom. Sub-areas SA-77b, SA-78a and SA-79 are separated by North, South and East Drives, and straddle the College Campus. The western part of sub-area SA-77b has since been developed as Oaklands Grange.

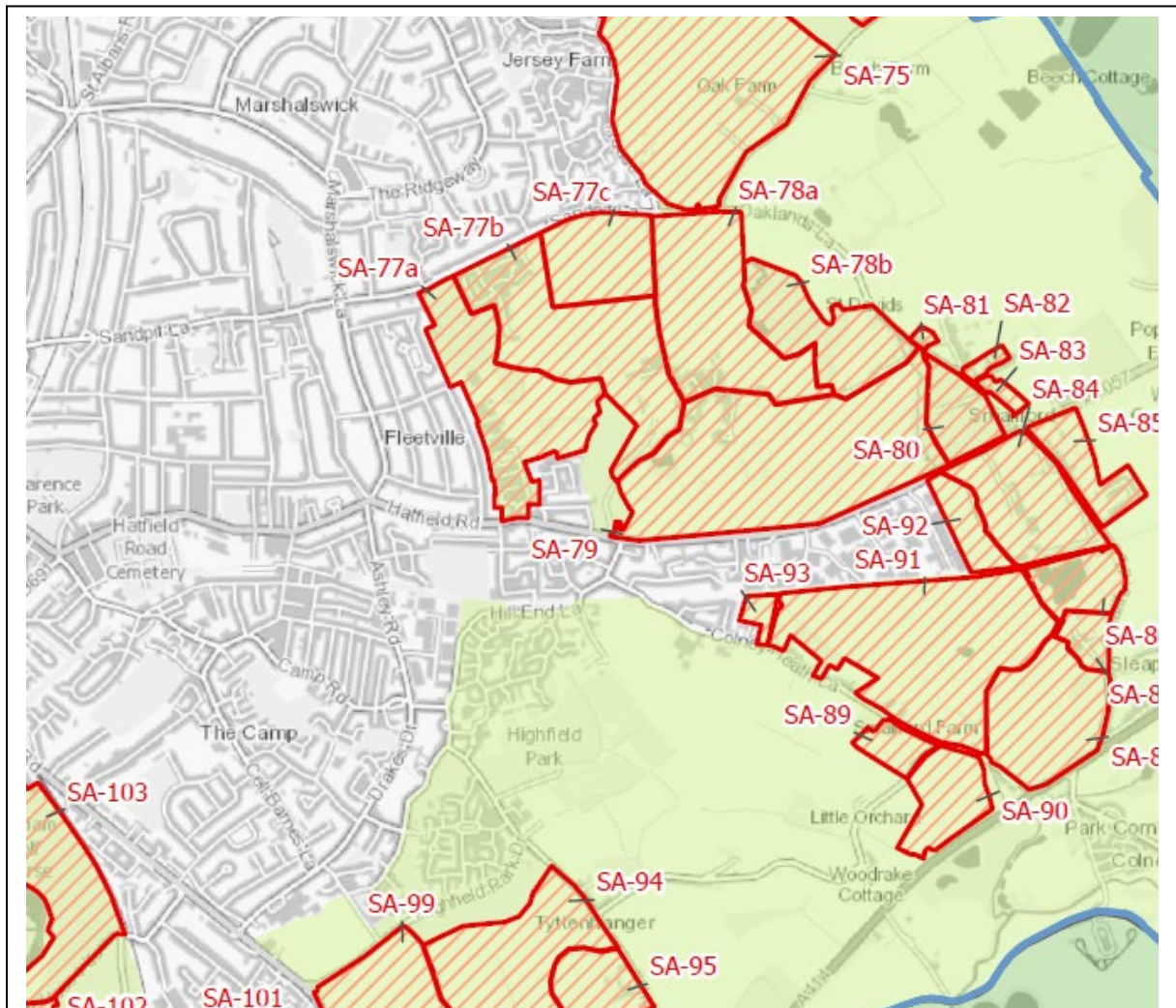


Plate 10.1 Stage 2 GBR Sub-Areas to east of St Albans

10.26 The 2023 Stage 2 GBR assessed the overall NPPF performance of the sub-areas as ‘Strongly’ meeting the criterion of the Green Belt, with the exception of SA-77b, which was assessed as ‘Weakly’ meeting the criterion of the Green Belt. This is predominantly due to the existing agricultural nature of the sub-areas and the small percentage of built form present within them, although this percentage has changed since the expansion of Oaklands College campus, and the construction of Oaklands Grange.

Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

- 10.27 With respect to Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas, all of the sub-areas are within the settlement buffer. The Sub-areas were assessed as:
- Sub-areas SA-77b and SA-77c, to the west of the Site, scored 1 (sub-area is 'enclosed' by a large built-up area, however the edge of the large built-up area lacks definition and/or permanence);
 - SA-78a scored 5+ (sub-area is contiguous with two or more large built-up areas and the inner boundaries with large built-up areas lacks definition and/or permanence OR sub-area is connected to a large built-up area. There are no outer boundary features to prevent disproportionate / irregular sprawl and the edge of the large built-up area(s) lacks definition and / or permanence); and
 - SA-79 scored 5 (Sub-area is contiguous with two or more large built-up areas and the edges of the large built-up area are strongly defined and permanent boundaries OR Sub-area is connected to a large built-up area. There are outer boundary features to prevent disproportionate / irregular sprawl, however the edge of the large built-up area is a strongly defined and permanent boundary).
- 10.28 Sub-area SA-77b and SA-77c were described as being enclosed by a large built up area, and predominantly having readily recognisable and likely to be permanent inner boundaries. Development within the sub-areas would *"round off the settlement edge and would constitute regular development form"*.
- 10.29 Sub-area SA-78a, which lies to the east of Oaklands Blossom and contains the north-eastern part of Oaklands College campus, is described as being perceptually connected to a large built-up area. However, no prominent outer boundary features for St Albans were considered to exist within a reasonable distance of the sub-area which are likely to prevent outward sprawl, and therefore development of this sub-area was considered likely to lead to *"disproportionate and irregular sprawl of the large built-up area"*. Oaklands Wood to the east of the sub-area does provide some containment of sub-area SA-78a.
- 10.30 Sub-area SA-79, which lies to the south of South and East Drive, contained by Hatfield Road, is described as being connected to a large built-up area although the assessment did not identify any *"prominent outer boundary features"* likely to prevent outward sprawl. However, Butterwick Brook and the woodland at Boggymead Spring are features that contain the eastern edge of St Albans immediately south of the sub-area. It is not clear what the existing *"predominantly recognisable and likely to be permanent inner boundary"* is that the assessment refers to, as there are no defined features containing the Oaklands Campus, although Home Wood to the west does contain the settlement edge north of Hatfield Road.

Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns from merging

- 10.31 All of the sub-areas were scored as 1 with respect to Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns from merging, with the sub-areas considered to form “a ‘less essential’ gap, or the less essential part of a gap, which is of sufficient scale and character that development is unlikely to cause merging between settlements”.
- 10.32 The sub-areas are all described as forming “a less essential part of the gap between St Albans and Hatfield; and St Albans and Welwyn Garden City. Since the sub-area is enclosed by St Albans and is set within its built extent, it is judged that the release of the sub-area would not result in the physical or perceptual merging of neighbouring built-up areas”.

Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 10.33 With respect to Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, the sub-areas were assessed as follows:
- Sub-area SA-77b scored 1 (sub-area contains more than 15% built form and/or possesses an urban character);
 - sub-area SA-77c scored 5 (sub-area contains less than 3% built form and possesses a strong unspoilt rural character); and
 - sub-areas SA-78a and SA-79 scored 3 (sub-area contains less than 10% built form and/or possesses a largely rural character).
- 10.34 Sub-area SA-77b is described as having approximately 5% of the sub-area covered by built form (excluding hardstanding). Built form is described as being concentrated to the west and south-east part of the sub-area, including buildings associated with Oaklands College of Agriculture, and a sizeable new residential development under construction in the west. The assessment notes that the “rest of the sub-area comprises some agricultural fields, and some allotments and managed parkland associated with Oaklands College. The built form and topography within the sub-area, combined with dense tree lines and hedgerows along the sub-area boundaries, creates a strong sense of enclosure, with limited views to the surrounding countryside. Overall sub-area has an urban character”.
- 10.35 Sub-area SA-77c is not covered by any built form, comprising an open agricultural field with views to the wider countryside limited to the east boundary, across North Drive. The assessment notes that there are “limited urbanising influences, including occasional views to the built form of St Albans to the north and industrial plant further to the north-east. Overall the sub-area has a strongly unspoilt rural character”.
- 10.36 Sub-area SA-78a is described as approximately 5% of the sub-area covered by built form (excluding hardstanding), with built form concentrated in the south, comprising a complex of buildings associated with Oaklands College and dispersed residential properties along East Drive. The northern part of the sub-area is open, comprising agricultural fields, with some visual links to the built form of St Albans. Due to the landform, the northern part of the sub-area

has wider views of the open countryside, with the south part enclosed by woodland to the east and built form to the west. Overall, the sub-area is described as having a largely rural character.

- 10.37 Sub-area SA-79 is described as having approximately 4% of the sub-area covered by built form (excluding hardstanding). Built form is concentrated in the north-west part of the sub-area, comprising education and sports facility buildings, and adjacent sports pitches, associated with Oaklands College. The assessment states that *“there are limited urbanising influences, including visual links to adjacent built form”* despite the long southern edge of the sub-area being along the busy Hatfield Road and bound by residential and industrial development. The majority of the sub-areas is described as comprising *“open agricultural fields, which have little relationship with the urbanising influences within and adjacent to the sub-area. Towards the north-east sections of the sub-area, there are high levels of visual enclosure due to a band of dense woodland, which limits views of the wider open countryside. Overall the sub-area has a largely rural character”*. The assessment doesn't make reference to the recreational uses within the fields, including sports pitches, which are recognised as being urban fringe land uses in the Stage 1 GBR methodology.

Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

- 10.38 With respect to Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, all of the sub-areas scored 0 as the sub-areas do not abut an identified historic place or provide views to a historic place and do not meet this purpose.

Site Specific Green Belt Assessment

- 10.39 Since the 2023 Stage 2 GBR, construction at Oaklands Grange has been completed and the land no longer contributes to the openness of the Green Belt (it is released from the Green Belt in the emerging Local Plan), and Oaklands College has been upgraded, with new buildings constructed within the Green Belt.
- 10.40 The Site Specific Green Belt assessment is based on the methodology set out in Appendix 2, and makes reference to the SACDC GBR where relevant, but relies on the current NPPF for the Green Belt methodology as the most current guidance.

Landscape and Visual Context

- 10.41 As described in the landscape and visual appraisal, the Site is on the eastern edge of St Albans, and comprises part of Oaklands College, including the built campus, and pastoral fields, paddocks and sports fields associated with the College.
- 10.42 The landscape within the site has been influenced by the former designed landscape of Mansion House, and the subsequent educational use of the land. In addition, urban fringe influences are present, given the Site's inset position within the settlement edge of St Albans, and the pre-dominance of recreational uses within the Site and its context.

- 10.43 The nature of the landform and vegetation are such that there is a limited perception of the gap between St Albans and Hatfield, with a strong sense of enclosure of the Site within its immediate setting, and a clear relationship with the existing settlement edge of St Albans.

Green Belt Assessment of the Site

- 10.44 As illustrated by the Site Context Plan, the Site is adjacent to the eastern edge of St Albans. It lies almost entirely within the 400m buffer from the existing settlement edge of St Albans, when taking into account the revised settlement edge at Oaklands Grange, since the Stage 1 GBR was undertaken. The Site is partially within the Strategic Sub-area identified in the stage 1 GBR.
- 10.45 Table 10.1 below assesses the contribution that the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt, based on the methodology set out in Appendix 2.

