



**Land North of Moat  
Road, Headcorn, Kent**

**Landscape and Visual  
Impact Assessment**

Prepared by:  
**The Environmental Dimension  
Partnership Ltd**

On behalf of:  
**Catesby Strategic Land Ltd.**

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Plan EDP 7: Landscape Strategy Plan

(edp5739\_d009d 21 September 2023 JFr/CMY)

## Executive Summary

- S1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP), on behalf of Gatesby Strategic Land Ltd, to inform planning proposals for the development of up to 120 new homes at Land North of Moat Road, Headcorn, Kent. EDP is an independent environmental consultancy and Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute, specialising in the assessment of developments at all scales across the UK.
- S2 This report summarises the findings of a comprehensive landscape data trawl and field appraisal undertaken by EDP's landscape team. The proposed development and mitigation are described, and an impact assessment has been undertaken of the likely landscape and visual effects having regard to the above, in line with a robust methodology, which aligns with the principles embedded within the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3).
- S3 The site is subject to a draft allocation within the Maidstone Local Plan Review, and therefore has been considered at a high level, and deemed to be a broadly appropriate location for future development.
- S4 The geographical extent of change affecting the host Headcorn Pasturelands Landscape Character Area would be extremely small, being limited to the site itself and its immediate surroundings to the west and south. The proposed development addresses the 'Summary of Actions' within the character assessment by enhancing components of the landscape character through hedgerow enhancement and tree planting.
- S5 There would be elevated effects on the character of the site itself as a result of the proposals (which is an unavoidable consequence of wholesale land use change), but the proposals offer an opportunity to enhance the existing site fabric in some areas and introduce habitats to deliver a net gain in biodiversity on site. In particular they offer the opportunity to enhance the way the settlement integrates with the landscape west of the town through the provision of a multi-purpose green space centred around the retained high value trees.
- S6 The assessment of visual amenity finds that the site is visually contained within circa 0.5-1km of the site, with the greatest level of anticipated change likely for public rights of way (PRoW) users, residential receptors and road users to the south and west. To the east and north, the existing settlement screens views of the proposals, and the generally flat landscape to the south means views are foreshortened; existing vegetation (typical of the Low Weald) and built form has a notable effect on screening views. There may be some distant elevated views from the north, but these would see the proposals in the context of a wide panorama and would not materially impact the views given the existing context and would be very few and far between.
- S7 Residents of properties that abut the site boundary to the west, east and north, both those more established and newly constructed, have variable views into the site and will, consequentially, experience some elevated effects. This is not a reflection on the quality of the proposals, which have been designed to mitigate change through boundary planting and the provision of sufficient offsets.

- S8 The assessment demonstrates the extent to which sensitive layout and strategic planting proposed in the masterplan would mitigate views, retain and reinforce the characteristic landscape fabric and pattern of the site, and assimilate the proposed development into the settlement and rural landscape of the site context. In addition, this LVIA shows how the proposed development would make a positive contribution to visual, recreational and wildlife amenity.
- S9 Accordingly, this LVIA concludes that the site has the capacity for the development as proposed on the masterplan, and that there is no 'in principle' or policy, landscape or visual reason why the site should not be developed as proposed.

## **Section 1**

### **Introduction, Purpose and Methodology**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) has been commissioned by Catesby Strategic Land Ltd ('the applicant') to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of proposals to develop residential development at Land North of Moat Road, Headcorn, Kent ('the site'). The site falls within Maidstone Borough Local Planning Authority (LPA) area, extends to circa 7.26 hectares (ha), and is briefly described in **Section 2** of this LVIA. Full site details are given in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) accompanying the planning application.
- 1.2 EDP is an independent environmental planning consultancy with offices in Cirencester, Cheltenham and Cardiff. The practice provides advice to private and public sector clients throughout the UK in the fields of landscape, ecology, archaeology, cultural heritage, arboriculture, rights of way and masterplanning. Details of the practice can be obtained at our website ([www.edp-uk.co.uk](http://www.edp-uk.co.uk)). EDP is a Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute<sup>1</sup> specialising in the assessment of the effects of proposed development on the landscape.
- 1.3 This LVIA is part of a suite of documents accompanying an outline planning application for the proposed development summarised in **Section 6** of this LVIA. The proposal is the development of up to 120 dwellings (Use Class C3) including demolition of existing buildings, means of access into the site from Moat Road (not internal roads), associated highway works, emergency access to Millbank, realignment of the existing public right of way (PRoW) and associated infrastructure. The proposals are illustrated on the Illustrative Masterplan at **Appendix EDP 1**.
- 1.4 The site has no planning history and comprises agricultural land on the edge of the settlement. There is a newly built residential development to the immediate north of the site.

#### **PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THIS LVIA**

- 1.5 The purpose of this LVIA is to identify the baseline conditions of the site and surrounding area and to determine those landscape and visual characteristics that might inform the design of the development proposals, including recommendations for mitigation. It then provides an assessment of the landscape and visual effects predicted to arise from development on the site with reference to the baseline analysis.
- 1.6 In undertaking the assessment described in this LVIA, EDP has:
- Undertaken a thorough data trawl of relevant designations and background documents, described in **Section 3**;

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<sup>1</sup> LI Practice Number 1010

- Assessed the existing (baseline) condition and character of the site and its setting, described in **Section 4**;
  - Assessed the existing visual (baseline) context, especially any key views to and from the site (**Section 5**). The establishment of baseline landscape and visual conditions, when evaluated against the proposed development, allow the identification and evaluation of landscape effects later in the LVIA at **Section 7**;
  - Described the landscape aspects of the proposed development that may influence any landscape or visual effects (**Section 6**);
  - In **Section 7**, assessed the landscape and visual effects in accordance with the approach described below; and
  - Reached overall conclusions in **Section 8**.
- 1.7 The assessment provides an analysis of the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposed scheme, which is determined by combining the magnitude of the predicted change with the assessed sensitivity of the identified receptors. The nature of any predicted effects is also identified (i.e., positive/negative, permanent/reversible).
- 1.8 The report is supported by a range of graphics, and at **Appendix EDP 4**, three photomontages of the scheme, which are fully verified and rendered. These provide an accurate representation of the proposal at Year 1 and Year 15. The views selected represent those areas considered of greatest sensitivity or where the greatest level of change is predicted.

## **METHODOLOGY ADOPTED FOR THE ASSESSMENT**

- 1.9 The proposed development assessed by this LVIA is not subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This LVIA has, therefore, been undertaken in accordance with the principles embodied in 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Third Edition (LI/IEMA, 2013)' (GLVIA3) and other best practice guidance insofar as it is relevant to non-EIA schemes.
- 1.10 **Familiarisation:** EDP's study has included reviews of aerial photographs, web searches, LPA publications and landscape character assessments. EDP has also obtained, where possible, information about relevant landscape and other designations such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), conservation areas and gardens and parks listed on Historic England's 'Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England' (RPG).
- 1.11 **Consultation:** A meeting was held in July 2022 to discuss the proposals and, in particular, the landscape and heritage issues surrounding the site. A written response to this meeting was provided on 22 September 2022, with a number of comments made in respect of the landscape issues and requirements. These comments have been picked up and responded to in the design, as set out in this report.



- 1.12 **Field assessment:** EDP has undertaken a comprehensive field assessment of local site circumstances, including a photographic survey of the character and fabric of the site and its surroundings, using photography from a number of representative viewpoints. The field assessment was undertaken by a suitably qualified landscape architect in fine weather in October 2022. Whilst this did not provide ‘winter’ conditions whereby leaf cover was absent, the field assessment enabled an assessment to be made of the potential worst-case impacts, and it is those which are reported in this LVIA.
- 1.13 **Acknowledgement of any shortcomings:** The field assessment was undertaken in summer conditions, with the trees in full leaf. Whilst this naturally provides additional screening of views and limits the degree to which long range views (in particular) are available, the assessment has been undertaken based upon a ‘worst case’ scenario, informed by professional judgement.
- 1.14 **Design inputs:** EDP’s field assessment has informed a process whereby the development proposals have been refined to avoid, minimise or compensate for landscape effects. Such measures are summarised in **Section 6** and form an important part of the LVIA process by enabling key constraints and opportunities to be incorporated into the design of the proposals.
- 1.15 **Assessment methodology:** Predicted effects on the landscape resource arising from the proposed development (as detailed in **Section 7** of this LVIA) have been determined in accordance with the principles embedded within published best practice guidance insofar as the assessment adopts the following well-established, structured approach:
- Likely effects on landscape character and visual amenity are dealt with separately;
  - The assessment of likely effects is reached using a structured methodology for defining sensitivity, magnitude and significance, which is contained as **Appendix EDP 2**. This framework is combined with professional judgement. Professional judgement is an important part of the assessment process; it is neither ‘pro’ nor ‘anti’ development but acknowledges that development may result in beneficial change as well as landscape harm;
  - As advised in GLVIA3, the assessment takes into account the effects of any proposed mitigation; and
  - Typically, a 15-year time horizon is used as the basis for conclusions about the residual levels of effect. Fifteen years is a well-established and accepted compromise between assessing the shorter-term effects (which may often be rather ‘raw’ before any proposed mitigation has had time to take effect) and an excessively long time period.

## STUDY AREA

- 1.16 To establish the baseline and potential limit of material effects, the study area has been considered at two geographical scales:

- First, a broad 'study area' was adopted, the extent of which is illustrated on **Plan EDP 1**. Based mainly on desk-based study, this broad study area allowed the geographical scope of the assessment to be defined based on the extent of views to/from the site, extent of landscape effects and the site's environmental planning context; and
- Second, following initial analysis and subsequent fieldwork, the broad study area was refined down to the land that is most likely to experience landscape effects. The extent of this detailed study area is 2km from the site boundary, although occasional reference may be made to features beyond this area where appropriate. This detailed study area is illustrated on **Plan EDP 1**.

