
St Ippolyts: Landscape, Visual and Green Belt Statement

Prepared on behalf of Countryside Properties

12 January 2018

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Appendix A.1: Extracts from Landscape Character Assessments

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) was commissioned by Countryside Properties in January 2018, to produce a summary document setting out the landscape, visual and Green Belt issues in relation to land to the south of Waterdell Lane in St Ippolyts.
- 1.2 The land, referred to throughout this document as 'the Site', comprises two fields to the south of the existing residential development on the southern edge of Gosmore, which forms part of the dispersed village of St Ippolyts, and to the north of Half Hankerchief Lane. More detail about the Site is included in Chapter 2.19. Part of the Site is identified as SI1 in the Local Plan 2011-2031 Preferred Options Consultation Paper (2014) and this area is to be promoted for residential development. The remainder of the Site, outside of the proposed allocation, will form part of the Public Open Space and structural landscaping. The Site and SI1 are identified on Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan accompanying this document. The context of the Site is assessed in relation to the land identified on Figure 1: Site Context Plan, and referred to as 'the Study Area'.
- 1.3 This report comprises the following elements:
- A brief study of the Site and its landscape context, combined with an analysis of the relevant published landscape character assessments, to understand the degree to which the Site reflects local landscape character and its contribution to the landscape character of the Study Area.
 - A visual analysis of the Site to understand its visibility and its role within views of the Study Area.
 - Identification of the published evidence base, including Green Belt Reviews, produced by North Hertfordshire Council, relating to the Site.
 - An assessment of the contribution that the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt and, therefore, its suitability for release from the Green Belt.
 - The identification of the landscape and visual opportunities and constraints to development within the Site, and recommendations for landscape enhancement measures that may be implemented as part of any future development proposals. This information will be used to inform the emerging masterplan for the Site.
- 1.4 Supporting illustrative information is presented in the following accompanying plans and photographs:
- Figure 1: Site Context and Visual Appraisal Plan - demonstrating the location of the Site in relation to areas of settlement, key areas of vegetation and landscape and cultural

heritage designations within the Study Area. This plan also shows the locations of the Site Context Photographs.

- Figure 2: Topographical and Hydrological Features Plan - demonstrating the topography of the Site to aid the understanding of the visual envelope of the Site.
- Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan - to demonstrate the location of the Site in relation to identified character areas within published landscape character assessments.
- Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan - demonstrating key landscape and built features around the Site and the locations of the Site Appraisal Photographs.
- Site Context Photographs - illustrating key views towards the Site and the role that the Site plays in those views.
- Site Appraisal Photographs - illustrating the character of the different areas of the Site and the landscape features within it.

1.5 In addition, the extracts from the relevant landscape character assessments and Green Belt Reviews are included within Appendix 1.0 of this statement.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) and Green Belt Review (GBR) are separate assessments. However, the information ascertained through the LVA is used to aid the assessment of the contribution that the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt, such as through the assessment of the relationship of the Site with the existing built form, the identification of defensible boundaries that may prevent sprawl, the physical and visual encroachment into the countryside and the physical and visual merging of settlements.

Methodology for Landscape and Visual Appraisals

2.2 The LVA has been prepared with reference to the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition¹.

2.3 A desktop review of the Study Area was undertaken to identify landform, landscape features, landscape designations and relevant landscape policy, and to review published landscape character information. This information was used as the initial basis against which to appraise the Site, and site visits were undertaken subsequently.

2.4 A visual appraisal of the Site was undertaken to consider the nature of existing views from publicly accessible viewpoints including roads, Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and public open spaces. Views were considered from all directions and from a range of distances. The viewpoints chosen are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to represent the potential views obtained towards the Site.

2.5 These studies were used to identify opportunities and constraints to future development to inform the development of masterplan designs for the Site.

Methodology for Green Belt Review

2.6 The assessment of the Site is included within Chapter 7.0.

2.7 The Site was assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out in Paragraph 80 of the NPPF, which are:

- *"To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- *To prevent neighbouring towns from merging in to one another;*
- *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and*

¹ Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment and the Landscape Institute (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition

- *To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns...*

- 2.8 The fifth purpose of the Green Belt "to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land", has been scoped out of the assessment as the Council is considering greenfield sites and, therefore, should the Site be brought forward for development, it would not prejudice derelict or other urban land being brought forward for development.
- 2.9 The NPPF states in Paragraph 83 that "once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan".
- 2.10 The NPPF states that the key characteristics of the Green Belt are "their openness and their permanence". In defining new boundaries to the Green Belt, it must be ensured that these characteristics are not diminished for the areas remaining within the Green Belt designation as a direct result of development.
- 2.11 The table below sets out the assessment criteria used within this LVA GBR to assess the contribution that the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt.

Table 2.1: Purposes of the Green Belt – Assessment Criteria

Purpose	Criteria	Contribution
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Protects open land against disorganised and unattractive extension	Considerable: Open land with few existing permanent boundaries where development would extend the settlement pattern beyond established limits and result in the perception of a disorganised or unattractive extension Some: Open land with some existing boundaries however they may not be permanent. The site has some relation to the existing built form of the area. Limited: Is well contained by existing boundaries where development would not extend the settlement pattern beyond its established limits.
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Prevents development that would result in the merging of settlements. This would also take into consideration the extent of visual connectivity between settlements.	Considerable: Development would result in the merging of settlements. Some: Development is not likely to result in the physical merging of settlements, however, there would be a visual merging of settlements. Limited: Development would not result in the merging of settlements, physically or visually.
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Protect the openness of the countryside and perceived rurality	Considerable: No built or engineered forms present and inherently rural in character. Some: Urbanising elements over the area, with minimal built for engineered forms.

		Limited: The majority of the area contains existing built or engineered forms or is urban in character / not perceived to be rural.
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Conserve the setting and special character of heritage assets	Considerable: Heritage assets present within, or adjoining, the area. Some: Intervisibility with, or contribution to the setting of, heritage assets. Limited: No intervisibility with, or contribution to the setting of, heritage assets.