Table 10.1: Green Belt Assessment of the Site

Purpose	Criteria
(a) Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>Moderate to Weak</p> <p>The Site is adjacent to the large built up area of St Albans, which encloses the Site to the south and west, and to the north-west. New development within the Site would not be incongruous with the existing pattern of development. Sandpit Lane, Oaklands Wood and Hatfield Road are robust, permanent physical features that could restrict and contain development within the Site. The Site is not free of existing development, with built form located within the College Campus, and is subject to urbanising influences due to the existing educational and recreational uses within the Site.</p>
(b) Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	<p>Moderate</p> <p>The Site is located within a gap between towns, but forms a somewhat less essential part of the gap between St Albans and Hatfield, predominantly due to the influence of residential and industrial development along the southern boundary and north-western boundaries, and the substantial built development within the Site. The development of the Site would not reduce the existing gap between St Albans and Hatfield, which extends east of the Site to Butterwick Brook. The Site could be developed without the loss of visual separation between towns due to the existing built form to the south and east of the Site, and the physical and visual enclosure provided by the landform and structural vegetation.</p>
(c) Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>Moderate to Weak</p> <p>Built form and extensive areas of hard-standing associated with the former Mansion House Estate and the current educational uses of Oaklands College are present within the Site. The surrounding fields comprise a mix of agricultural fields and sports fields. Whilst the fields maintain the openness of the Green Belt, the recreational uses reflect the urban fringe location and educational use of the Site, which have an urbanising influence over the landscape and contribute to the semi-urban character of the Site.</p>

Purpose	Criteria
	To the east of the Site, Oaklands Wood and the woodland along Butterwick Brook, along with the watercourse, provide robust and permanent Green Belt boundaries that physically and visually contain the Site and limit its urbanising influence over the wider landscape.
(d) Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	None The Site does not form part of the setting of a historic town, and has no visual, physical or experiential connection to the historic aspects of the town.

- 10.46 Overall, the Site does not make a strong contribution to purposes (a), (b) and (d), and therefore meets the definition of “grey belt”. Sandpit Lane, Oaklands Wood, and Hatfield Road provide robust Green Belt boundaries and the release of the Site from the Green Belt would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt.
- 10.47 Within the Site, Oaklands College Campus comprises a large area of Previously Developed Land (PDL) as set out in NPPF.
- 10.48 With respect to robust and permanent Green Belt boundaries, the Site is well contained by existing built development to the north-west, west and south; and by Sandpit Lane and Hatfield Road to the north and south. Oaklands Wood contains the Site to the east. The land within ownership is contained by Oaklands Lane and Butterwick Brook and Boggymead Spring to the east.

Grey Belt Review

- 10.49 The updated NPPF recognises that it may be necessary to release Green Belt land for development, and states that plans should give priority to PDL, then consider Grey Belt which is not previously developed, and then other Green Belt locations. “Grey Belt” is land that comprises PDL and/or that does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in Paragraph 143, and excludes land (other than Green Belt) set out in footnote 7. The NPPF states that development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where development would utilise grey belt land and *“would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan”*.
- 10.50 The Site is not assessed as performing strongly against any of the listed three Green Belt purposes. The Site is largely contained by built form and contains a significant area of PDL. Development of the Site would not undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt as it is contained within the Mansion House Estate landscape that is distinct from the wider agricultural landscape that provides the setting for St Albans and Hatfield.

11.0 Summary

- 11.1 The Site is located on the eastern edge of St Albans, within the grounds of Oaklands College. The Site is bound by Sandpit Lane to the north, Oaklands Lane to the east, and Hatfield Road to the south. Existing built development encloses the Site to the north-west, west and south; and Home Wood and Oaklands Wood contain the Site to the south-west and north-east.
- 11.2 The Site comprises an educational campus centred around Mansion House and the former private and agricultural buildings, which have been in educational use for the past 100 years. More recently, new buildings and public realm improvements have been carried out, and Oaklands Grange, to the north-west of the Site has been built out as residential development. Public Rights of Way provide access through the Site, and the campus, along North, South and East Drives. The Site is not subject to any landscape designations, but lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Home Wood, on the south-western boundary, is Ancient Woodland and a LWS.
- 11.3 The Northern Thames Basin NCA washes over the Study Area and St Albans. This covers a diverse area that contains the suburbs of North London and historic towns, including ST Albans. Urban expansion is a feature of the NCA, which has reduced tranquillity in the area and resulted in a fragmented and varied pattern of land-use and habitats. At a local scale, the Site lies within the De Havilland Plain LCA, that extends east of St Albans and north of Hatfield. The LCA is highly varied, with a diverse mix of uses and an incoherent pattern that is unified by the level topography. The Site is located within the southern area, which is described as being a mix of extraction, urban fringe development and Oaklands College resulting in an “incoherent and jumbled landscape”.
- 11.4 The visual appraisal found that the Site is well contained by landform, built form and structural vegetation, with views of the Site very localised and experienced in the context of the urban fringe of St Albans. Views into the Site from the surrounding roads are limited due to the hedgerows and trees that enclose the Site. Where more open views within the Site are possible, they are characterised by open views across pastoral fields, paddocks and recreational fields towards the built and well-treed core of the campus and towards Oaklands Grange on the skyline. Home Wood and Oaklands Woodland existing vegetation along the roads surrounding Oaklands College, generally contain views.
- 11.5 The Proposed Development will introduce 472 new homes into the Oaklands Blossom site, along with a Local Centre, Extra Care Building, children’s home, primary school and associated infrastructure and open space. This extension to the existing settlement edge of St Albans is located within the north-western part of the Site that is strongly enclosed by existing residential development, and is accessed off Sandpit Lane and contained by North Drive to the east.
- 11.6 Within the Oaklands College site, demolition and renovation of existing buildings and the construction of new buildings is proposed to replace out-dated buildings and improve the educational provision within the college. New pitches and tracks are proposed along with enhancements to the public realm, including the creation of new

main plazas, improving the pedestrian priority and legibility within the core of the campus, and rationalising and improving the parking provision.