## Section 2 The Site

- 2.1 **Plan EDP 1** illustrates the location of the site's boundaries and the study area for the LVIA. The site's character and local context is illustrated on the aerial photograph contained as **Plan EDP 2**.
- 2.2 A site-specific assessment of the landscape circumstances of the local context has been undertaken by appropriately experienced Chartered Landscape Architects. This study has included a review of aerial photography, mapping and field assessments to enable EDP to prepare a description of the local landscape character, from which the following key points can be drawn. The photoviewpoints provided should also be referenced as they illustrate the character of the site and surrounding area.
- 2.3 The site comprises an area of agricultural grazing land directly adjacent to the northern parts of the western boundary of Headcorn. The site is split into two parcels of land, the northern of which sits adjacent to a PRoW, and beyond this is the Bovis site currently under construction. The southern parcel sits adjacent to Moat Road and contains old farm buildings in its south-eastern corner and lies adjacent to an electricity substation in the south-western corner. A small hamlet at the northern end of Black Mill Lane contains the site to the west.
- 2.4 The site lies within the 'Open Countryside' from a policy perspective (Policy SP17), but not purely in an area typical of open countryside character given the location of the site between the settlement edge and the hamlet to the west, although there is a strong vegetated boundary comprising outgrown hedgerows and mature trees, which contains the site visually. **Images EDP 2.1** and **2.2** show the site in its current form. There is a PRoW which runs north from Moat Road, through the southern site parcel to the western site boundary.



**Image EDP 2.1:** The site's southern field, looking from the south-west corner, north-east towards the settlement edge. The existing trees and hedgerows are visible in the centre of the site.



**Image EDP 2.2:** The site's northern field, looking from the south-west corner, north-east towards the settlement edge.

- 2.5 As shown on the Illustrative Masterplan at **Appendix EDP 1**, it is proposed that the site will be accessed from Moat Road to the east of the existing access to the substation. **Image EDP 2.3** shows the existing substation and approximate location of the proposed access point.



**Image EDP 2.3:** Looking along Moat Road, from the west, towards the substation and proposed site access point.

- 2.6 To the north, the site is largely visually contained by vegetation aligning the PRoW and beyond this by the new Bovis development. The vegetation along this PRoW (as shown by **Image EDP 2.4**) is tall, double-lined, and provides an effective visual screen (particularly in summer, but also to a lesser degree in winter).



**Image EDP 2.4:** : View along the PRow running along the northern boundary, and the site's north-western corner (beyond the gate).

- 2.7 Based upon the available views of the new Bovis development, it is likely that views of any development within the site would also be available, but that in the current context these views wouldn't be either out of character or prominent.
- 2.8 Further north there are potential southward views from Stonestile Road towards the edge of Headcorn. The new Bovis development is visible from here, although in the context of existing development along the eastern side of Maidstone Road. Due to the location of this new development, in juxtaposition with the site, it is likely that development on the site would be entirely screened. Indeed, this blocking of views would be applicable to the wider landscape to the north where open views are available – in this regard, due to the natural vegetation pattern of the Low Weald, and the relatively flat landscape, potential open views would either be foreshortened or unavailable due to intervening vegetation.
- 2.9 Other receptors to the north would include the new residences within the Bovis development; however, the context of these dwellings means that effects would only be limited. A few filtered views are likely available towards the site from Bankfields, beyond the immediate site boundary, as shown by **Image EDP 2.5**.



**Image EDP 2.5:** View from Bankfields.

- 2.10 To the west, the extensive site boundary vegetation (as shown on **Images EDP 2.6** and **2.7**) would screen the majority of views under summer conditions, although there would likely be some fragmented visibility in winter when trees are without leaf cover. A generous offset has been provided within the masterplan to ensure additional planting (and thus visual mitigation) could be established, meaning the level of change both near the site boundary (i.e., the dwellings at the northern end of Black Mill Lane) and also further afield would be extremely limited.



**Image EDP 2.6:** Western site boundary, northern field parcel.



**Image EDP 2.7:** Western site boundary, southern field parcel

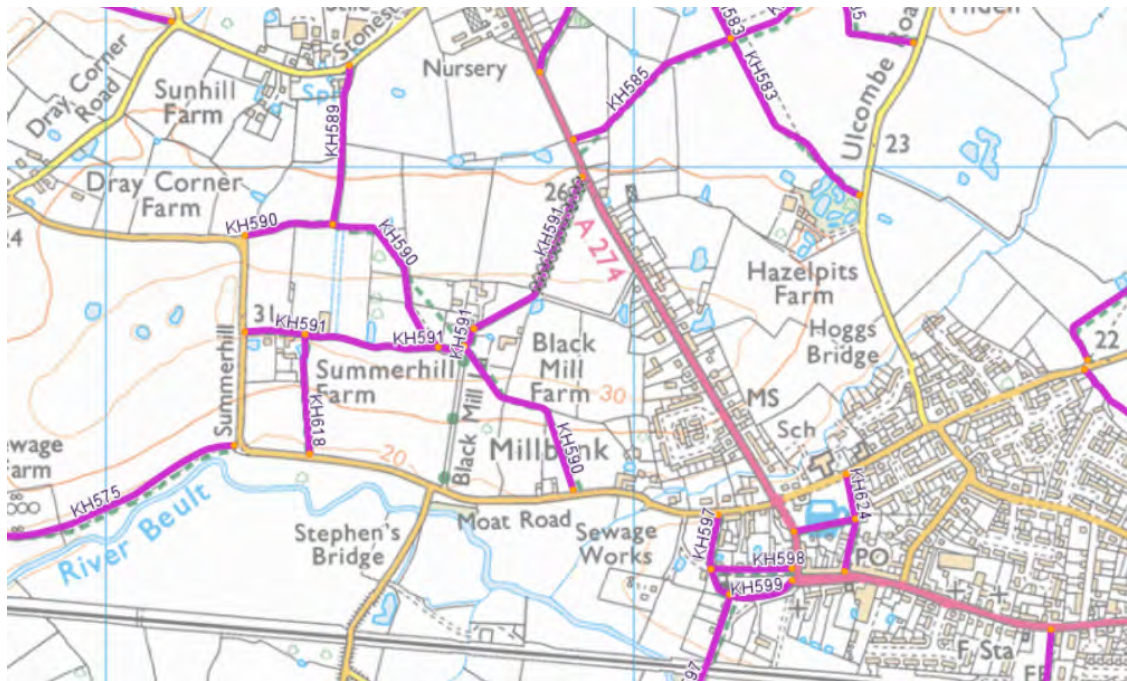
- 2.11 This boundary vegetation – and the potential for proposed mitigation – would mean visual change on the PRoW which run west from the site boundary would experience fragmented views of the new settlement edge, but this would be heavily softened. In addition, and considering this change perceptually, the existing dwellings on the northern end of Black Mill Lane, and also (to a lesser degree) the new Bovis development, would serve to establish an element of urban character to this general locale.

#### **EXISTING DEVELOPMENT, HUMAN INFLUENCES AND URBANISING FEATURES**

- 2.12 The main urban influence is that provided by the adjacent village, which borders the entirety of the site to the east and north. Dwellings along Bankfields and within the new Bovis development sit adjacent to the site, and there are additional built influences along Moat Road to the south, including the derelict farm buildings and the substation.
- 2.13 Within the wider context, and as shown on **Plan EDP 2**, there is increasing levels of built development occurring around the village, both to the north (the Bovis development, which is recently completed) and also to the east between Mill Bank and Ulcombe Road.
- 2.14 There is a network of minor country roads spread across the local landscape, particularly to the north, west and south, linking the villages and individual houses and farmsteads to the more main roads of Maidstone Road and Biddenham Road. Aside from these main roads, there are no further A or B roads in close proximity to the site.
- 2.15 The only village within c.2km of the Site is Hawkenbury, which sits on lower ground to the west. The nearest main settlement is Staplehurst, circa 4km to the west.

## PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

- 2.16 As shown on **Plan EDP 6** and **Image EDP 2.8**, there is a single PRoW within the site; route number KH590 which runs through the southern part of the site and links to further PRoW to the west. Route KH591 skirts the north-western corner of the site. A good network of PRoW exists to the east of the site, but there are only few to the south, with these lying south of the east-west railway line.



**Image EDP 2.8:** Excerpt of Kent Definitive Map.

- 2.17 PRoW within proximity are identified below:

- PRoW 250\_1, which runs north from Steeple Road to the north of the site;
- PRoW 250\_7, 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14 run through the agricultural land to the west of the village and provide access from Latchingdon southwards to Lower Burnham Road;
- PRoW 250\_2 provides access from Steeple Road, past Lawling Hall, to the estuary at Mundon Creek;
- PRoW 250\_5 provides access from Steeple Road, south to Green Lane; and
- Approximately 1.5-2km north there is a network of PRoW around Mundon Hall, which includes the St Peter's Way promoted route. These routes include PRoW 255\_4, 255\_8, 255\_5, 255\_14, 255\_2, 255\_3 and 255\_10.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSETS

- 2.18 Cultural heritage assets are shown on **Plan EDP 3**. As can be seen there is a good distribution of listed buildings within the study area, with most of these being Grade II. There are a small number of higher-grade buildings (Grade I and II\*) within the Headcorn



Conservation Area (CA) to the south-east. The closest listed building is 'The Moat', which is located very close to the site's south-western boundary on Moat Road.