Description of terms

Openness

- 2.12 Openness is taken to be the degree to which an area is unaffected by built structures. It is considered that, in order to be a robust assessment, this should be considered from first principles, i.e. acknowledging existing structures that occur within the area, rather than seeing them as being 'washed over' by the existing Green Belt designation.

Sprawl

- 2.13 Disorganised and unattractive extension to an existing development area. Unrestricted sprawl could also be defined as areas where large expanses of land are being used for a relatively small amount of development. Sprawl also considers:

- How well the Site relates to the existing built form of the area (how well contained the Site is);
- How well the existing boundary performs in containing development. Where strong boundaries are formed by roads, rivers and railway lines, with smaller country lanes performing a more limited role; and
- The impact of encroachment on the countryside. Where sites that are surrounded on more than one side by development (i.e. where the landscape is less open), this impact is more limited.

Merging

- 2.14 This relates to the coalescence of settlements or the erosion of the gap between settlements. Interlying physical barriers, intervisibility between towns / settlements and the potential for coalescence are all taken into consideration.
- 2.15 Coalescence is the physical or visual linkage of two settlements or areas of built form.

Encroachment

- 2.16 Advancement of built development beyond the limits of the existing built up area into an area perceived as countryside either physically or visually.
- 2.17 Any development on greenfield sites would inevitably lead to physical encroachment, whether the land is within the Green Belt or not. Encroachment into the countryside takes into consideration the landscape character context, and the urbanising features present as well as the potential visual encroachment into the countryside.

Defensible Boundaries

- 2.18 The NPPF states that "local authorities should define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent".
- 2.19 With regard to physical barriers, these would include roads, railway lines, large woodland or significant topographical features.

3.0 SITE AND LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

- 3.1 As outlined above, the Site is situated on the southern edge of the hamlet of Gosmore, which forms part of the wider dispersed village of St Ippolyts, as demonstrated by Figure 1: Site Context Plan. This plan also shows the locations of the Site Context Photographs which demonstrate views towards the Site from the surrounding landscape. St Ippolyts is situated to the south of Hitchin in Hertfordshire and is located within North Hertfordshire District. The Site comprises two arable fields, totalling 4.1ha in area. An aerial photograph of the Site is included on Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan. This also shows the locations of the Site Appraisal Photographs included within the illustrative material accompanying this note.
- 3.2 The northern boundary of the eastern field is marked by the fences along the rear boundaries of numbers 7 to 53 Waterdell Lane and a community hall, as demonstrated in the right hand side of Site Appraisal Photograph C. The northern boundary of the western field is marked by the boundary of number 81 Waterdell Lane, as seen in the centre left of Site Appraisal Photograph D. The western boundary of the western field is partially marked by native hedgerows, separating the Site from the adjacent arable fields. Part of the western boundary is unmarked, where the westernmost field is conjoined with a further field outside of the Site boundary (Site Appraisal Photograph D). The western boundary of SI1 is unmarked but corresponds to the rear boundaries of number 83 to 97 Waterdell Lane. The southern boundary of both fields is marked by Half Hankerchief Lane, which separates the Site from the wooded grounds of the Grade II Listed St Ibbs, (see Site Appraisal Photographs B and C). The eastern boundary of the Site is marked by a belt of woodland trees which has been present since at least the time of the 1881 OS Map (right hand side of Site Appraisal Photograph D). The tree belt separates the Site from the B656 London Road. To the east of London Road is the curtilage of Queenborough, a single detached house in large grounds, bordered by pastoral farmland and further parkland associated with St Ibbs.

Topography and Hydrology

- 3.3 The Site rises from approximately 75m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) at its boundary with the London Road, up to over 85m AOD on the western boundary, as demonstrated by Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan.
- 3.4 Gosmore is situated between approximately 80 and 90mAOD on the western edge of the valley of Ippollitts Brook, which extends north towards Hitchin and which is situated at approximately 75mAOD. St Ippolyts is situated on the eastern side of the valley at the head of a narrow ridge of land between approximately 85 and 96mAOD.

- 3.5 The landform rises up to a ridge of land crossing the south-western corner of the Study Area at over 155mAOD. A further ridge of land of approximately 115mAOD extends from the south-eastern edge of the Study Area, extending along the western edge of Stevenage.
- 3.6 A smaller ridge of land extends through the southern edge of Gosmore, extending south towards Half Hankerchief Lane approximately parallel with the western boundary of the Site, from which Site Context Photograph 6 is taken.

Settlement

- 3.7 Settlement comprises a series of small historic villages and hamlets forming satellites to Hitchin to the north and Stevenage to the south-east. Further individual dwellings are spread along the intervening roads, creating a consistent sense of scattered development.

Access

- 3.8 The main road in the region of St Ippolyts is the B656 London Road, which extends south from Hitchin along the eastern boundary of the Site. The A602 extends south-east from Hitchin towards Stevenage and the A1(M) crosses the eastern edge of the Study Area, extending around the northern edge of Stevenage. A widely spaced network of rural roads connects the wider countryside to the main routes.
- 3.9 The Chiltern Way National Trail crosses the south-western edge of the Study Area, the Hertfordshire Way National Trail extends approximately north-south through the eastern edge of the Study Area. The two routes meet approximately 2km to the south of the Site.
- 3.10 A single footpath (footpath 11) crosses the centre of the Site, dividing the western and eastern fields. A further footpath extends east from Half Hankerchief Lane, through St Ippolyts and on towards the east of the Study Area. Otherwise, there are few footpaths in the immediate region of the Site. Further footpaths are located on the higher ground, approximately 1km to the west and south-west of the Site.