- 11.7 The Proposed Development will result in the loss of open fields and some existing trees to accommodate the proposed built form and associated access and facilities. This is not out of keeping with the existing urban edge context of the Oaklands Blossom site and educational campus context of the Oaklands College site. The Proposed Development will have an effect on the openness of the Green Belt.
- 11.8 The assessment of landscape effects did not identify any significant effects on landscape character as a result of the Proposed Development. This was due to the combination of the relatively low sensitivity of the landscape character areas to the type of development proposed; the existing urban fringe influences and built character of Oaklands College campus; and the localised nature of landscape effects. The Proposed Development will result in the loss of open fields for built development, and the loss of trees. However, the built development would represent an infilling of the existing settlement edge, and the landscape and BNG proposals would offset the loss of trees and have some beneficial effects on key landscape features.
- 11.9 Visual effects are very localised due to the nature of the Site and the Proposed Development. A significant effect on residents fronting onto Sandpit Lane are likely to occur at Year 1, due to the orientation of the properties, and the removal of vegetation along Sandpit Lane which will open up views into the Site. The Proposed Development is set back from Sandpit Lane, and proposed planting within the Northern Open Space and Site Gateway will restore the treed character of Sandpit in the medium to long term, although this will be more formalised and managed. No significant residual effects are anticipated for residents at Year 15.
- 11.10 Users of PRoW through the Site are likely to experience the greatest effects on visual amenity as a result of the Proposed Development, particularly users of the North Drive bridleway that runs along the eastern boundary of the Proposed Development. There will be a distinct change in the view, with residential housing fronting onto North Drive, albeit set back by at least 20m beyond the proposed East Boundary open space. The bridleway itself will be upgraded to meet HCC requirements for bridleways, which will result in a slight urbanisation of the route associated with widening, surfacing and lighting along the route.
- 11.11 Overall, a permanent significant effect on visual amenity is likely to occur. This is recognised as having both adverse and beneficial aspects, and is likely to reduce but remain significant at Year 15 when the proposed planting along the route and within the development areas has established and is maturing.
- 11.12 Users of Oaklands College, including students, teachers and visitors, are likely to experience significant effects as a result of the Proposed Development which will introduce substantial changes to the built fabric and public realm within the campus. Whilst this will result in an increase in massing within the Oaklands College site, the change in visual amenity is considered to be beneficial, with an improvement in the quality and legibility of Oaklands College.

- 11.13 No significant effects on users of local roads surrounding the Site are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Development, although it is recognised that the Proposed Development will result in a localised change in views when travelling past the Site on Sandpit Lane. However, these are transient views, and unlikely to result in significant effects due to the relatively low sensitivity of users of the local roads and the brief extent of views affected.
- 11.14 The Green Belt Assessment has found that the Site does not make a strong contribution to the first four purposes of the green belt and a large area of the Site comprises PDL. As the Site does not make a strong contribution to purposes (a), (b) and (d) it therefore meets the definition of “grey belt”. Sandpit Lane, Oaklands Wood, and Hatfield Road provide robust Green Belt boundaries and the release of the Site from the Green Belt would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt.
- 11.15 With respect to robust and permanent Green Belt boundaries, the Site is well contained by existing built development to the north-west, west and south; and by Sandpit Lane and Hatfield Road to the north and south. Oaklands Wood contains the Site to the east. The land within ownership is contained by Oaklands Lane and Butterwick Brook and Boggymead Spring to the east.
- 11.16 The Site, and land within the ownership of Oaklands College, provides opportunities for landscape and visual mitigation, and to enhance and restore features that are important to the local character and sense of place. There is potential for enhanced public access through the Site, with proposed upgrades to the existing bridleways and new ATRs and informal paths proposed as part of the Proposed Development. The network of green blue infrastructure has been designed to create multi-functional and layered open space corridors that reinforce the existing landscape patterns, improve local connectivity, and create habitat corridors linking features within the Site and its wider context.

12.0 Appendix 1: LVIA Methodology

Introduction to LVIA Methodology

- 12.1 The methodology described below and used to carry out the LVIA of the Proposed Development is based on the guidelines set out in GLVIA3, NatureScot and Natural England LVIA and landscape character guidance. GLVIA3 does not provide a prescriptive set of rules, but sets out broad principles and the approach has been tailored to the specific project, informed by the type and scale of development and landscape and visual receptors, as well as the relevant regulations and guidance documents applicable to the Proposed Development and Site.
- 12.2 This LVIA has been undertaken by professional landscape architects as competent experts who were involved in the design of the landscape and the preparation of green infrastructure and landscape management proposals. NatureScot notes that LVIA is "used to help design the proposed change as well as assess its effects, so that negative landscape effects are avoided, reduced or offset" (NatureScot, 2021). This iterative approach has been applied to the LVIA process. Judgments made in the LVIA are based on training and experience, and are supported by clear evidence and reasoned argument.
- 12.3 LVIA must address both effects on landscape as a resource in its own right and effects on views and visual amenity. Whilst these are interrelated, they are described and assessed separately.
- 12.4 The steps in LVIA include:
- Baseline study: establish the baseline landscape and visual conditions;
 - Identification and description of effects: effects on the landscape as a resource and effects on views and visual amenity as experienced by people;
 - Assessing the landscape and visual effects: significant effects to be identified and described for EIA;
 - Mitigation and Enhancement: identify measures to prevent, reduce and where possible offset/compensate for adverse landscape and visual effects and/or enhance the baseline landscape and visual conditions; and
 - Engaging with stakeholders and the public.

Baseline Studies

- 12.5 The baseline studies step of the LVIA establishes the existing landscape and visual conditions, to enable assessment and description of the changes that are likely to result in landscape and visual effects as a result of the Proposed Development. The level of detail, scale and study area has been determined to be appropriate and proportional to the different stages of the assessment process and the nature of the Proposed Development and receptors.

12.6 The sources of background information informing the landscape and visual baseline studies include:

- Desktop analysis of planning policy (including landscape designations), published guidance, studies and assessments (including landscape character assessments); and historic and current mapping;
- Identification of potential visual receptors and representative viewpoints within the study area; and
- Site visit(s) to verify the desktop baseline and further identify representative receptors that may be affected by the Proposed Development.

Design and Mitigation

12.7 GLVIA3 states that "*design plays an increasingly important part in the development planning process*" and the LVIA has been undertaken by professionals who were involved in the design of the landscape, green infrastructure and mitigation / enhancement proposals and subsequent management proposals. The design and assessment stages are iterative, with LVIA used as an important design tool to improve the siting, layout and design of the Proposed Development.

12.8 Where the iterative LVIA design process has resulted in the early avoidance or reduction of landscape and visual impacts, this will be described as part of the Design Evolution of the project and summarised where potential effects have been identified and overcome.

12.9 Mitigation measures typically fall into three categories:

- Primary measures: these have been integrated or embedded into the Proposed Development design as a result of the iterative design process. For an application for Planning Permission in Principle (PPiP) this comprises the development parameters).
- Standard construction and operational management practices for avoiding and reducing environmental effects; and
- Secondary measures, designed to address any residual adverse effects remaining after the first two mitigation measures have been incorporated into the scheme.

12.10 Primary mitigation measures are embedded into the Proposed Development design as a result of the desk-based study and Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) field work and the initial assessment of effects. Measures can include building layout and siting, massing and height; green infrastructure design and the choice and use of materials and colour.

12.11 Mitigation relating to standard construction and operational management practices include measures such as the use of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to minimise effects arising during the construction process and the implementation of British Standards, including tree protection in line with BS5873:2012.