### **INTERVISIBILITY**

- 2.19 The predominantly flat topography combines with occasionally very strong field boundary vegetation, tree belts and small woodlands/copses (particularly to the west) to restrict visibility in many views within the local area. The network of PRoW and roads surrounding the site means that views towards the site from publicly accessible locations are generally limited to the west, and to a lesser degree, the south and north. Longer distance views towards the site and Headcorn are rare, with those from the elevated ground to the north the most likely; however, in these areas, available views are few and far between due to intervening vegetation.

## Section 3 Findings of EDP Data Trawl

- 3.1 The findings of EDP's data trawl of relevant environmental and planning designations are illustrated on **Plan EDP 3** and summarised in this section.

### **BACKGROUND PUBLISHED EVIDENCE BASE DOCUMENTS**

- 3.2 The following documents are relevant and will be discussed as appropriate later in this report:
- The Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment (2012, amended 2013);
  - Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment Supplement (2012);
  - Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study: Sensitivity Assessment (2015);
  - Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study: Site Assessments (2015); and
  - National Character Area Profile 121: Low Weald (Natural England, 2013).
- 3.3 There are no further Supplementary Planning Documents, guidance documents, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements or Management Plans which relate to either landscape and visual matters, or Headcorn specifically.

### **FINDINGS OF EDP DATA TRAWL**

- 3.4 EDP has conducted a review of relevant planning policy and landscape designations to identify what 'value' the Local Authority places on the landscape and what value it has in planning terms. This review focuses on local plan policy, since such policy is: (a) more specific to the site; and (b) reflects the advice of regional and national advice regarding landscape issues.

### **Landscape-related Designations and Other Considerations**

- 3.5 Landscape-related designations and policy considerations within 4km of the site are shown on **Plan EDP 3**. In summary:
- National landscape designations: The site does not lie within a nationally designated landscape;
  - Local landscape designations: The site is located within an area designated as a 'Landscape of Local Value' (LLV), as protected through Policy SP17 of the Local Plan; and
  - Other landscape-related designations: The site does not lie within any other designated area, such as Green Belt, a green wedge or other policy area.

### **Heritage Matters**

- 3.6 Heritage assets can influence the visual character of the landscape and enrich its historic value. This LVIA addresses heritage assets only insofar as they are components of the wider contemporary landscape – not in terms of their significance and value as heritage assets, which is a matter addressed by the separate Heritage Assessment (prepared by Pegasus Group).
- 3.7 Within the near study area, the following heritage assets are the principal components of the contemporary landscape relevant to this LVIA (i.e. those within circa 1km):
- Grade I Listed Buildings as follows;
    - The Church of St Peter and St Paul, within the Headcorn CA.
  - Grade II\* Listed Buildings as follows;
    - Cloth Hall, within the Headcorn CA; and
    - Headcorn Manor, within the Headcorn CA.
  - Grade II Listed Buildings as follows;
    - Stephens Bridge, to the south-west;
    - The Moat, to the south-east;
    - Forstal Farmhouse, to the south;
    - Water Lane Cottages, to the south-west;
    - Trumpeter, to the south-west;
    - Listed Barn, north along the A274;
    - Hazelpits Farmhouse, to the north-east;
    - Ramhurst Farmhouse, to the north on Stonestile Road;
    - Maltmans, to the north at Tattlebury Lane;
    - Tilden and Oast House, to the north at Tilden; and
    - A large conglomeration of buildings within the core of the Headcorn CA.
- 3.8 There is a single Conservation Area within the 2km study area, to the south at Headcorn, but no Scheduled Monuments within this zone.

### **Ecology Matters**

3.9 A separate Ecology Assessment (prepared by Aspect) considers the ecological assets on the site and within the study area. There are few ecological designations within the study area, with those circa 2km including:

- The (statutory) River Beult Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);
- The (non-statutory) Kelsham Farm Orchards Local Wildlife Site (LWS);
- Brook Wood Ancient Woodland; and
- The (non-statutory) River Sherway, Ponds and Pasture LWS.

### **Arboricultural Matters**

3.10 A separate Arboricultural Assessment (prepared by Aspect) considers the arboricultural assets on the site and within the study area. The following matters are relevant to the scope of this LVIA:

- There is a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) covering part of the vegetation splitting the southern and northern site parcels, and also the south-western part of the boundary to the northern parcel;
- There are a number of Category A trees (mostly oak and ash) and groups along the site boundaries, and within close proximity to the site;
- There are a number of Category B trees and groups (again, mostly oak and ash) along the site boundaries, particularly the northern and southern boundaries and the south-western boundary of the northern parcel; and
- A number of hedgerows border the site and provide a vegetated boundary between the northern and southern parcels.

### **Public Access and Rights of Way**

3.11 As detailed briefly in **Section 2**, a review of the definitive map reveals the following notable PRoW within circa 1km of the site:

- PRoW KH590, which runs north-westwards through the western parts of the site, and then continues north-westwards to Summerhill;
- PRoW KH591, which runs close to the site's north-western corner, and links to PRoW KH590 on Black Mill Lane, and accesses the countryside of the west of the site;
- PRoW KH618, which runs south from KH591 at Summerhill Farm, to the west of the site, to meet Moat Road;
- PRoW KH589, which runs north from KH590 to Stonestile Road, north of the site;

- PRoW KH575 runs east from Summerhill/Moat Road to the west of the site;
- Further to the north-east, beyond the A274, PRoW KH585, KH583 and KH584 run north-eastwards towards Tattlebury; and
- Further to the south, beyond the railway line and River Beult, PRoW KH594, 593, 597 and 596 provide access into the countryside.

3.12 There are no promoted or long-distance walking routes within the 2km study area.

### **National Planning Policy Framework and Guidance**

3.13 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated in September 2023, includes planning policies and guidance requiring developers to respond to the natural environment and landscape character, integrating the development into its local surroundings. Under paragraph 174 it requires development to recognise the intrinsic character of the landscape.

### **Adopted Local Plan (Published)**

3.14 The adopted Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2011–2031 (adopted 2017) includes overarching general development policies, against which the development proposals will be tested. Note that the site is a draft allocation within the Local Plan Review and covered by policy LPRSA310. The draft policy text contains the following requirements under ‘Landscape/Ecology’:

#### ***“Landscape/Ecology***

- *A phase 1 habitat survey will be required, which may as a result require on and/or-off site mitigation for the existing habitat of local fauna/flora.*
- *Existing tree/hedgerow margins should be retained/enhanced in order to provide the opportunity for biodiversity habitat creation/enhancement. Public access to such areas would normally be limited.*
- *Development will be subject to a site-wide strategy to incorporate an appropriate level of biodiversity net gain in accordance with national and local policy.*
- *The proposed landscaping scheme shall respect and protect TPO trees within the site or adjacent to boundaries.*
- *The existing hedgerow fronting Moat Road shall be retained and enhanced and the impacts of any access junction minimised and mitigated.*
- *Vehicular access routes within the development shall feature tree planting.”*

3.15 Adopted Local Plan policies that are relevant to the site in landscape and visual terms are set out below (detail added only for those considered of primary importance, and relevance highlighted by underlining).

**The Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017)**

3.16 The site is located within Maidstone Borough, in Kent. The current statutory development plan for the site contains a number of policies relevant to the consideration of the site as a possible development site in landscape terms (emphasis added).

3.17 The most important Strategic Policy is Policy SP17: The Countryside:

*“The countryside is defined as all those parts of the plan area outside the settlement boundaries of the Maidstone urban area, rural service centres and larger villages defined on the policies map.*

1. *Development proposals in the countryside will not be permitted unless they accord with other policies in this plan and they will not result in harm to the character and appearance of the area.*
2. *Agricultural proposals will be supported which facilitate the efficient use of the borough's significant agricultural land and soil resource provided any adverse impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape can be appropriately mitigated.*
3. *Great weight should be given to the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.*
4. *Proposals should not have a significant adverse impact on the settings of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.*
5. *The Metropolitan Green Belt is shown on the policies map and development there will be managed in accordance with national policy for the Green Belt.*
6. *The distinctive landscape character of the Greensand Ridge, the Medway Valley, the Len Valley, the Loose Valley, and the Low Weald, as defined on the policies map, will be conserved and enhanced as landscapes of local value.*
7. *Development in the countryside will retain the separation of individual settlements. Account should be taken of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan and the Maidstone Borough Landscape Character Guidelines Supplementary Planning Document.”*

3.18 The policy also sets out at paragraph 4.105 that:

*“In order to assist in the successful integration of new development into the countryside the Council will ensure LVAs are carried out as appropriate to assess suitability and to aid and facilitate the design process”.*

3.19 For the defined LLV the policy text provides further information as follows at 4.113 and 4.114:

*“4.113 The council will seek to conserve or enhance its valued landscapes. The Kent Downs AONB and High Weald AONB and their settings and other sites of European and national*

*importance are considered to be covered by appropriate existing policy protection in the NPPF, NPPG and other legislation. As well as this national policy guidance and statutory duty, the settings of the Kent Downs and High Weald AONBs are also afforded protection through the criteria of policy SP17 and no additional designation is therefore necessary. In addition to these areas, the borough does include significant tracts of landscape which are highly sensitive to significant change. Landscapes of local value have been identified and judged according to criteria relating to their character and sensitivity:*