Vegetation and Field Pattern

- 3.11 The landscape comprises an irregular patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland spread out between the main settlements. Larger areas of woodland are primarily situated on the ridges of higher ground in the south-west, although small pockets of remnant parkland occur around the villages. Field pattern also tends to be smaller closer to the villages. Fields are separated by hedgerows with remnant hedgerow trees, with greater numbers of trees on the higher ground to the south-west.

Designations

- 3.12 The edge of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty covers the north-western edge of the Study Area, approximately 3km to the north-west of the Site.
- 3.13 The Grade II* Registered Parkland of Temple Dinsley is situated 1.5km to the south-west of the Site. Areas of Ancient Woodland occur on the higher ground to the south-west, the closest to the Site being over 620m to the south.
- 3.14 There is a Grade II Listed Ice House in the south-eastern corner of the Site and the Grade II Listed St Ibbs Lodge is situated immediately to the south of the Site on the southern side of Half Hankerchief Lane.
- 3.15 With the exception of the south-western area and the eastern edge, the majority of the Study Area is part of the London Metropolitan Green Belt.

4.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1 This chapter provides a brief summary of the local landscape character and the recommended guidance. The locations of the Landscape Character Areas within the Study Area are shown on Figure 3: Landscape Character.

National

4.2 At a national level, the Site and Study Area is situated with National Character Area (NCA) 110: Chilterns. This is described as part of an outcrop of Chalk which extends between East Anglia and the South Downs. This area is incised by branching valleys, as demonstrated on Figure 2. Views are described as being enclosed within the valleys and the sunken routeways, as well as the extensive woodland and hedgerow-enclosed fields. The Chilterns are described as one of the most wooded lowland landscapes in England and as containing "*extensive rights of way, commons, open access downland, woodland and ... parklands*".

4.3 The neighbouring NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk, which covers the Study Area to the east of the Site, is described as being more open with a more regular field pattern, forming a lower-lying extension of NCA 110.

4.4 Although the Study Area is mainly situated within NCA 110, only the higher areas of ground in the south-west reflect this, whereas the central area of the Study Area, including the Site, is generally less vegetated and contains relatively few rights of way and is therefore not reflective of the NCA.

4.5 Statements of Environmental Opportunity for NCA 110 include the following:

- SEO 1: Manage the wooded landscape, to conserve and enhance biodiversity, protect the historic landscape character of the area and to provide recreational opportunities;
- SEO 2: Where natural and cultural heritage is strong, aim to restore and strengthen the historic landscape;
- SEO 4: Enhance local distinctiveness and create green infrastructure within existing settlements and new development.

4.6 Landscape opportunities for this character area include the following:

- Protect the character of the landscape by conserving and enhancing landscape assets such as boundary features, semi natural habitats and historic buildings;
- Identify and protect views to and from important viewpoints and landmarks;
- Protect the patchwork of the landscape including the conservation of small farm woodlands and historic hedgerows, veteran and ancient trees;

- Reflect traditional building styles and materials within new development;
- Identify opportunities to restore degraded landscape features;
- Reduce threats to natural and historic features by protecting or restoring their setting;
- Protect and enhance opportunities for increased public access.

Local

- 4.7 At the local level, the Site is situated within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 214: Langley Valley within the northern Hertfordshire Landscape Study (2011). LCA 214 extends north-west to south-east around the southern edge of Hitchin. It is described as a large-scale rolling landform that is predominantly in arable use. The field pattern is described as varying in size with smaller fields associated within grazing land closed to St Ippolyts and Langley. Hedgerows are described as generally well-trimmed and containing remnant mature trees. Woodland is described as being situated primarily on the more pronounced chalk landscapes with relatively little woodland elsewhere. Scattered settlements and farmsteads are described as a feature, as is parkland.
- 4.8 The condition of the landscape is described as 'poor' and the robustness as 'weak'. Visual sensitivity is described as moderate to high and landscape value is described as moderate low.
- 4.9 The document states that *"it may be possible to accommodate some small-scale expansion of Hitchin within this Character Area carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character"*. The document goes on to say that mitigation planting and the protection of existing woodland would need to be considered as part of any proposals to ensure that there is limited visual intrusion into the landscape.
- 4.10 Guidelines for development within this area include the following:
- Promote planting of new woodland particularly in relation to urban edges;
 - Promote links between habitat areas;
 - Promote hedgerow restoration along historic field boundaries and for visual links between woodland areas;
 - Promote the use of traditional hedgerows in place of post and wire fencing;
 - Promote the diversity of hedgerow species;
 - Maintain and extend the rights of way network;
 - Protect the pattern of winding narrow lanes and associated hedge banks;
 - Retain the rural character of Langley valley, ensuring that new development is reflective of the local context in terms of style, scale and massing;
 - Protect woodland blocks;

- Encourage the planting of new broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen development from long distance views;
- Avoid development on exposed ridgelines;
- Reduce the impact of new lighting on the character area;
- Create new accessible green infrastructure for local communities;
- Protect and enhance views towards St Ippolyts Church.

Landscape Sensitivity Study for Land South West of Hitchin (2012)

- 4.11 The Site is situated within Landscape Unit L1 for the purposes of the study which was primarily designed to assess sensitivity to a proposed bypass route around the southern edge of Hitchin.
- 4.12 The table on page 42 makes reference to the 'micro-level' variations within the landform, mainly the small ridge of land which extends through the southern edge of Gosmore and extending south to the east of the Site. The table references the *"diverse landscape pattern, the integrity of which would be vulnerable to residential and mixed-use development footprints"*.
- 4.13 Views are described as been *"essentially framed and filtered by landform and interlaced field boundary vegetation"*.
- 4.14 The overall landscape sensitivity of the unit to residential and mixed-use development was assessed as being 'moderate-high'.
- 4.15 Recommendations for the Landscape Unit highlight that it has very limited ability to accommodate anything other than very small-scale development which sits within the existing landform and landscape structure pattern, and which responds to the existing scale and quantum of settlement.