- 12.12 Finally, secondary measures contribute to the assessment of residual effects and are considered in relation to the assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the scheme. They are not embedded into the Proposed Development and therefore consideration should be given to how they can be secured. Measures can include the preparation of Design Codes; a Landscape Strategy Plan detailing landscape design approaches; and/or a programme of management and monitoring, such as a Landscape and Environmental Management Strategy (LBMS).
- 12.13 LVIA considers the various stages of the Proposed Development where possible landscape and visual effects may vary through the life of the project, including: construction and operation. The contribution made by planting within the Proposed Development design should be considered in terms of the effects at Year 1 and the residual effects at Year 15, allowing for growth of planting over time. The height of the planting for assessment purposes is assumed to be as follows, based on broad average growth rate of 1m in 3 years, albeit the rate of growth varies according to species and local landscape conditions.
- 12.14 Enhancement measures are proposals that seek to improve the landscape resource and the visual amenity of the Proposed Development site and its wider setting, over and above its baseline condition. Enhancement does not serve a mitigation purpose, and ideally, should be an integral part of the design of the Proposed Development.

Assessment of Landscape Effects

- 12.15 GLVIA3 states that *"an assessment of landscape effects deals with the effects of change and development on landscape as a resource"*.
- 12.16 The assessment of landscape effects addresses how the Proposed Development will affect the elements that make up the landscape, the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape and its distinctive character.

Predicting and Describing Landscape Effects

- 12.17 The landscape baseline is combined with understanding of the details of the proposed change that is to be introduced to the landscape as a result of the Proposed Development in order to identify and describe the landscape effects.

Assessing the Significance of Landscape Effects

- 12.18 The significance of landscape effects requires the methodical combination of the assessments of the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and the magnitude of effect on the landscape for each effect that has been identified as a result of the Proposed Development.

Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors

- 12.19 The sensitivity of landscape receptors is determined by combining judgments of their susceptibility to the type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape, using professional judgment.

12.20 The guidance for LVIA sets out the broad principles and approach for both a formal LVIA process, as an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and as part of the appraisal of development proposals and contributing to planning applications.

Landscape Susceptibility

12.21 The susceptibility of the landscape refers to the ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies. Susceptibility is determined in relation to the change arising from the specific development proposal. Susceptibility is recorded on a verbal scale, in which a landscape of high susceptibility would have a low capacity to accommodate change / a greater vulnerability to the type of development proposed; and a landscape of low susceptibility would have a high capacity to accommodate change / a lesser vulnerability to the type of development proposed.

12.22 The assessment of susceptibility of landscape character to change includes the following criteria, as appropriate to the Proposed Development and its context:

- Landform;
- Pattern/Complexity;
- Composition;
- Landcover;
- Relationship of the landscape area to existing settlements or developments; and
- Potential for appropriate mitigation within the context of existing character, policy and guidelines.

12.23 The assessment of the susceptibility of landscape features, this relates to the potential for loss and/or retention of relevant features with respect to the type of development proposed and the facility with which such elements may be replaced, where appropriate.

12.24 Table A.1 sets out the scale against which the susceptibility of landscape character / landscape features is categorised.

Table A.1: Landscape Susceptibility

Susceptibility	Criteria
High	The receptor is likely to have little scope to accommodate the type of change proposed without undue effects upon its overall integrity.
Medium	The receptor is likely to have some scope to accommodate the type of change proposed without undue effects upon its overall integrity.
Low	The receptor is likely to be able to accommodate the type of change proposed with little or no effect upon its overall integrity.

Landscape Value

12.25 The value of a landscape receptor is established by the baseline study, combining the value of the Landscape Character Types or Areas and the value of individual contributors to landscape character, such as key characteristics and including landscape features. The value of landscape receptors will reflect landscape designations and the level of importance they signify, to some extent, but will also include consideration of a range of factors, including:

- Landscape quality (condition): the measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
- Scenic quality: the term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily, but not wholly the visual senses).
- Rarity: The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type.
- Representativeness: Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples.
- Conservation interests: The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical or cultural interest that can add to the value of the landscape as well as having value in its own right.
- Recreation value: Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.
- Perceptual aspects: A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness or tranquillity.
- Associations: Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history which contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.

12.26 The assessment of the value of landscape features of the landscape can be judged in their own right, including whether or not they can be realistically replaced, as well as being judged on their contribution to the overall character and value of the wider landscape.

12.27 Table A.2 sets out the scale against which the value of landscape character / landscape features is categorised.

Table A.2: Landscape Value

Value	Criteria
Very High	A landscape with a rugged landform or dramatic landform features (which may be large in scale), or a small scale or intimate landform. The landform may be very steep with exposed, visible slopes and no field boundaries or tree cover to provide screening.
High	Landscape area of distinctive components and characteristics which may also be nationally designated for scenic beauty. A landscape feature which makes a strong positive contribution to landscape character e.g. a mature tree or woodland.
Medium	Landscape area of common components and characteristics which may be designated at county or borough level for its landscape and visual qualities. A landscape feature which makes some positive contribution to landscape character.
Low	Landscape area/feature of inconsequential components and characteristics, undesignated and with little or no wider recognition of value, although potentially of importance to the local community.
Very Low	Landscape area or feature that is undesignated and providing no positive contribution to the landscape.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 12.28 An assessment of landscape receptors' sensitivity is reached by combining judgments of their susceptibility and value. Landscape sensitivity is categorised as High, Medium or Low.

Magnitude of Landscape Effects

- 12.29 The landscape magnitude of effect (change) is assessed based on its size or scale, the geographical extent of the area that is influenced and the duration and reversibility.

Size or scale

- 12.30 A judgment is made about the size or scale of change in the landscape that is likely to be experienced as a result of each effect, categorised as pronounced, partial, limited, very slight or no change, considering the following:

- The extent of the existing landscape elements that will be lost, the proportion of the total extent that this represents and the contribution of that element to the character of the landscape;
- The degree to which aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the landscape are altered;
- Whether the effect changes the key characteristic of the landscape.

Geographical Extent

- 12.31 Consideration is given to the geographical area over which the landscape effects will be felt, categorised as the site level, immediate setting of the site, scale of the landscape unit (area / type) within which the Site is located or on a larger scale.