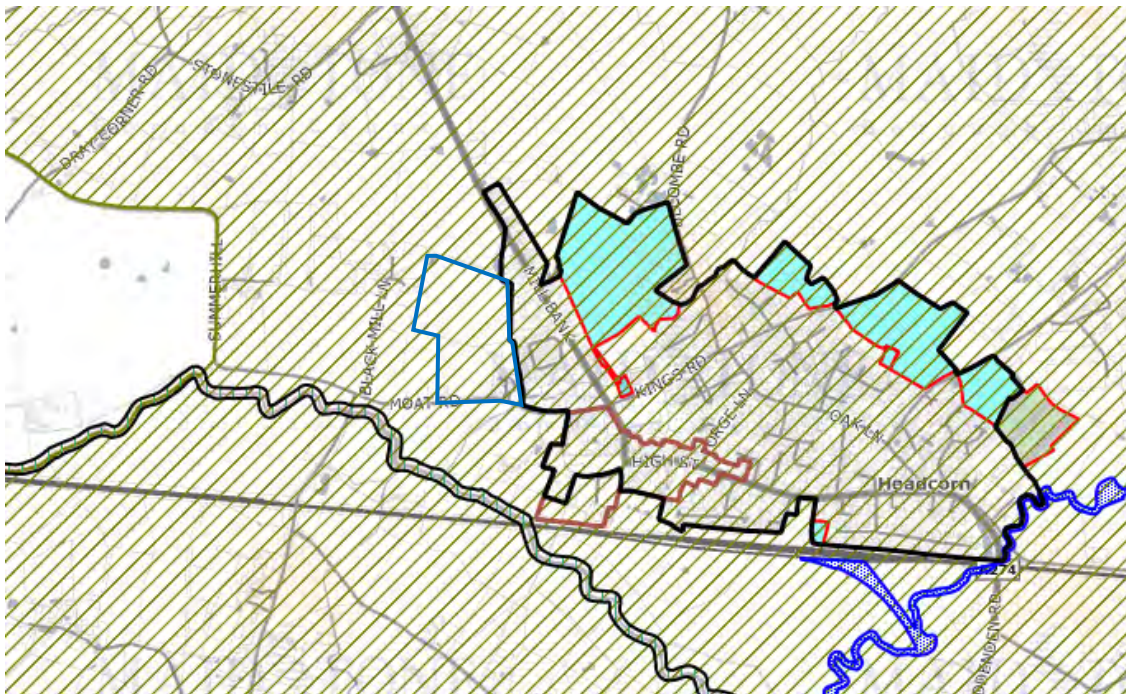
- i. Part of a contiguous area of high quality landscape;*
- ii. Significant in long distance public views and skylines;*
- iii. Locally distinctive in their field patterns, geological and other landscape features;*
- iv. Ecologically diverse and significant;*
- v. Preventing the coalescence of settlements which would undermine their character;*
- vi. Identified through community engagement;*
- vii. Providing a valued transition from town to countryside.*

*4.114 Development proposals within landscapes of local value should, through their siting, scale, mass, materials and design, seek to contribute positively to the conservation and enhancement of the protected landscape. Designated areas include parts of the Greensand Ridge and the Low Weald, and the Medway, the Loose and the Len river valleys. These landscapes were highlighted as areas of local value by the public through local plan consultations.”*

3.20 Regarding Development Management Policies, further policies of relevance are detailed below:

- **Policy DM1: Principles of Good Design** is in place to ensure developments reflect published landscape character assessments and other guidance relating to the protection and conservation of landscape;
- **Policy DM3: Natural Environment** aims to ensure that “*new development protects and enhances the natural environment*” by incorporating a wide range of measures set out within the policy; and
- **Policy DM30: Design principles in the countryside.** This relates to development outside of the settlement boundaries which should meet a number of criteria, as set out in the policy.

3.21 The settlement of Headcorn in relation to the Policies Map is shown in **Image EDP 3.1**. This is an extract from the online map and shows that aside from being outwith the settlement boundary, and within the LLV, the site and immediate local area are unconstrained (in policy terms).



**Image EDP 3.1:** Extract from MBC Proposals Map. The green diagonal hatch represents the 'Landscapes of Local Value'. The site is shown with a blue boundary.



## Section 4

### Existing (Baseline) Conditions: Landscape Character

- 4.1 This section provides an assessment of the ‘baseline’ (existing) conditions in respect of the character of the site and its landscape context. It summarises any relevant published landscape assessments that contribute to a better understanding of the landscape context. Such assessments provide a helpful understanding of the landscape context, but rarely deliver sufficiently site-specific or up-to-date information to draw robust conclusions about the significance of any change proposed by the development. Accordingly, EDP has undertaken its own assessment of the site itself, which is included in this section.

#### NATIONAL CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- 4.2 At the national level, the character of England has been described and classified in the National Character Area (NCA) profiles published by Natural England<sup>2</sup>. The site and its surroundings fall within NCA 121 Low Weald, which is a broad, low-lying clay vale which wraps around the northern, western and southern edges of the High Weald.
- 4.3 For the scale of the development proposed on the site, it is considered that the description of landscape character undertaken at the sub-regional level is more relevant in establishing the landscape resource baseline. As such, of much greater use are the more localised assessments described in the following paragraphs.

#### LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS

##### The Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.4 At a local level, the site is characterised within the ‘Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment’ (2012, amended 2013), which provides a more detailed assessment of the landscape character of the site and its surroundings than the national level assessment described above. Its purpose is defined as follows:

*“The Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment identifies the features that give an area its ‘sense of place’ and pinpoints what makes it different from neighbouring areas. It provides technical information on landscape character which can be used for landscape design and management purposes. It also enables Maidstone’s environment to be protected and enhanced by ensuring that any changes take place in a way that is sympathetic to the character of the landscape and make the most of opportunities to enhance it.”*

- 4.5 This assessment defines 7 Landscape Character Types (LCT) and 58 Landscape Character Areas (LCA) within Maidstone Borough. The site sits within the ‘Headcorn Pasturelands’ LCA

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>

(LCA43) and the key characteristics noted within the assessment include (with EDP emphasis):

- *“Low lying landscape which forms part of the Low Weald*
- *Reservoirs along the foot of the Greensand Ridge*
- *Drainage ditches running southwards towards the River Beult*
- *Enclosed pasture*
- *Sparse development with scattered farms and small hamlets*
- *Dominance of mature oaks within pasture and as mature hedgerow trees”.*

4.6 The identified ‘Actions’ for the LCA are very generic and do not really take account of the need for development within green field sites, and do not, therefore, provide a great deal of guidance in this respect. They are defined as follows:

- *“Consider the generic guidelines for the Low Weald*
- *Conserve the abundance of oak as a dominant species, and plant new isolated oaks within pasture and hedgerows to replace ageing population*
- *Conserve the pastoral land use and resist conversion to arable land*
- *Conserve and enhance the small scale field pattern and sense of enclosure*
- *Conserve the largely undeveloped rural landscape and the remote quality of isolated farmsteads*
- *Resist infill linear development along Maidstone Road*
- *Soften the visual prominence of large agricultural barns through native planting*
- *Enhance habitat opportunities around water bodies and ditches by promoting a framework of vegetation in these areas”.*

#### **Landscape Sensitivity Assessment**

4.7 In relation to landscape sensitivity, MBC have produced a landscape sensitivity assessment, defined on their website as follows:

*“The Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study assesses the comparative sensitivity of the borough’s landscapes to development. The study excludes the general urban area of Maidstone and the nationally designated Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as these have protection through other policies, but includes the fringe landscapes of both areas. There are two parts to this report: a general sensitivity assessment and more specific site assessments.”*

- 4.8 The study defines LCA43 as having a ‘high’ landscape character sensitivity, and a ‘moderate’ visual sensitivity. In summarising these aspects, the report cites:

***“Landscape Character Sensitivity: High***

*Oak is notably dominant and the low lying landscape, with its ditches and ponds, provides a consistent pattern. There are some visual detractors, such as large scale barns, the busy Maidstone Road and recent linear development along its route. Habitat strength and connectivity are good with small scale hedged pasture with frequent ditches and water bodies. The traditional field pattern, mature standard oak trees, pastoral land use, isolated historic farm buildings and traditional buildings within the central core of Headcorn provide a strong sense of place. However there is a significant amount of recent and indistinct development which dilutes this slightly.*

***Visual Sensitivity: Moderate***

*Visibility is moderate. Whilst there are some long views across the Low Weald to the Greensand Ridge to the north, and open views of this landscape from the Ridge, intervening vegetation encloses many immediate views across the flat to very gently undulating landform.*

*The population is concentrated within the key settlement of Headcorn and along Headcorn Road/Maidstone Road. There are also scattered properties and farmsteads throughout most of the area. This means there are relatively low numbers of people in residential properties with potential views of the landscape. There is a golf course and a well-developed footpath network. Overall there are moderate numbers of potential visual receptors.”*

- 4.9 In summarising the sensitivity, the report states:

*“Headcorn Pasturelands is assessed as being of high overall landscape sensitivity and is sensitive to change.*

*Development potential is limited to within and immediately adjacent to existing settlements and farmsteads in keeping with existing. Other development could be considered to support existing rural enterprises, although extensive, large scale or visually intrusive development would be inappropriate.”*

- 4.10 With reference to the site, it is apparent that it fulfils the criteria of being *“immediately adjacent to existing settlements”* and as was borne out by the field appraisal, could be brought forward without being *“visually intrusive development”*. On this basis – and despite the LCA being described overall as sensitive to change, there is potential scope to develop the site in accordance with the sensitivity assessment as published.
- 4.11 Looking to the specific site assessment carried out as part of this study (under reference HO 105), this provides a more detailed analysis, and concludes that the site has a moderate landscape sensitivity and a high visual sensitivity, leading to an overall landscape sensitivity of high. In summarising the opportunities and constraint, it states:

- *“Whilst located in reasonably close proximity to Headcorn centre, the site does not relate well to the existing settlement pattern to the east which forms a narrow and largely linear extension to the core of Headcorn;*
- *Development generally undesirable, particularly on the higher, northern, part of the site where it would be highly visible from the Beult Valley.”*

4.12 The analysis acknowledges that proximity to the existing settlement has a moderating influence on landscape character sensitivity (reducing it compared to the wider LCA) but considers that the elevated ground means there are extensive views to and from the higher northern parcel from the Beult valley to the south, and therefore, a high rather than moderate visual sensitivity. Overall, the capacity is considered to be ‘low’.