5.0 VISUAL BASELINE

- 5.1 The Site is enclosed by existing residential development to the north, a tree belt along the eastern boundary and the wooded grounds of St Ibbs to the south. The land rises up to a small ridge to the immediate west of the Site, falling away slightly before rising up to the higher ground to the south-west.
- 5.2 Immediate open views into the Site are possible from the footpath crossing the centre. Filtered views over the top of the hedge are possible from Half Hankerchief Lane to the south and through the tree belt from London Road to the east (Site Context Photographs 2 and 3).
- 5.3 Moving away from the Site, views are possible from a short stretch of Half Hankerchief Lane to the south-west, where the lane rises up to the narrow ridge east of the Site (Site Context Photograph 6). Further glimpsed views are possible through gaps in the hedgerow along Thistley Lane to the south-east (Site Context Photograph 7) and from the elevated land on St Albans Highway on the edge of the higher ridge of ground to the south-west (Site Context Photograph 8).
- 5.4 Views from the west are possible from the grounds of St Ippolyts Church and from the cemetery on Folly Lane, south of St Ippolyts (Site Context Photographs 4 and 5). Both of these views are partially obscured by the trees within the parkland of St Ibbs and the tree belt extending along the eastern boundary of the Site.
- 5.5 Views from the north and north-west are obscured by the intervening vegetation and built form. Views from Waterdell Lane to the north of the Site, and from Preston Road, on the edge of Gosmore, are obscured by the trees within the parkland and the intervening built form. Views into the Site from a short stretch of Waterdell Lane, immediately north of footpath 11, are possible, filtered through the hedgerow (Site Context Photograph 1).
- 5.6 More distant views from all directions are obscured by landform and vegetation.

6.0 LANDSCAPE PLANNING POLICY

6.1 The Site is situated within the St Ippolyts Neighbourhood Plan area, but no Neighbourhood Plan has, as yet, been Made. The Current Development Plan for the Site therefore comprises the Saved Policies of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations (1996) (Saved 2007)

North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations

6.2 The relevant policies can be summarised as follows:

- Policy 2 - Green Belt – the Council will aim to keep the uses of land open in character.
- Policy 3 - Settlements within the Green Belt - the Council will not normally permit development proposals
- Policy 57: Residential Guidelines and Standards – the layout and design of each new development must relate to its unique context. Existing features should be retained. Residential areas adjacent to open agricultural land must be designed so as to *“minimise any potential urban fringe problems and lessen any detrimental effects on adjacent open countryside and its land uses”*. Housing proposals should relate to, and enhance the site and surroundings, and dwellings should be grouped in informal and small-scale clusters. The design should relate to the existing landscape features which should be kept where possible. Sites at the edge of town should be designed to provide an attractive setting and long-term boundary and tree belts, if appropriate to the location, should be a minimum of 10m wide.

Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan 2011-2031

6.3 The Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan was approved by Cabinet on 26th September 2016. It was then submitted to the Government on the 9th June 2017. Hearings relating to the examination of the Local Plan commenced in November 2017 and will continue into March.

6.4 The Site is partially covered by a draft allocation for 40 homes, reference S11. This area covers the entirety of the eastern field of the Site and the western field as far west as the rear boundaries of numbers 83-97 Waterdell Lane.

6.5 Policies relevant to the Site are as follows:

- SP1: Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire – development will respect and improve their surroundings, protect important landscapes, heritage assets and green infrastructure.
- SP5: Countryside and Green Belt – references the Green Belt Review.

- SP9: Design and sustainability – development will be supported where it is well-designed and responds positively to its local context.
- SP10: Healthy communities – green infrastructure should be protected, enhanced and created *“to foster healthy lifestyles”*.
- SP12: Green infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape – Green infrastructure, biodiversity networks and landscape character should be protected and enhanced and, where appropriate, created.
- D1: Sustainable design – development proposals must respond to the site’s context, retain existing vegetation and create new appropriate planting.
- NE1: Landscape – Development should respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape character areas and accord with its guidelines, not have a detrimental impact on the appearance of their immediate surroundings and character unless suitable mitigation can be provided, consider the long-term management and maintenance of the proposed landscape features.
- NE2: Green Infrastructure – development should protect and enhance green infrastructure, avoid negative impacts upon green infrastructure.
- NE5: New and improved public open space and biodiversity – proposals must provide suitable open space, incorporate open space buffers where necessary and contribute to ecological and biodiversity networks.

6.6 The Site, reference SI1, was proposed for allocation with an overall number of 72 dwellings.

Draft SA/SEA of North Hertfordshire Local Plan Preferred Options (2014)

6.7 The table on page 43 of Appendix 7 of the above document includes the pros and cons of Site SI1. Pros include the provision of 72 dwellings whereas the cons relate to the landscape capacity which is assessed to be low to moderate for small-scale development, in accordance with the North Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment.

SHLAA (2016)

6.8 The entirety of the Site was identified in Appendix 5 of the SHLAA as 221N, was assessed as meeting the tests set within the SHLAA and has been designated as SI1. SI1 in the SHLAA covers the entirety of the Site, rather than the smaller area forming the draft allocation SI1.

6.9 Site 221N was assessed as being suitable, available and achievable and capable of delivering 40 units. The Site is described as being *“largely well-defined, with exception of that part of the boundary adjoining Site 152”*. The land to the rear of the properties on Waterdell Lane is described as being ‘relatively contained’ whereas the south-western area of the Site beyond the footpath was assessed as being *“more exposed in longer views to south-west”*. Reservations were made as to the suitability of this latter area.

7.0 GREEN BELT REVIEW

7.1 This chapter includes a high overview of the North Hertfordshire Green Belt Review (2016) and its assessment of the land including the Site, before undertaking a site specific Green Belt Review utilising the methodology set out in Chapter 2.0.