Duration and Reversibility of the Landscape Effects

- 12.32 Duration considers the timescale over which an effect is likely to be experienced. Reversibility considers the potential and practicality of a particular effect being reversed, and the associated time-frame, or whether the effect is likely to be permanent.
- 12.33 Table A.3 sets out the scale against which the landscape magnitude of effect (change) is categorised.

Table A.3: Landscape Magnitude of Effect (Change)

Magnitude	Criteria
Large	Pronounced change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect an extensive area. The change may be long-term or may be irreversible.
Medium	Partial change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect a wide area. The change may be medium-term or may be irreversible.
Small	Limited change to the existing landscape receptor that is likely to affect a restricted area. The change may be short-term or reversible.
None	No change to the existing landscape receptor.

Assessment of Visual Effects

- 12.34 GLVIA3 states that *"an assessment of visual effects deals with the effects of change and development on the views available to people and their visual amenity"*.

Receptors of Visual Effects and Viewpoint Selection

- 12.35 The viewpoints to be used in the assessment of visual effects have been selected to reflect the range of receptors of visual effects located within the area that is theoretically visually influenced by the Proposed Development. It is not possible to include every location where views or visual amenity may be affected. Therefore, the selection of viewpoints has been selected to include public viewpoints; sequential views from transport routes and views from places where people work. The selected viewpoints are also identified to ensure the following general groups are covered, where applicable:

- Representative viewpoints: selected to represent a group of viewpoints, for example views experienced by users of a footpath;
- Specific viewpoints: selected as they are key or promoted viewpoints, for example views from a visitor attraction or identified on ordinance survey (OS) mapping; and
- Illustrative viewpoints: selected to demonstrate a particular effect or specific issue.

- 12.36 It should be noted that the final selection of viewpoints is influenced by the type of viewers who will be affected and the places where they will be affected, favouring viewpoints that represent receptors of the highest sensitivity or where the magnitude of effect (change) is likely to be greatest. Viewpoints include users of Core Paths, Public Rights of Way, National Cycle Routes, residents and users of local roads and businesses.

- 12.37 The viewpoints take account of a range of factors, and are categorised as follows:

- Type of visual receptor represented: residential, transport route, work place, visitor attraction, park, etc;
- Viewing distance: short-, medium- or long-distance view;
- View type: panorama, vista, partial, filtered or none;
- Nature of the viewing experience: fixed or transient; and
- Extent of the Site that is visible: full, partial, glimpse or none.

- 12.38 Baseline photographs are taken at each viewpoint, using a digital SLR camera, to record the existing views in accordance with the latest relevant guidance, including the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 06/19 'Visual Representation of Development Proposals'.

Assessing the Significance of Visual Effects

- 12.39 The significance of landscape effects requires the methodical consideration of each effect identified and assessment of the nature of the visual receptors and the nature of the effect on views and visual amenity for each one.

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

- 12.40 The sensitivity of a visual receptor (the particular person or group of people likely to be affected at a specific viewpoint) is assessed in terms of both their susceptibility to change in views and visual amenity and the value attached to the particular view.

Susceptibility of Visual Receptors to change

- 12.41 The susceptibility of visual receptors to changes in views and visual amenity is mainly a function of the extent to which their attention is focused on appreciation of the landscape. Professional judgment is used to determine susceptibility, and generally follows the criteria set out in Table 3.4.

Table A.4: Susceptibility of Visual Receptors

Susceptibility	Criteria
High	Residents at home; People who are engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way and core paths, whose attention or interest is likely to be focussed on the landscape; Visitors to heritage assets or other attractions where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience; and People travelling along recognised scenic routes or where their appreciation of the view contributes to the amenity experience of their journey.
Medium	People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation, where their appreciation of their surroundings is incidental to their enjoyment; and People travelling on secondary roads or country lanes, rail or other transport routes.
Low	People travelling on major roads; and People at their place of work.

Value attached to Views

- 12.42 Professional judgments are made regarding the value attached to the views experienced, and generally follows the criteria set out in Table A.5.

Table A.5: Value of Views

Value	Criteria
High	View of / from a location that is likely to be of international or national importance, either designated or with national cultural associations.
Medium	View of / from a location that is likely to be of local importance, either designated or with local cultural associations.
Low	View of / from a location that is not designated, with minimal or no cultural associations.

12.43 An assessment of visual receptors' sensitivity is reached by combining judgments of their susceptibility and the value attached to the view. Visual sensitivity is categorised as High, Medium or Low.

Magnitude of Visual Effects

12.44 The magnitude of visual effect (change) is assessed based on its size or scale, the geographical extent of the area that is influenced and the duration and reversibility.

Size or scale

12.45 A judgment is made about the size or scale of change in the view that is likely to be experienced as a result of each effect, categorised as pronounced, partial, limited, very slight or no change, considering the following:

- The scale of the change in the view with respect to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition;
- The degree of contrast or integration of any new features or changes in the landscape; and
- The nature of the view of the proposed development and whether views will be full, partial or glimpses.

Geographical Extent

12.46 Consideration is given to the geographical extent of the visual effect, with factors including:

- The angle of the view in relation to the main activity of the receptor;
- The distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development; and
- The extent of the area over which the changes would be visible.

Duration and Reversibility of the Visual Effects

12.47 Duration considers the timescale over which an effect is likely to be experienced. Reversibility considers the potential and practicality of a particular effect being reversed, and the associated time-frame, or whether the effect is likely to be permanent.

12.48 Table A.6 sets out the scale against which the magnitude of visual effect (change) is categorised.

Table A.6: Visual Magnitude of Effect (Change)

Magnitude	Criteria
Large	The proposals will cause a pronounced change to the existing view, resulting in the loss or addition of features that will substantially alter the composition of the view. The change may be long-term or may be irreversible.
Medium	The proposals will cause a noticeable change in the view, resulting from the loss or addition of features in the view and will noticeably alter the composition of the view. The change may be medium-term or may be irreversible.
Small	The proposals will cause a limited change in the view, which would not materially alter the composition of the view. The change may be short-term or reversible.
None	No change discernible in the view.