4.13 Having undertaken a review of the site circumstances and nearby visibility, this is not considered to be an accurate analysis for the following reasons:

1. Whilst the site is relatively elevated, this elevation is not dramatic, and the northern parcel is not widely visible from the landscape to the south. **Photoviewpoints EDP 1 to 15** illustrate views from this area and show how only glimpsed views of the site are available due to the heavily vegetated landscape and relatively flat topography. Also, were the northern site (and development on it) widely visible, then one would expect open and expansive visibility of the existing settlement on the eastern boundary, which is not the case; and
2. In terms of proximity to the existing settlement, and the assertion that the site does not relate well to the existing settlement, it is notable that this sensitivity assessment was undertaken before the development to the north was consented and under construction. It is clear in the current form that the site is very well related to the existing settlement, both to the east, and now the north. The new development to the north has effectively extended the physical presence of the village, meaning that this site is much more logical in 2-dimensional terms, than was the case at the time the sensitivity assessment was written.

4.14 It is also notable that the two specific constraints identified are demonstrated herein to not actually be notable constraints to development on this site at all, assuming a sensitive masterplan response. Any sensitive response would follow the mitigation measures identified in the capacity assessment, as detailed below:

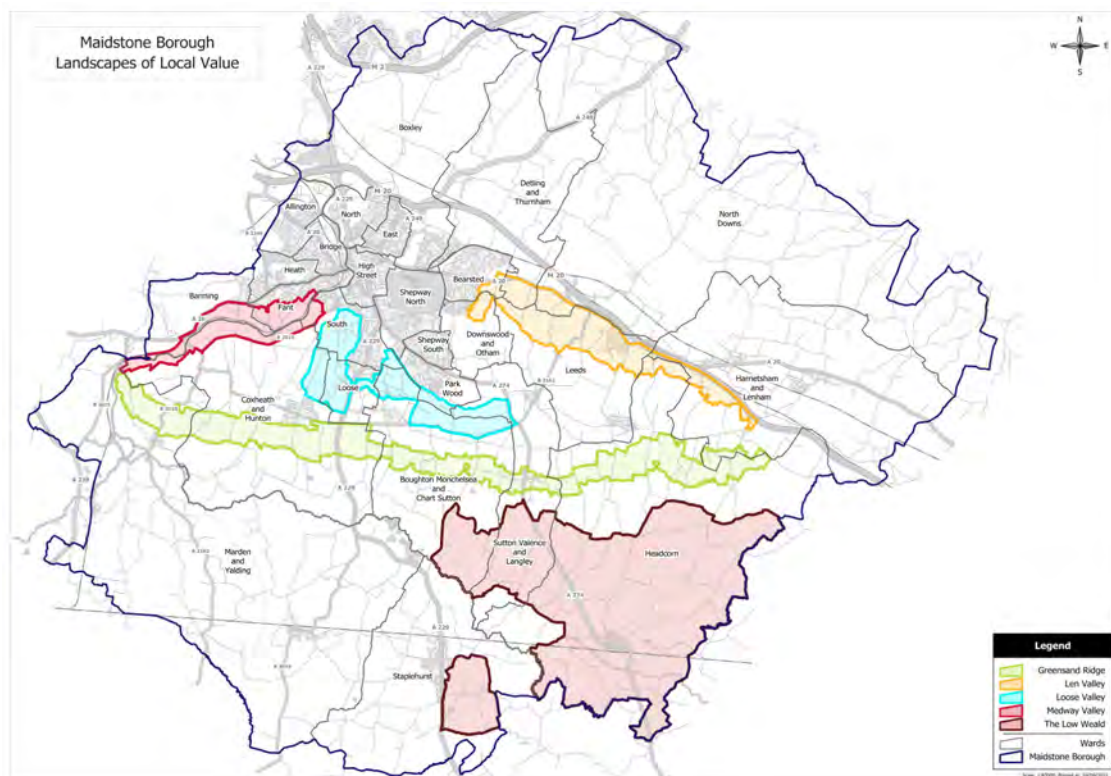
- *“Retain field and enclosure pattern*
- *Retain mature vegetation and TPO trees*
- *Respect the setting of listed building to south east along Moat Road*
- *Retain and respect the attractive, well treed, urban/rural interface along the urban boundary*
- *Respect remote, rural setting to Headcorn*

- *Respect rural, open views from public footpath that crosses site.*”

- 4.15 Based on the review above, it is reasonable to conclude that the site actually has a moderate (rather than high) visual sensitivity owing to the lack of actual views where it might be openly visible, and that the moderate landscape sensitivity is substantiated through the presence of the new development to the north. A moderate landscape character and visual sensitivity would lead to a ‘moderate’ overall landscape sensitivity.
- 4.16 When combined with a moderate value, there results a moderate capacity for development, rather than the ‘low’ capacity stated. With a draft allocation under the Local Plan Review this reduced sensitivity, and increased capacity, is seemingly accepted by the LPA.

### Landscapes of Local Value

- 4.17 As set out above, the site is located within an LLV, defined as ‘The Low Weald’ LLV on the plan reproduced as **Image EDP 4.1**, which can be found on the Local Authority website.



**Image EDP 4.1:** Maidstone Borough Landscapes of Local Value.

- 4.18 LLV are protected through Policy SP17 of the Local Plan, with the key policy text provided within **Section 3** above and repeated below (underlining added for emphasis).

*“4.113 ...In addition to these areas, the borough does include significant tracts of landscape which are highly sensitive to significant change. Landscapes of local value have been identified and judged according to criteria relating to their character and sensitivity”.*

- 4.19 The policy goes on to state:

*“4.114 Development proposals within landscapes of local value should, through their siting, scale, mass, materials and design, seek to contribute positively to the conservation and enhancement of the protected landscape. Designated areas include parts of the Greensand Ridge and the Low Weald, and the Medway, the Loose and the Len river valleys. These landscapes were highlighted as areas of local value by the public through local plan consultations.”*

4.20 In relation to the Low Weald LLV specifically, the policy wording states as follows:

*“4.117 The Low Weald covers a significant proportion of the countryside in the rural southern half of the borough. The Low Weald is recognised as having distinctive features: the field patterns, many of medieval character, hedgerows, stands of trees, ponds and streams and buildings of character should be conserved and enhanced where appropriate.”*

4.21 As a landscape receptor, the LLV is clearly not as sensitive as, for example, the AONB within the district (as alluded to in the policy wording), but it does exhibit an elevated sensitivity given it is based on landscape character and sensitivity. On this basis, the LLV is considered to have a high sensitivity to the proposed development.

## **EDP SITE ASSESSMENT**

4.22 While the above published assessments provide a helpful contextual appreciation of the wider landscape, as set out below, EDP considers that the published descriptions of the local landscape character do not convey the detailed character of the site and its immediate environs, in the same way as a more detailed study can. This requires an appropriately detailed assessment of the site itself and its immediate surroundings. EDP has undertaken such an assessment, and the results are described below and should be read in conjunction with **Plan EDP 2**.

4.23 A site visit was undertaken in October 2022 in clear weather conditions. This field visit was complemented by a review of aerial photography, mapping and field assessments from publicly accessible locations (e.g., from local roads and PRoW).

4.24 Recognising that ‘landscape’ is a multi-dimensional concept embracing ‘what we see’, its time-depth and physical attributes, this LVIA reviews and assesses change to landscape character in terms of the physical landscape, the site’s visual and sensory character, landscape fabric and habitats, historic landscape character and cultural connections.

4.25 **Physical landscape** – see **Plan EDP 2**: The site occupies a gently undulating parcel of grazing land on the immediate western side of the northern parts of Headcorn. Key physical features of the site are set out below:

- The site comprises two rectilinear parcels of land; a larger parcel to the north and a smaller parcel to the south. These parcels are separated by a line of mature trees and hedgerows (which looks to be a historic field boundary), some of which are subject to a TPO. These trees not only fulfil a separating function, but also add visual and biodiversity interest, as shown on **Images EDP 4.2** and **4.3**;

- Both field parcels are bound to the west by a mature hedgerow, which is much more dense for the northern parcel, comprising hedgerow trees. As detailed in the Arboricultural survey, these trees comprise a mix of Category A–C grade trees. This dense boundary extends north from Moat Road to the north-western site boundary adjacent to PRoW KH591 and beyond this, the Bovis development. This boundary provides both a physical and visual barrier to the more open expansive rural area to the west;
- The northern parcel also contains a mature hedgerow boundary to the PRoW, with this forming part of a double hedgerow between the site and the Bovis development;
- The southern parcel has a mature hedgerow boundary to Moat Road, and there is existing built infrastructure to the immediate south-west (comprising the substation) and within the south-eastern confines of the site, which comprises the derelict farm buildings. A short length of existing hedgerow extends northwards from the disused farm buildings; and
- Both parcels lie adjacent to the settlement edge to the east. The properties within Bankfields and along Mill Bank/A247 back onto the site, and there are various forms of boundary treatment, from wood panel fencing to mature hedgerows and trees.