North Hertfordshire Green Belt Review (2016)

7.2 The Site is situated within Study Area 11 of the above document. Each Study Area was assessed for its performance against the first four of the purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF. Each Study Area was assessed as making a limited, moderate or significant contribution to the purpose of the Green Belt.

7.3 Study Area 11 was assessed as making a significant contribution to preventing sprawl from Hitchin to the north-east, a limited contribution to preventing the merger of Hitchin and Stevenage, a significant contribution to the prevention of the expansion of, and protection of the setting of Gosmore and Charlton, and a significant contribution to protecting the setting of Hitching. Overall, the Study Area was assessed as making a significant contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt.

7.4 The Site was further located within Sub-Parcel 11d: 'Abuts the southern edge of Hitchin bounded by London Road, and road opposite Little Almshow Farm', an area of land far larger than the Site. The GBR assessed this Sub-Parcel as making a significant contribution to the purposes the Green Belt, playing an important role in the checking of unrestricted sprawl and a moderate role in the prevention of encroachment into the countryside.

7.5 Both Study Area 11 and Sub-Parcel 11d cover an area of land significantly larger than the Site and cannot be used as a judgement as to the performance of the Site itself.

7.6 The Site was assessed under the reference of 221 in the 2016 Green Belt Review and was assessed as making a moderate contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, making a significant contribution to the prevention of sprawl and to protecting the countryside from encroachment. The document does acknowledge that the Site is well-contained.

7.7 The following paragraphs dispute the assessment made above which does not consider the effects of the defensible boundaries to the south and east of the Site, nor the effects of the topography and landscape features on the prevention of encroachment into the countryside. More detail is set out below.

Site Specific Green Belt Review

7.8 A Green Belt Review of the Site was undertaken by Barton Willmore, using the methodology set out in Chapter 2.0. The following table summarises the assessment.

Table 7.1: Contribution of the Site to the Purposes of the Green Belt

Purpose	Critique	Contribution
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	The southern edge of Gosmore is not currently defined by a defensible boundary. The parkland of St Ibbs to the south of Half Hankerchief Lane, and the associated tree planting, form a defensible boundary to the south of the Site. The eastern boundary is marked by London Road and the tree belt, providing a defensible boundary to the east. There is no strongly defensible boundary to the west, which is currently unmarked. The ridge of land extending into Gosmore along the western edge of the Site may form the basis of a defensible boundary.	Some, reducing to limited if new planting established along the western boundary along the ridge.
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	The Site is situated on the southern edge of Gosmore, on the opposite side to Hitchin. Stevenage is situated 2.8km to the south-east. The Site performs no role in preventing these towns from merging, visually or physically.	Limited
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	The visual envelope of the Site is limited to short distance views from the south-west and west, and isolated partial views from the eastern edge of St Ippolyts proper. The woodland within St Ibbs forms a strong visual barrier from views to the south and the ridgeline extending along the western boundary limits views towards the Site with only rooftops likely visible above the landform. These rooftops will be viewed set back against, and within the context of, the existing built form, and will therefore create a very limited visual impact from these locations. The proposed development will not extend further west than the existing western edge of Gosmore. Developing the Site will create limited to negligible visual and physical encroachment into the countryside.	Limited
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	The Site is situated on the opposite side of Gosmore from Hitchin and cannot, therefore, be considered to form part of its setting. If the criteria were taken to extend to historic villages, it would apply to the historic cores of Gosmore and St Ippolyts. Views from the historic core of Gosmore are prevented by the intervening inter-war development, and the tree planting to the west of Waterdell Lane. The Site does not, therefore, provide any physical or visual connectivity with the centre of Gosmore and cannot, therefore, form part of its setting. Views towards the Site are possible from limited locations within the grounds of St Ippolyts Church, from a small corner of the churchyard from which the view is not obscured by planting within the parkland of St Ibbs. Views are limited by the tree belt along the eastern boundary of the Site. Views towards the development would be in the context of the immediately adjacent development on Waterdell Lane and the buildings to the east of London Road. Developing the Site with development appropriate to its context would not notably adversely affect views from the historic centre of St Ippolyts.	Limited

Overall	Some to limited (limited if planting established along the western boundary)
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8.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Site is situated on the southern edge of Gosmore, a hamlet forming part of St Ippolyts in North Hertfordshire District. The Site is situated between inter-war residential development and a community hall on the edge of Gosmore, and the wooded parkland of St Ibbs to the south. The western boundary is partially comprised by a native hedgerow and partially open to the adjacent field. The majority of the Site is covered by a draft allocation SI1 for residential development. The land between SI1 and the Site is proposed for public open space and structural landscaping.
- 8.2 The Site is situated on the western side of the valley of the Ippollitt Brook, and St Ippolyts is situated on the low ridge of land on the eastern side of the valley. The landform rises in a low ridge approximately parallel with the western boundary of the Site, before falling away slightly and then rising to over 155m in the south-west of the Study Area. The landscape is generally devoid of woodland away from the high away of ground in the south-west, with the exception of the remnant parklands, such as St Ibbs. Fields are irregular in shape with remnant hedgerow trees, tending to be small in size close to villages. The higher ground is well-wooded and with more frequent hedgerow trees.
- 8.3 At a national level, the Site is situated within NCA110: Chilterns, which describes the well-wooded chalk ridge crossing the south-west of the Site. The centre of the Study Area, in which the Site is situated is more devoid in vegetation than the NCA suggests. At a local level, the Site is situated within Character Area 214: Langley Valley, which describes a gently undulating landscape which is less vegetated than the higher ground and which more accurately reflects the experience of visiting the Site.
- 8.4 Isolated partial views towards the Site are possible from the historic core of St Ippolyts on the higher ground to the east, from the shallow ridge to the immediate west of the Site, and from the edge of the high ridge further to the south-west. Further views are prevented by intervening landform, vegetation and built form.
- 8.5 The current Development Plan for the Site comprises the 2007 Saved Policies of the 1996 North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2 (Saved 2007). These will be replaced by the emerging Local Plan 2011-31, the Submission Draft of which is currently undergoing hearings. The majority of the Site is covered by a draft allocation within the Draft Local Plan, under the designation of SI1. The western boundary of SI1 broadly corresponds with the rear boundaries of number 82 to 97 Waterdell Lane.
- 8.6 The Site appears within the evidence base from at least 2014, and is referred to in the 2016 SHLAA and the 2014 Draft SA/SEA of the Preferred Options. The Local Plan Preferred Options