Level of Effects

- 12.49 To draw conclusions about the level of landscape or visual effects, the separate judgments about the sensitivity of the receptors and the magnitude of effect (change) need to be combined. The level of effects are considered for the Proposed Development at Year 1 of operation; and, depending on the nature of the development, at an appropriate point where the planting associated with the Proposed Development will be establishing, such as Year 15. In certain circumstances, it may also be appropriate to consider effects during Construction and on Decommissioning of the Proposed Development.
- 12.50 The assessment of effects is subject to professional judgment and the approach is customised based on the nature of the Proposed Development, its location and context. Effects are rated on a scale of Major to Neutral.
- 12.51 Where it is considered that there is potential for both beneficial and adverse changes, these magnitudes of change are noted and the balance of these considerations is used to inform conclusions on the level of effect and its significance.
- 12.52 For schemes subject to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), as governed by the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2011/92/EU), an assessment of whether or not an effect is considered 'significant' is required. This is relative to each scheme, but in general, effects of Major or Moderate significance are deemed 'significant'.
- 12.53 For schemes that are not subject to EIA, the word significant is used in its ordinary English meaning of "*worthy of consideration*". Impacts of Major or Moderate significance are considered to be substantial and therefore potentially material to the planning process.
- 12.54 Where effects are judged to be significant and adverse, mitigation measures should be proposed and described for preventing/avoiding, reducing or offsetting or compensating for them. The significant residual effects remaining after mitigation should be summarised as the final step in the process.

Figure 12.1: Level of Effect Diagram

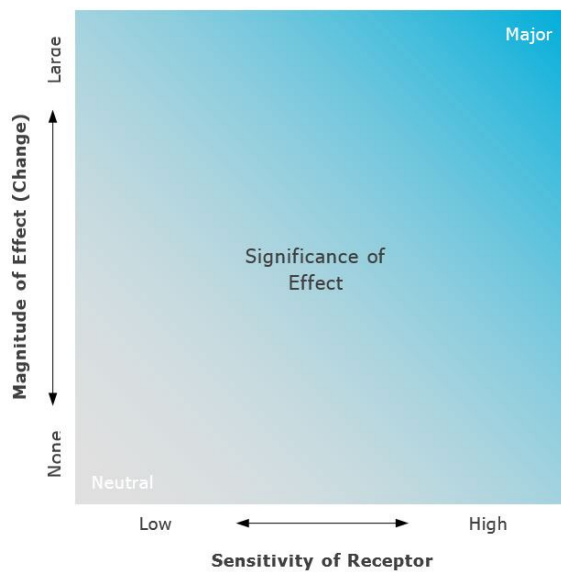


Table 12.7: Level of Landscape Effects (Change)

Significance of Landscape Effect	Criteria
Major Beneficial	Alterations that result in a pronounced improvement of the existing landscape resource. Valued key features and/or special qualities would be restored and reintroduced as part of the Proposed Development.
Moderate Beneficial	Alterations that result in a partial improvement of the existing landscape resource. Valued key features and/or characteristics would be partially restored or reintroduced.
Minor Beneficial	Alterations that result in a limited improvement of the existing landscape resource. Characteristic features would be restored to a limited degree.
Negligible Beneficial	Alterations that result in a very slight improvement to the landscape resource, not uncharacteristic within the receiving landscape.
Neutral	Neither beneficial nor adverse effects on the existing landscape resource.
Negligible Adverse	Alterations that result in a very slight deterioration of the existing landscape resource, not uncharacteristic within the receiving landscape.
Minor Adverse	Alterations that result in a limited deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Characteristic features would be lost to a limited degree.
Moderate Adverse	Alterations that result in a partial deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Valued key features and/or characteristics would be partially lost.
Major Adverse	Alterations that result in a pronounced deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Valued key features and/or special qualities would be completely lost as part of the Proposed Development.

Table 12.8: Level of Visual Effects (Change)

Significance of Visual Effect	Criteria
Major Beneficial	Alterations that typically result in a pronounced improvement in the existing view or visual amenity.
Moderate Beneficial	Alterations that typically result in a noticeable improvement in the existing view or visual amenity.
Minor Beneficial	Alterations that typically result in a limited improvement in the existing view or visual amenity.
Negligible Beneficial	Alterations that typically result in a barely perceptible improvement in the existing view.
Neutral	Neither beneficial nor adverse effects in the existing view or visual amenity.
Negligible Adverse	Alterations that typically result in a barely perceptible deterioration in the existing view or visual amenity.
Minor Adverse	Alterations that typically result in a limited deterioration in the existing view or visual amenity.
Moderate Adverse	Alterations that typically result in a noticeable deterioration in the existing view or visual amenity.
Major Adverse	Alterations that typically result in a pronounced deterioration in the existing view or visual amenity.

13.0 Appendix 2: Green Belt Review Methodology

13.1 The Site and Green Belt parcels have been assessed against the five purposes of the Green Belt, as set out in paragraph 143 of NPPF (December 2024), which are:

- a) *“To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b) *To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- c) *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- d) *To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- e) *To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”*

13.2 With respect to the fifth principle, Green Belt release does not necessarily prejudice derelict or other urban land being brought forward for urban regeneration. There is also no mechanism by which to evaluate the relative contribution made by different Green Belt parcels or areas to this purpose. Whilst the fifth principle is considered to hold true for all areas within the Green Belt, the updated NPPF introduces the concept of *“grey belt land”* in addition to *“previously developed land” (PDL)*.

13.3 NPPF recognises that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl, by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their *“openness”* and their *“permanence”*. Once established, there is no requirement for Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed or changes although they may be altered *“where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified”*. Changes to Green Belt boundaries should have regard to their *“intended performance in the long term”* to ensure they endure beyond the plan period.

13.4 The updated NPPF identifies exceptional circumstances as including *“instances where an authority cannot meet its identified need for homes, commercial or other development through other means”*. Where it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, paragraph 148 of the NPPF requires that priority is given to previously developed land and then consideration should be given to grey belt which is not previously developed, and then to other Green Belt locations. *“Grey Belt”* is defined as *“land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d)”*. The NPPF notes that *“grey belt”* excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development, these include habitats sites and designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Green Space, National Parks and National Landscapes.

13.5 When defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent. Once Green Belts have been defined, NPPF notes that local planning authorities should *“plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to*

provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land”.