**Image EDP 4.2:** Mature hedgerow trees separating the two site parcels and the TPO immediately west of the site.



**Image EDP 4.3:** TPO and hedgerows between the two parcels.

- 4.26 **Surrounding topography:** The site sits at approximately 20–30m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), sloping gently from north to south. The wider surrounding landscape is generally very flat to the south, where the River Beult runs east to west to the north of the railway line. The elevation of circa 20–30m extends some way to the south, and the verdant landscape ensures there is a pastoral feel to the landscape hereabouts.
- 4.27 To the west, the small spur on which the site sits, extends a short distance to Kelsham Farm, where the land falls slightly and gently. To the north the site falls gently beyond the Bovis development, before rising slightly near Hearnden Green.
- 4.28 **Visual and sensory character:** The site is unremarkable in the wider context and contains little in the way of sensitive visual and sensory features, although being an open parcel of land on the edge of the settlement, surrounded by mature vegetation, it does exhibit some value in this respect. It is agricultural grazing land which does not form a notable setting or fringe to the urban form of Headcorn, although those approaching from the west along PRoW KH590 and KH591 would appreciate the site as they approach the town.
- 4.29 Both parcels of the site sit adjacent to the urban context, which inevitably provides an influence across the site. The urban context is increasing with the recent completion of the Bovis development, and in this context the site as a development site is not entirely without precedent on this side of the settlement.
- 4.30 Other minor urban influences exist in the form of the disused farm buildings and the substation in the southern parts of the site.
- 4.31 **Landscape fabric and habitats:** Groundcover on the site is mainly grazing land with mature boundaries and occasional mature features within the site – as detailed above. The ecology



appraisal confirms that the site is of local ecological value, with the main features of interest/quality being the hedgerow boundaries and trees.

- 4.32 **Cultural connections:** There are no defined cultural associations between the site and the local context. The site has historically been managed for agriculture but is not unique in that regard. As set out in the heritage appraisal, there is a listed building to the south-east ('The Moat'), and remnants of a Royal Observer's Corp post within the south-eastern part of the site.
- 4.33 **Landscape quality:** The Site comprises grazed farmland with generally good quality field boundary hedgerows and numerous hedgerow trees of varied quality. The landscape is considered to be of good quality, although is somewhat influenced by the adjacent settlement areas.
- 4.34 **Recreation value/access:** There is a single PRoW running through the site, although no further areas of public access. There is a good network of PRoW to the north and west, which link to the PRoW running through the site.
- 4.35 Based upon the above description, provided in **Table EDP 4.1** is an analysis of the site value as informed by the Landscape Institute guidance TGN 02/21. For each of the nine criteria, the site and local area is judged on the basis of a range from 'good', through 'ordinary' to 'poor' in terms of the performance against these criteria.

**Table EDP 4.1:** Value Judgements Relating to the Site.

GLVIA/TGN Criteria	Observations
<b>Natural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest, which contribute positively to the landscape.	<b>Ordinary.</b> Aside from the TPO within the site, the site or immediate context contains no sensitive features of natural heritage importance.
<b>Cultural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest, which contribute positively to the landscape.	<b>Ordinary/Good.</b> As confirmed within the heritage appraisal, the Grade II Listed building 'The Moat' is located to the east of the site, and there is a Royal Observer's Corp post within the site, which adds low level interest.
<b>Landscape Condition:</b> Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure.	<b>Ordinary/Good.</b> The site is unremarkable agricultural grazing land and contains a number of TPO trees. The boundary vegetation is of good quality, particularly to the west and north.
<b>Associations:</b> Some landscapes are associated with particular people such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of natural beauty in the area.	<b>Poor.</b> There are no associations relating to the site.

GLVIA/TGN Criteria	Observations
<b>Distinctiveness:</b> Landscape that has a strong sense of identity.	<b>Poor.</b> Beyond being an open area of grazing land on the edge of the settlement, the site has no particularly strong sense of identity or distinctiveness and comprises unremarkable agricultural land.
<b>Recreational:</b> Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important.	<b>Ordinary.</b> The site has some recreational value, with a PRow crossing its southern parts. This level of access is, however, unremarkable.
<b>Perceptual (scenic):</b> Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense.	<b>Poor/Ordinary.</b> The site is a standard edge of settlement parcel of land, which provides little in the way of scenic quality. Urban form is notable and evident in views of the site.
<b>Perceptual (wildness and tranquillity):</b> Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies.	<b>Poor.</b> The site is adjacent to the village of Headcorn and is not wild or tranquil as a result.
<b>Functional:</b> Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape.	<b>Ordinary.</b> As a parcel of agricultural land, it performs a valuable function in that context.

- 4.36 Having assessed the site in accordance with TGN 02-21, overall, it is considered of no more than ‘ordinary’ landscape value when considered in the round, which equates to a medium value. Moreover, there exists no evidence (based on ‘demonstrable physical attributes’) to suggest that further weight should be attached to the value of the site derived from the use or enjoyment of this area by local residents (beyond that considered above) or as expressed by any other stakeholder.

## INTERIM CONCLUSIONS: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### Overall Sensitivity of the Headcorn Pastures LCA (LCA 43)

- 4.37 Sensitivity is made up of judgements about the ‘value’ attached to the receptor, which relates to a range of factors as discussed above (and not just whether or not a landscape is designated at national or local level), and the ‘susceptibility’ of the receptor. The susceptibility of the landscape resource is defined as the ability of the receptor (whether the overall character, individual fabric elements or perceptual aspects) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation.
- 4.38 The character of the site itself is broadly aligned to that of the wider LCA 43 Headcorn Pastures as a whole. Both the site and the wider surrounding landscape are affected by existing landscape detractors in the form of powerlines crossing the landscape, disused buildings and the substation, and also urban influences pervading from the village of Headcorn to the east and north. From a sensory perspective, the site is unremarkable within the landscape, and the site does not form a prominent, or particularly notable, part of the experience of the wider landscape.

- 4.39 The site is covered by an area of LLV, which unusually for a local designation has been retained as a protected area within the Local Plan. There are no further designated landscapes within the site or within the 2km detailed study area. The above appraisal of value using Landscape Institute guidance defines the value of the site in the local context of medium. The susceptibility is earlier defined as medium.
- 4.40 This site is also covered by the Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study, which defines the site (under site reference HO 105) as having a moderate landscape sensitivity and a high visual sensitivity, and an overall low capacity. The review undertaken above provides a detailed analysis of the capacity assessment in relation to the specific site circumstances and finds that (using the criteria within the capacity assessment itself) a more appropriate conclusion is the site having a moderate visual sensitivity, a moderate visual sensitivity and an overall moderate sensitivity and capacity.
- 4.41 Based upon the range of factors identified above, the detailed site study and the published guidance available, the Headcorn Pastures LCA within the context of the site is considered to be of medium sensitivity. This would be more elevated as distance from the settlement edge increases, and a medium/high sensitivity would apply.

#### **Overall Sensitivity of the Site Character**

- 4.42 The main character and valuable fabric of the site is to be found along the hedgerow boundaries, which include a limited number of mature trees of high quality (some of which are subject to a TPO), and the mature hedgerow trees within the site which are also protected under a TPO. From a sensory perspective, the site is consistent with its near, and more distant, context, being relatively unremarkable within the landscape and experiencing a strong edge of settlement character along its eastern edge. It does not form a prominent or important part of the appreciation of the wider landscape, and is perceived as open agricultural grazing land in close proximity to existing residential properties and the urban context of Headcorn.
- 4.43 All of the existing field boundary hedgerows would be retained as part of the Proposed Development (except a small loss on the southern and northern boundaries to allow for the accesses) and have the potential for improved management and enhancement. There is also scope for extensive new hedgerow and tree planting within the development, in line with the published landscape 'Summary of Actions' for the LCA, and the aspirations of the draft allocation.
- 4.44 The fields within the site are used for grazing and are found to be of limited biodiversity value. Indeed, the proposed development offers the potential to increase the biodiversity value of the site significantly, as set out in the ecological appraisal. There are no obvious cultural associations with the site.
- 4.45 On this basis, the overall sensitivity of the landscape character of the site and its environs is judged to be medium in accordance with EDP's methodology contained at **Appendix EDP 2**.

## INTERIM SUMMARY

4.46 The landscape character receptors to be assessed within this LVIA are summarised below for convenience.

**Table EDP 4.2:** Summary of Landscape Receptor Sensitivity.

<b>Receptor</b>	<b>Overall Sensitivity</b>
Low Weald area of Local Landscape Value	High
The Site and its Context	Medium
LCA 43 Headcorn Pastures	Medium to Medium/High

## Section 5

### Existing (Baseline) Conditions: Visual Amenity

#### INTRODUCTION

- 5.1 Visual amenity (as opposed to ‘visual character’ described in the previous section) is not about the visual appearance of the site, but has to do with the number, distribution and character of views towards, from or within the site. An analysis of visual amenity allows conclusions to be reached about who may experience visual change, from where and to what degree those views will be affected by the proposed development.
- 5.2 This section describes the existing views; changes to views wrought by the proposed development are analysed in **Section 6**. An analysis of existing views and the ‘receptors’ likely to experience visual change is conducted in three steps described in turn below.