(2014) refers to the entirety of the Site and a potential 72 dwellings, whereas the 2016 SHLAA refers to the smaller SI1 and a total of 40 potential dwellings. Within the draft allocation SI1, the western Site boundary is drawn at the same westward extent as the rear boundaries of numbers 83 to 97 Waterdell Lane, whereas the Site extends as far west as the rear boundary of number 81 Waterdell Lane.

- 8.7 The Site and SI1 are assessed by Barton Willmore as making some to a limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, making moderate contribution to preventing sprawl and a limited contribution to the remaining three purposes assessed. This is as a result of strong landscape and visual barriers to the south of the Site which will prevent sprawl to the south, as well as physical and visual encroachment into the countryside. There is no defensible boundary along the western boundary, although the small ridge of land reduces views from the south-west and west. New planting and open space could be created between the western boundaries of SI1 and the Site, reducing the contribution of the Site to the Green Belt to 'limited'.
- 8.8 The North Hertfordshire District Council document entitled 'Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 Schedule of Matters and Issues for the Examination' sets out a number of questions in paragraph 11.69 which will be considered at the Hearing by the Inspector. Of those questions, the following are relevant to this assessment:
- b) What is the nature and extent of the harm to the Green Belt of removing the Site from it?
 - c) To what extent would the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt be ameliorate or reduced to the lowest reasonable practicable extent?
 - d) If this site were to be developed as proposed, would the adjacent Green belt continue to serve at least one of the five purposes of Green Belts, or would the Green Belt function be undermined by the Site's allocation?
 - g) Has the Green Belt boundary around the site been defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent? Does it avoid including land which is unnecessary to keep permanently open?
- 8.9 Each of these is answered in turn below.

What is the nature and extent of the harm to the Green Belt of removing the Site from it?

- 8.10 The visual envelope of the Site is limited and, from where it is visible, it is seen within the context of the neighbouring built form of Gosmore. As a result, there is limited visual encroachment into the wider Green Belt. There are strong defensible boundaries to the south

and east and the opportunity to create defensible boundaries to the west. There will be limited harm on the wider Green Belt from the removal of the Site.

To what extent would the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonable practicable extent?

- 8.11 The proposed development will extend no further west than the existing western edge of Gosmore in this area. The introduction of new planting along the western boundary will contribute to the effects of the rise in the landform to further reduce views from the south-west. Management and maintenance of the tree belt along the eastern boundary will also reinforce this as a defensible boundary. Further, ensuring that the proposed development is of a scale and type appropriate to its immediate context and its location on the edge of the village, and being broken up by Green Infrastructure, will result in a development which sits sensitively into the wider landscape and townscape.

If this site were to be developed as proposed, would the adjacent Green belt continue to serve at least one of the five purposes of Green Belts, or would the Green Belt function be undermined by the Site's allocation?

- 8.12 Removing this Site from the Green Belt will not reduce the ability of the neighbouring areas to perform their function. The wooded grounds of St Ibbs to the south will remain as a strong defensible boundary as will the parkland to the east of London Road. Creating new planting along the western boundary will create a defensible boundary, reducing the pressure on the land to the west.

Has the Green Belt boundary around the site been defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent? Does it avoid including land which is unnecessary to keep permanently open?

- 8.13 The southern boundary is formed by the wooded parkland of St Ibbs, an area of historic landscape which forms the visual setting of the Listed Buildings of St Ibbs, as does the extension of the parkland to the east of London Road. The wooded tree belt along the eastern boundary, combined with London Road, form a strong defensible boundary to the east, further supported by the grounds of the property to the immediate east of London Road. The western boundary of the Site is currently unmarked by a defensible boundary, but is partially marked by a hedgerow, and the western boundary of SI1 is unmarked. Reinforcing this hedgerow and creating new areas of planting and open space in the land between the western boundaries of SI1 and the Site will create a more defensible boundary in this area and, combined with the ridge of land, will further contribute to visual screening from the land to the west whilst contributing to the landscape infrastructure.

Conclusion

8.14 The Site has the capacity to accommodate development within the area designated S11, assuming the following elements are included within the proposed design:

- The planting along the eastern boundary is retained and enhanced;
- The site and setting of the Listed Ice House is protected;
- The native hedgerows along the southern and western boundaries are retained and enhanced;
- The route of the footpath is protected and enhanced within a green corridor passing through the development;
- New planting is established along the western boundary in the form of mixed tree and shrub planting of at least 10m in depth but preferably 20m. This may form a dense planting belt of 10m and a belt of open woodland of 10m;
- Development should be of a size, scale and design which reflects the prevailing local vernacular within Gosmore and St Ippolyts;
- Development in the western part of the Site should be lower in density and informal in layout, in accordance within Saved Local Plan Policy 57.

APPENDIX 1.0: Extracts from Landscape Character Assessments



Summary

The extensively wooded and farmed Chilterns landscape is underlain by chalk bedrock that rises up from the London Basin to form a north-west-facing escarpment offering long views over the adjacent vales. From the vales, the River Thames breaches the escarpment in the south at the Goring Gap and flows on past riverside towns such as Henley. Small streams flow on chalk down some of the dip slope valleys or from the scarp foot, passing through numerous settlements. The major sources of public water supply for the Chilterns and the London area are the chalk aquifer and the Thames.