- 13.6 With respect to proposals affecting the Green Belt, the NPPF identifies exceptions that apply where development is not inappropriate in the Green Belt in Paragraph 154. The NPPF states, in Paragraph 155, that *“the development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where:*
- a) The development would utilise grey belt and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan”.*
- 13.7 Paragraph 156 sets out ‘Golden Rules’ that apply where Green Belt land is released for development. These include contributions for affordable housing, necessary improvements to infrastructure; and provision of new, or improvements to existing, green spaces that area accessible to the public. New residents *“should be able to access good quality green spaces within a short walk of their home, whether through onsite provision or through access to offsite spaces”.*
- 13.8 Paragraph 159 of NPPF notes that *“the improvements to green spaces required as part of the Golden Rules should contribute positively to the landscape setting of the development, support nature recovery and meet local standards for green space provision where these exist in the development plan. Where no locally specific standards exist, development proposals should meet national standards relevant to the development (these include Natural England standards on accessible green space and urban greening factor and Green Flag criteria). Where land has been identified as having particular potential for habitat creation or nature recovery within Local Nature Recovery Strategies, proposals should contribute towards these outcomes”.*

Assessment of contribution to the Purposes of the Green Belt

- 13.9 Criteria have been used to assess the contribution made by the Site or Green Belt parcel to the purposes of the Green Belt are set out in Table 2.1.
- 13.10 With respect to purpose five, “assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land”, this is considered to apply equally to all areas of Green Belt which would be considered secondary to the development of derelict and urban land. There is no way in which to differentiate between different areas of Green Belt in encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. It is therefore considered that all Green Belt land / parcels contribute equally to purpose five.

Table 13.1: Green Belt Assessment Methodology

Purpose	Contribution	Criteria / Illustrative Features
Purpose A: Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Strong	Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to be free of existing development, and lack physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development. They are also likely to include all of the following features: - be adjacent or near to a large built up area - if developed, result in an incongruous pattern of development (such as an extended “finger” of development into the Green Belt)
	Moderate	Assessment areas that contribute moderately are likely to be adjacent or near to a large built up area, but include one or more features that weaken the land’s contribution to this purpose a, such as (but not limited to): - having physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development - be partially enclosed by existing development, such that new development would not result in an incongruous pattern of development - contain existing development - being subject to other urbanising influences
	Weak or None	Assessment areas that make only a weak or no contribution are likely to include those that: - are not adjacent to or near to a large built up area - are adjacent to or near to a large built up area, but containing or being largely enclosed by significant existing development
Purpose B: Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Strong	Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to be free of existing development and include all of the following features: - forming a substantial part of a gap between towns - the development of which would be likely to result in the loss of visual separation of towns
	Moderate	Assessment areas that contribute moderately are likely to be located in a gap between towns, but include one or more

Purpose	Contribution	Criteria / Illustrative Features
		features that weaken their contribution to this purpose, such as (but not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - forming a small part of the gap between towns - being able to be developed without the loss of visual separation between towns. This could be (but is not limited to) due to the presence or the close proximity of structures, natural landscape elements or topography that preserve visual separation
	Weak or None	Assessment areas that contribute weakly are likely to include those that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do not form part of a gap between towns, or - form part of a gap between towns, but only a very small part of this gap, without making a contribution to visual separation
Purpose C: Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Strong	Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to contain no built or engineered forms and to be perceived as inherently undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development within the assessment area would potentially result in a strong urbanising influence over the wider landscape.
	Moderate	Assessment areas that contribute moderately are likely to have built or engineered forms present but retain a perception of being predominantly undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development within the assessment area would potentially result in a moderate urbanising influence over the wider landscape.
	Weak or None	Assessment areas that contribute weakly are likely to have built or engineered forms present and a minimal perception of being undeveloped or to be perceived as inherently developed and/or urban in character. Development within the assessment area would potentially result in a limited or no urbanising influence over the wider landscape.
Purpose D: Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Strong	Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely be free of existing development and to include all of the following features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - form part of the setting of the historic town - make a considerable contribution to the special character of a historic town. This could be (but is not limited to) as a result of being within, adjacent to, or of significant visual importance to the historic aspects of the town
	Moderate	Assessment areas that perform moderately are likely to form part of the setting and/or contribute to the special character of a historic town but include one or more features that weaken their contribution to this purpose, such as (but not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being separated to some extent from historic aspects of the town by existing development or topography

Purpose	Contribution	Criteria / Illustrative Features
		- containing existing development - not having an important visual, physical, or experiential relationship to historic aspects of the town
	Weak or None	Assessment areas that make no or only a weak contribution are likely to include those that: - do not form part of the setting of a historic town - have no visual, physical, or experiential connection to the historic aspects of the town

13.11 The key characteristics of the Green Belt are their *“openness”* and *“their permanence”*. These characteristics must not be diminished for the areas remaining within the Green Belt designation as a result of the release of land from the Green Belt and the defining of new Green Belt boundaries. Matters which need to be considered when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt include:

- *“openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume*
- *the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness*
- *the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation”.*

13.12 Consideration is also given to the relationship of the Site / Green Belt Parcel to existing elements, such as built form, roads, railways and rivers, and visual barriers, including ridgelines and areas of notable structural vegetation. This informs the assessment of the Site / Green Belt Parcel, and the identification of permanent and robust Green Belt boundaries.

13.13 Where appropriate, these considerations, along with the assessment against the purposes of the Green Belt, are used to determine the degree of harm to the Green Belt likely to arise from the release of the Site / Parcel from the Green Belt and the development of the Site.

Table 13.2: Definitions

Term	Definition
Brownfield	See Previously Developed Land
Character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that differentiates one from another
Coalescence	The physical or visual linkage of large built-up areas
Countryside	In planning terms; land outwith the settlement boundary
Defensible Boundary	A physical feature that is readily recognisable and likely to be permanent

Term	Definition
Encroachment	Advancement of a large built-up area beyond the limits of the existing built-up area into an area perceived to be countryside
Green Infrastructure	A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities
Greenfield	Land, usually farmland, that has not previously been developed
Grey Belt	NPPF definition: For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.
Large built-up area	An area that corresponds to the settlements identified in the Local Plan, including those inset from the Green Belt
Merging	Refer to 'Coalescence'
Neighbouring Town	Refers to settlements identified within the Local Plan and those within the neighbouring authorities' administrative boundary that abut the Green Belt
Open Space	All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (as defined in NPPF) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as visual amenity
Openness	Openness is taken to be the degree to which an area is primarily unaffected by built features, in combination with the consideration of the visual perception of built features. This is considered from first principles, i.e. acknowledging existing structure that occur physically and visually within the area, even where they are 'washed over' by the Green Belt designation.
Previously Developed Land	Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. This excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill, where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures; land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape. (NPPF definition)
Sprawl	The outward spread of a large built-up area in an incoherent, sporadic, dispersed or irregular way