#### STEP ONE: DEFINING ZONES OF THEORETICAL AND PRIMARY VISIBILITY

- 5.3 The starting point for an assessment of visual amenity is a computer-generated ‘zone of theoretical visibility’ (ZTV). The ZTV is derived using digital landform height data only and therefore it does not account for the screening effects of intervening buildings, structures or vegetation, but it does give a prediction of the areas that, theoretically, may be able to experience visual change; it thus provides the basis for more detailed field assessment.
- 5.4 The ZTV is then refined by walking and driving local roads, rights of way and other publicly accessible viewpoints to arrive at a more accurate, ‘field-tested’ zone of primary visibility (ZPV). The ZPV is where views of the proposed development would normally be close-ranging and open, whether in the public or private domain, on foot, cycling or in a vehicle. In this instance, the field assessment was undertaken by an experienced landscape architect in October 2022 in fine weather, and therefore confidently predicts the extent of summertime views of the proposed development. When making judgements informed by the site visit, allowance has been given to wintertime views, when trees are without leaf.
- 5.5 Beyond the ZPV lies a zone of visibility that is less open, being either partly screened or filtered. Views from within this zone would include the proposal – it may not be immediately noticeable, but once recognised would be a perceptible addition to the view.
- 5.6 **Plan EDP 6** illustrates the findings of the visual assessment from which it can be seen that the ZPV extends as follows:
- To the north the ZPV extends only as far as the neighbouring, and recently finished, Bovis development, which sits on the far side of the adjacent PRoW. This development all but restricts views south from the A274 and other receptors, but change would be likely from the housing development and the PRoW;
  - To the east, change within the site would not be experienced beyond the immediate settlement edge to the west of the A274. The existing settlement would screen all views

of the proposals, even with the slightly ascending topography, and only adjacent residential receptors are within the ZPV;

- To the south there will be available views from Moat Road, with views further south largely restricted by the combination of the flat topography and intervening vegetation. Some distant views might be available from the environs of New House Lane, circa 0.5km to the south, and PRow in the vicinity of this lane; and
- To the west the agricultural landscape continues unbroken for more than 2km towards Hawkenbury. Within this area views are foreshortened by the flat topography and further limited by intervening vegetation, particularly that directly on the site boundary. Even from the nearest PRow in this direction (PRow KH590 and 591) views of the existing settlement, and the site, are restricted, but occasionally available in winter months (e.g., from Black Mill Lane).

## **STEP TWO: DEFINING RECEPTOR GROUPS**

- 5.7 Within the ZPV and wider area, the people ('receptors') likely to experience visual change can be considered as falling into a number of discernible groups; these are reviewed below.

### **Rights of Way Users**

- 5.8 While there are a number of PRow within the broad study area, only a limited number of locations on these routes allow for clear views towards the site as indicated by the ZPV on **Plan EDP 6**, or indeed within then slightly wider Zone of Secondary Visibility (ZSV). Generally, users of PRow are considered of high sensitivity unless they are within areas particularly desensitised by urban form (such as within settlements) or conversely, within a landscape designation such as a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As confirmed above there are no promoted long-distance routes within the study area from where the site might be discernible in the view. These routes are reviewed below:

- PRow KH590, which runs north-westwards through the western parts of the site, and then continues north-westwards to Summerhill, will experience open views of the development as it passes through the site and from immediately west of the site beyond the site boundary. **Photoviewpoint EDP 1** shows the view from this route as it enters the site from Moat Road;
- PRow KH591, which runs close to the site's north-western corner, and links to PRow KH590 on Black Mill Lane, and accesses the rural area to the west of the site, will have some fragmented views of the site through the western site boundary vegetation, and possibly some views further to the west near Black Mill Farm. **Photoviewpoint EDP 3** provides a view from within the Bovis development on the old alignment of this route;
- PRow KH618, which runs south from KH591 at Summerhill Farm, to the west of the site, to meet Moat Road, is unlikely to have many open and clear views of the site due to the layers of vegetation between the PRow and the site. **Photoviewpoint EDP 7** shows the view from this route;

- PRow KH589, which runs north from KH590 to Stonestile Road, north of the site, may have some fragmented views of rooftops beyond the vegetation around Black Mill Farm and The Croft. **Photoviewpoint EDP 9** provides a view from the northern end of this route near to Stonestile Road;
- Further to the north-east, beyond the A274, PRow KH585 and KH584 run north-eastwards towards Tattlebury and may have occasional views of rooftops beyond the Bovis development. **Photoviewpoint EDP 10** shows the view from where these routes cross; and
- Further to the south, beyond the railway line and River Beult, PRow KH597 and 596 may have occasional distant views of the development. **Photoviewpoint EDP 11** shows a typical view from this area.

### **Road Users – Main Roads**

- 5.9 The only major road in the Study Area is the A274 Maidstone Road, where potential views might be available looking south and west from certain open parts of the route. Receptors using this road would exhibit a low sensitivity.

### **Road Users – Minor Roads**

#### ***Moat Road***

- 5.10 Moat Road runs past the southern site boundary and would afford open views of the site access and also offer some views into the main body of the site. Views would be restricted to the part of the road which runs along the site boundary, with views further east limited by the built development in Headcorn and to the west by the layering of vegetation both along the road, but also intervening field boundaries. Views from this route are shown on **Photoviewpoint EDP 2**.

- 5.11 There are no factors to raise the susceptibility of this receptor to the change proposed, and no particularly elevated value. The road is considered to have a medium sensitivity to the proposed development. There is no pedestrian access along the majority of this route, although it is likely to be used by some local people using, and linking to, PRow.

#### ***Black Mill Lane***

- 5.12 Black Mill Lane runs to the west of the site and is a dead-end lane providing access to residents of Black Mill Farm and a few other dwellings. Views of the site would be available in winter when looking east, and the existing settlement edge would form part of the baseline in these views. The road is illustrated on the OS Explorer map as an 'other route with public access', and provides a connection to the Bovis development, and the A274 to the north-east.
- 5.13 As for Moat Road, the overall sensitivity is considered to be medium for road users, with this applicable to road users. Pedestrians would have a high sensitivity. Receptors using this route are represented by **Photoviewpoints EDP 5** and **6**.

### **Water Lane**

- 5.14 Water Lane is heavily vegetated over most of its course as it routes south from Moat Road, and views are further restricted by the vegetation along the River Beult. As such any views would be more likely to be available in winter, where some limited fragmented visibility might be available.
- 5.15 As a road running through a rural area, this receptor is considered to have an overall medium sensitivity with no particular susceptibility or value factors which would raise (or lower) this.

### **Stonestile Road**

- 5.16 This lane runs broadly west from the A274 and provides access to rural farmsteads and dwellings. It is relatively well-vegetated along its route, with only occasional glimpsed views. A similar view (from PRow KH589) is illustrated by **Photoviewpoint EDP 9**. Views south include the northern extents of Headcorn, and particularly the newly completed Bovis development immediately north of the site. A rural route, there is considered to be an overall medium sensitivity to the proposed development for car users, whilst pedestrians using the route (which is likely) would have a high sensitivity.

### **New House Road**

- 5.17 New House Road runs broadly south-east from Water Lane to the south of the railway and is bordered by well-cut agricultural hedgerows. Over these hedges, and where gaps in the vegetation allows, there are some views northwards towards the higher ground containing the site. Such views are relatively long range, and largely incidental to the experience of the route, whilst the existing settlement edge is already visible in the available open views, as demonstrated by **Photoviewpoints EDP 8** and **11**. A rural route, there is considered to be an overall medium sensitivity to the proposed development for car users, whilst pedestrians using the route would have a high sensitivity.

### **Residential Dwellings/Groups**

- 5.18 This LVIA focusses predominantly on views from publicly accessible locations. Views from private residential properties, although likely to be of high to very high sensitivity to changes in the view, are not protected by national planning guidance or local planning policy. Accordingly, changes to the character, 'quality' and nature of private views are not a material planning consideration in the determination of a planning application. However, they remain relevant to this review of the predicted extent and nature of visual change, so are reviewed briefly below:
- The dwellings bordering the entire eastern site boundary, within the residential area known as 'Bankfields' (which generally border the southern field parcel) and the dwellings along the western side of Maidstone Road (which border the northern site parcel). These dwellings generally back on to the site, and have a variety of different boundary treatments, from no discernible physical boundary to heavily vegetated boundaries, which are visually impermeable. In the worst case the views are open and direct across the site, although such views are limited in number (with some screening



normally in place). These views would be from rooms occupied in daylight hours, and also from garden areas. **Photoviewpoint EDP 4** is taken from within Bankfields;

- To the north of the site, residents of the new Bovis development will likely have some views across the site, although the double line of vegetation along Black Mill Lane east of PRoW KH591 restricts many views, particularly in summer months. **Photoviewpoint EDP 3** shows the view from the public open space within the Bovis development;
- Individual dwellings to the west of the site – including The Croft, Old Mill House, Black Mill Farm and Black Mill Cottage – will all have some visibility of the proposals, through the western site boundary vegetation. These views would be from main living rooms, and garden areas, but will be visually restricted to varying degrees. **Photoviewpoint EDP 5** shows the view from Black Mill Lane, which will be similar to the views at these dwellings;
- Further west again, there may be some more limited visibility from Summerhill Farm, The Billiards House, Summerhill House, but again this would be visually restricted – by both built form and existing vegetation. **Photoviewpoint EDP 7** shows the view from a PRoW in this vicinity; and
- Some properties along Moat Road will have views of either the built development, or changes along Moat Road, including The Moat, Springfields and Willow Bank. Change would likely to be minimal from these receptors.

### **Other Receptors**

- 5.19 The only other receptor is Black Mill Lane to the east of Black Mill Farm, which isn't a formal PRoW but is frequently used, and equivalent to a formal PRoW in terms of sensitivity. Change is likely at close range beyond the northern site boundary, and through the emergency access point. Receptors are considered to have a high sensitivity.

### **STEP THREE: DEFINING REPRESENTATIVE VIEWPOINTS**

- 5.20 Within the ZPV, there are clearly many individual points at which views towards the site are gained. EDP has selected a number of viewpoints that are considered representative of the nature of the views from each of the receptor groups. The selection of the representative viewpoints is based on the principle that the assessment needs to test the 'worst case' scenario, and in selecting these viewpoints, EDP has sought to include:

- A range of viewpoints from all points of the compass, north, south, east and west;
- A range of viewpoints from distances at close quarters at the site boundary and up to distant viewpoints at 2km and more from the site; and
- Viewpoints from all the above receptor groups.

- 5.21 The representation of views is supported by 15 photoviewpoints (PVP), the number and location of which have not been agreed with the LPA. Their locations are illustrated on

**Plan EDP 5.** Photographs from the selected viewpoints are contained in **Appendix EDP 3.** The purpose of these viewpoints is to aid assessment of a visual receptor(s). These viewpoints are not assessed separately.