The countryside is a patchwork of mixed agriculture with woodland, set within hedged boundaries. Furthest from London, the natural and built features of the countryside are recognised as special and attractive in approximately half the National Character Area (NCA) by the designation of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and, in a small area south of the River Thames, by the North Wessex Downs AONB. Outside the AONBs there are major settlements that incorporate extensive urban fringe and growth areas, including Luton, Hemel Hempstead and High Wycombe. Motorways and railways make the area very accessible to visitors and connect the Chilterns to nearby London. Opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the outdoors are wide-ranging, including extensive rights of way; open access commons, woods and downland; Registered Parks and Gardens open to the public; golf courses; shooting estates; and urban green spaces. The Ridgeway and the Thames Path National Trails pass through the Chilterns, and the River Thames and Grand Union Canal are major water-based recreation corridors.

Human history dates back to the Palaeolithic, as evidenced by flint scatters. Farming of the valleys and escarpment began in the Neolithic and continues to this day as a major land use. Arable farming is concentrated on deep, well-drained soils found in the valleys, along the scarp foot and beneath the hills in the north. Nucleated settlements, often featuring historic buildings dating back to medieval times, are found in the valleys and along the scarp foot, as are the major routes. Chalk streams are found only in the main valleys and can be dry in their upper reaches.

Click map to enlarge; click again to reduce.

Above the valley floors, cultivation is made difficult by steep slopes, convoluted terrain and extensive clay-with-flint soils on the dip slope ridges. This has given rise to a diversity of land management practices throughout history, including mixed farming, woodland, extensively grazed downland and common land. Settlement on the plateau is characterised by dispersed farmsteads and villages linked by historic, small-scale routes including sunken lanes.



Walkers can enjoy an extensive rights of way network across farmland and woodland.

Today, common land and downland exist as fragments of their former extents. Commons are numerous across the plateau, providing green space near to people's homes. Historic downland is largely confined to the scarp and is strongly associated with prehistoric archaeology; its species-rich grassland and scrub include areas designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Woodland cover accounts for 14 per cent of the NCA and makes the Chilterns one of the most wooded lowland landscapes in the country. Woods are found on poor agricultural soils, on commons and 'hanging' on steep slopes. A long history of a wood-based economy has helped to maintain many woodlands on ancient sites and generate rich woodland archaeology. More recently, local demand for wood fuel is helping to maintain the woodland resource. Chilterns NCA is renowned for its native beechwoods, a number of which are designated as SAC for their ecological interest.

Throughout the area, historic buildings and also some more recent constructions display locally distinctive uses of local materials, particularly brick and flint. Large mansions and follies are frequent in the countryside, many relating to Registered Parks and Gardens.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity

- **SEO 1:** Manage the wooded landscape, the woodlands (including internationally important Chilterns beechwoods), hedgerows, commons and parklands with the aims of conserving and enhancing biodiversity and the historic landscape and its significant features; maximising the potential for recreation; and securing sustainable production of biomass and timber.
- **SEO 2:** In pockets of historic land use where natural and cultural heritage are both particularly rich, aim to restore and strengthen the historic landscape, ecological resilience and heterogeneity, and to conserve soils. Ensure that species-rich habitats are conserved and extended, including internationally important species-rich Chiltern downland. Secure environmentally and economically sustainable management to ensure conservation in the long term.
- **SEO 3:** Conserve the Chilterns' groundwater resource, River Thames and chalk streams by working in partnership to tackle inter-related issues at a catchment scale and also across the water supply network area. Seek to secure, now and in the future, sustainable water use and thriving flood plain landscapes that are valued by the public.
- **SEO 4:** Enhance local distinctiveness and create or enhance green infrastructure within existing settlements and through new development, particularly in relation to the urban fringe and growth areas such as Luton. Ensure that communities can enjoy good access to the countryside.



Remnant downland is rich with orchids and other flowering plants.

Key characteristics

- The chalk plateau is incised by parallel branching valleys gently shelving to the south-east into the London Basin. The large chalk aquifer is abstracted for water to supply London and its surrounds and also supports flows of springs, chalk streams and the River Thames.
- There are several chalk streams. Features associated with a history of modification include historic mills, watercress beds, culverts and habitat enhancements.
- The north-west-facing escarpment is an abrupt relief feature beside low-lying vales, breached notably by the Thames at the Goring Gap. The escarpment lowers northwards, terminating as distinct hills. The Chiltern ridge offers panoramic views.
- Within the Chilterns, views are enclosed within branching valleys, sunken routeways and extensive woodland and hedgerow-enclosed fields. There are hidden, tranquil pockets along single track lanes and rights of way.
- A mixture of arable, grassland and woodland and the numerous commons reflects the dominance of Grade 3 agricultural land. Ancient woodland has remained on extensive clay-with-flint deposits, while very steep slopes are rarely cultivated. There are, however, not inconsiderable areas of Grade 1 and 2 land that are associated with lower-lying areas and river valleys.
- The Chilterns are one of the most wooded lowland landscapes in England. The area is particularly renowned for its extensive native beechwoods, several of which are designated as part of the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Other distinctive features include rare box woods, 'hanging' woods on steep slopes and rare yew woods, including Hartslock Wood SAC.



The River Thames offers a variety of recreation opportunities, particularly as it passes through towns fronting the river such as Marlow shown here.

Key characteristics continued

- Pre-18th-century fields defined by ancient, often sinuous hedged boundaries are scattered throughout, including co-axial fields. Parliamentary enclosure fields are limited. Large modern fields, usually with ancient boundaries, cover the better agricultural land, most notably in the north-east.
- Remnants of various historic land use types can combine rich and diverse habitats and archaeology. Many key places are publicly accessible, including Registered Parks and Gardens, historic downland and common land. Traditional flood plain landscapes and orchards are the most restricted in extent. Historic routeways, hedged boundaries and watercourses provide connectivity.
- Historic downland preserves prehistoric archaeology and supports high numbers of rare and scarce chalk grassland vascular plants, mosses and liverworts. Diversity is enhanced by a mosaic of chalk grassland, scrub and woodland, with Hartslock Wood SAC being one example.
- Species strongly associated with the Chilterns include the red kite, pasque flower, stag beetle, Chiltern gentian, shepherd's needle, chalkhill blue butterfly and native box. Aston Rowant SAC protects an internationally important juniper scrub population. Farmland birds and deer are a feature of the wider countryside.
- Nucleated settlements of medieval origin and land farmed since prehistory are found alongside watercourses and springs in the through-valleys and at the foot of the scarp. Elsewhere, dispersed farmsteads dating from the medieval period and mid-19th-century development around commons are characteristic of the plateau.
- The River Thames and its flood plain mark a distinctive area in the south. The river is a focus for settlement, abstraction and recreation.
- Major transport routes, including motorways, radiate from adjacent Greater London, associated with significant 20th-century development and extensive urban fringe areas.
- Brick and flint are the dominant traditional building materials, with Totternhoe Stone (clunch) being less common, but still a distinctive
- Numerous parkland landscapes define large, historic estates. Designs by Humphry Repton and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown are represented, and the houses, follies and wooded features provide local landmarks.
- Extensive rights of way, commons, open access downland, woodland and some parklands provide access to the countryside. The Thames Path, the Ridgeway and the Grand Union Canal are high-profile recreation routes; locally promoted routes include the Chilterns Cycleway. Private leisure land uses, including golf courses and horse paddocks, are common near urban centres.

Landscape opportunities

- Protect the character and integrity of the rural landscape, by conserving the combination and balance of key assets; boundary features, semi-natural habitats, tranquillity and historic buildings.
- Identify and conserve views to and from key and popular viewpoints and landmarks by careful design and vegetation management, minimising the impact and effects of development, woodland planting and scrub encroachment.
- Conserve the patchwork land use pattern, valued farmland species and productivity of the landscape by securing sustainable forestry and mixed agricultural activity. This includes conservation of small farm woodlands, historic hedgerows, farmland birds, woodland birds and arable weeds.
- Plan and manage private and public spaces for recreation, such as golf courses and hobby farms, so that their design and their features positively contribute to landscape character. Seek the conservation, restoration and creation of natural and cultural features in these landscapes.
- Secure sustainable development which also reflects traditional local building styles and materials both within and outside the AONBs of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs. Where landscape character and features are degraded by development, identify opportunities to re-develop areas and infrastructure, for example; re-modelling canalised sections of river and restoring key views.
- Conserve the range and mosaic of habitats found in the landscape by protecting traditionally managed or relict features such as chalk grassland, coppice woodland, orchards, laid hedgerows, veteran and ancient trees and commons.
- Support marginal and localised land management practices and develop 'products' attractive to modern consumers, including leisure products, local brands and wood fuel.
- Seek to reduce threats to natural and historic features by conserving or restoring their setting, addressing the problem of fragmentation particularly associated with chalk grassland and common land. Work at a landscape scale which reflects the ecosystem approach, ecological network approach and historic landscape character areas.
- Conserve, enhance and create new public access infrastructure, access links and accessible natural and cultural features, particularly near to settlements, in order to enhance the transitional areas between town and countryside and conserve tranquillity. Undertake appropriate visitor management to ensure sustainable visitor pressure at all sites but particularly focus upon 'honey pot' sites and those sites near to new development. Identify and promote alternative green spaces and entry points to reduce visitor pressure.

Landscape opportunities continued

- Conserve the extensive woodland cover and diversity of wooded features, particularly the ancient woodlands, native beech woodlands and wooded features in designed landscapes, in order to conserve the sense of place, biodiversity and historic landscape. Restore plantations on ancient woodland sites. Plan to improve the understanding of the extent and management requirements of the rare yew and box woods. Plan to build the resilience of woodlands to climate change impacts, particularly the valued beech woodlands which are vulnerable. Consider new species compositions and secure woodland across a variety of aspects.
- Engage landowners and managers of parklands in the management of trees and woodlands, particularly those outside grant schemes and those that are 'At Risk'. Conserve the best examples and variety of Chiltern parklands, maintaining their legibility and contents and ensuring management brings about positive outcomes for access and interpretation, biodiversity and the historic record. Manage veteran and ancient trees, woodlands and grasslands in parklands to strengthen biodiversity value.
- Conserve ancient routeways and existing hedgerow boundaries across the landscape to conserve boundary patterns and biodiversity. Create new hedgerow boundaries to fields and routeways to restore historic field patterns and benefit biodiversity. Carry out targeted surveys and possible Local Wildlife Site designation to conserve species-rich hedgerows and identify hedgerow trees of significant landscape and biodiversity value.
- Protect chalk streams and wetlands through securing sustainable levels of water abstraction and through pollution prevention measures in both their rural and urban settings. Harness catchment-scale approaches, recognising the entire length of chalk streams and groundwater resources. Pursue Local Wildlife Site designation to secure protection as appropriate.
- Manage the flood plain of chalk streams, including historic features such as watercress beds and channels, in order to conserve and create wetland habitat, filter runoff; and store water. In the urban environment, seek to restore degraded channels and extend the area of green space surrounding rivers for biodiversity, flood alleviation and public access benefits.
- Manage recent change in the landscape by establishing a dialogue with growing stakeholder groups, particularly hobby farmers, horse-owners and non-farmers owning significant areas of land and valued features. Develop best practice management guidance to disseminate to these growing audiences.
- Build on existing community interest and activity around chalk streams and common land to secure further improvements.
- Create urban fringe areas that deliver a variety of functions and contribute positively to sense of place. Create strong visions which help to manage land that is 'awaiting development'.