**Table EDP 5.1:** Summary of Representative Photoviewpoints.

<b>PVP No.</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Grid Reference</b>	<b>Distance and Direction of View (m)</b>	<b>Reason(s) for Selection and Sensitivity of Receptor</b>
1	PRoW KH590 on Site's Southern Boundary	582897, 144394	0m N	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.
2	Moat Road at Site's South-Eastern Corner	583002, 144373	7m NW	Close proximity road receptors. Medium sensitivity.
3	New Bovis Development North of the Site	582831, 144815	70m S	Residential receptors and PRoW Users. High to very high sensitivity.
4	Bankfields East of the Site	583107, 144539	90m W	Close proximity residential receptors. Very high sensitivity.
5	Black Mill Lane West of the Site (1)	582675, 144628	95m E	Close proximity road receptors and walkers. Medium to high sensitivity.
6	Black Mill Lane West of the Site (2)	582646, 144447	185m E	Close proximity road receptors and walkers. Medium to high sensitivity.
7	PRoW KH618 West of the Site	582373, 144561	385m E	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.
8	New House Lane	582557, 143950	535m NE	Rural road receptors. Medium sensitivity.
9	PRoW KH589 North of the Site	582459, 145158	565m S	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.
10	PRoW KH585/583 Junction North-East of the Site	583188, 145237	580m SW	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.
11	PRoW KH596 South of New House Lane	582890, 143583	805m N	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.
12	PRoW KH622 South of the Site	582408, 143187	1,295m N	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.
13	PRoW KH580 near Hearnden Green	582213, 145890	1,320m S	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.
14	PRoW KH575 near Little Hawkenbury	580658, 144775	2,110m E	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.
15	Stickfast Lane near Little Ulcombe	583043, 147399	2,665m S	PRoW Users. High sensitivity.

## Section 6

### The Proposed Development and Mitigation

- 6.1 Having defined the baseline conditions in the previous two sections, this section reviews the proposed development and (in the next section) undertakes an assessment of the likely effects in landscape terms.

#### THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 6.2 An Illustrative Masterplan of the proposed development is included in **Appendix EDP 1** while the Illustrative Landscape Strategy is included at **Plan EDP 7**. The DAS supporting this application provides full details of the development proposals. This assessment is based on the contents of the DAS and Illustrative Masterplan, along with the mitigation shown on the Landscape Strategy.
- 6.3 The proposed development is seeking outline permission (with all matters reserved except access) for the development of up to 120no. dwellings (Use Class C3) including demolition of existing buildings, means of access into the site from Moat Road (not internal roads), associated highway works, provision of public open space, emergency/pedestrian access to Millbank and associated infrastructure including surface water drainage (with related off site s278 highway works to Moat Road).

#### REVIEW OF PUBLISHED LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES/RECOMMENDATIONS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

- 6.4 The LCA provides a ‘Summary of Actions’ for the Headcorn Pasturelands LCA, as follows (underlined emphasis added by EDP):

##### **“Summary of Actions**

- *Consider the generic guidelines for the Low Weald*
- *Conserve the abundance of oak as a dominant species, and plant new isolated oaks within pasture and hedgerows to replace ageing population*
- *Conserve the pastoral land use and resist conversion to arable land*
- *Conserve and enhance the small scale field pattern and sense of enclosure*
- *Conserve the largely undeveloped rural landscape and the remote quality of isolated farmsteads*
- *Resist infill linear development along Maidstone Road*
- *Soften the visual prominence of large agricultural barns through native planting*

- Enhance habitat opportunities around water bodies and ditches by promoting a framework of vegetation in these areas.

6.5 In addition to these actions, the draft Allocation requirements set out the following aspirations of relevance to the Landscape Strategy for the proposed development:

- *“Existing tree/hedgerow margins should be retained/enhanced in order to provide the opportunity for biodiversity habitat creation/enhancement. Public access to such areas would normally be limited.*
- *Development will be subject to a site-wide strategy to incorporate an appropriate level of biodiversity net gain in accordance with national and local policy.*
- *The proposed landscaping scheme shall respect and protect TPO trees within the site or adjacent to boundaries.*
- *The existing hedgerow fronting Moat Road shall be retained and enhanced and the impacts of any access junction minimised and mitigated.*
- *Vehicular access routes within the development shall feature tree planting.”*

6.6 Further additional guidance was provided as part of the Council’s response to a pre-application meeting, as follows:

*“The site itself rises from the Moat Road frontage significantly increasing its visual prominence. There would be gaps to Moat Road via the new access point which needs generous visibility splays and there is a relative lack of landscape screening in the SE corner.”*

*“The topography of the site coupled with the low lying open landscape in the vicinity means that much more significant landscape screening needs to be indicated and secured in perpetuity. The Open Space needs to be of a substantial width along all of the western and southern boundaries to ensure it can effectively serve as a visual buffer, planted with trees and landscaping to screen development. It will be important to have structural E-W landscaping within housing areas to break up both the visual massing and the roofscape.”*

## **OVERALL LANDSCAPE STRATEGY**

6.7 The Illustrative Landscape Strategy is contained as **Plan EDP 7**. The process of LVIA has informed the masterplan for the proposed development to ensure the integration of mitigation within the proposals has been undertaken from the outset, and a landscape-led approach is followed. Moreover, the above guidance and recommendations have been taken into account in the development of the Landscape Strategy.

6.8 Existing vegetation at the site boundaries and within the site would be retained, with the exception of a very short length of hedgerow to facilitate the site access onto Moat Road to the south, and another very short length at the access to Black Mill Lane. The small loss of vegetation will be more than compensated for by proposed planting across the site, as shown on the Landscape Strategy. As confirmed in the Ecological Appraisal, the site will

deliver a net biodiversity gain of 64%, which is far in excess of the planning policy requirement.

- 6.9 Where it exists, retained vegetation along the eastern site boundary (to the settlement edge) will be enhanced through additional hedge and tree planting to increase the buffering to existing properties. The treatment along this boundary will vary depending on the extent of vegetation that already exists, but the aspiration is to provide a strong green boundary, which will form the rear of gardens along this edge.
- 6.10 In addition, a new green corridor will be created north to south in the central area of the site, which will link the east to west green corridor focussed on the existing TPO trees with the access to Black Mill Lane to the north. These green links will also link into the large public open space buffers proposed along the southern and western site boundaries.
- 6.11 These green buffers and connecting spaces would provide multifunctional green spaces with the following features:
- A formal area of children's play located in the western parts of the northern parcel, which complements the western area of public open space and is located near to the link into PRoW KH590;
  - A new area of woodland and scrub is proposed in the western parts of both the northern and southern site parcels. This will provide critical visual screening, and also provide valuable biodiversity and recreational opportunities;
  - Two large Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) 'zones' are proposed to provide additional amphibian habitat and other ecological and social interest. Specific shapes and locations of these are not yet defined, but there will be one in the northern site parcel and one in the southern site parcel, adjacent to the southern boundary;
  - The proposals include a smaller pocket of public open space between the two site parcels, which is focussed on the mature trees and hedgerow forming part of the old hedgerow boundary between the parcels. This green link will break up the visual mass of development when viewed in open views from the south;
  - The areas of public open space, which help frame and shape the development, also assist in providing a logical development pattern when viewed in association with the new Bovis development to the north, and provide significant opportunities for recreation and landscape mitigation on the most sensitive aspects of the site; and
  - The proposed and retained green corridors together create a network of connecting green spaces, enhancing biodiversity and habitats on-site as well as connecting public open spaces and enhancing visual amenity of these spaces.
- 6.12 The public open space is intended to be naturalistic, providing enhanced biodiversity, visual amenity, play spaces, and informal recreation for all ages. There will be footpaths through the public open space, accessible both to new residents and the existing residents of Headcorn.

## **PROPOSED LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT**

6.13 The proposals will deliver enhancements in terms of:

- Increased public access to open space that provides opportunities for play and informal recreation and relaxation – for both existing and new residents (it is notable that other new development in the area provides little in the way of public open space);
- Increased Green Infrastructure network connectivity between and through the site;
- Improved visual filtering of the town, thus improving the way in which the development ‘sits’ within its landscape context; and
- Significant additional tree and hedge planting, areas of native shrubs and species-enriched grassland will contribute to visual amenity and habitat diversification.

## Section 7 Assessment of Effects

### INTRODUCTION

- 7.1 In this section, the predicted effects on landscape character and visual amenity are assessed. The assessment uses the thresholds for magnitude, sensitivity and significance defined at **Appendix EDP 2** as a guide, but moderated where appropriate with professional judgement. Professional judgement is an important part of the assessment process; it is neither 'pro' nor 'anti' development but acknowledges that development may result in beneficial change as well as landscape harm. The assessment also takes account of the likely effectiveness of any proposed mitigation.
- 7.2 Predicted effects on receptors are assessed at construction and upon the first year following completion (Year 1), these effects tending to be the 'worst case'. Also provided is an assessment of effects at Year 15 once mitigation has had time to mature and the proposals are settled in their context. Year 15 (and beyond) is the timeframe over which the proposed development should be judged for its acceptability, with landscape change properly measured over this longer-term horizon.

### CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS

- 7.3 Construction activities, movement of site traffic, lighting, noise and sounds will be ever-present during the construction process. This is not unusual and will be carefully controlled by a conditioned construction method statement. Recommendations for protection of retained trees and hedgerows, in accordance with relevant British Standards such as BS 5837, will ensure that the rooting areas of trees and hedgerows are not adversely affected by the construction process.
- 7.4 The magnitude of change will, however, be very high (on both the site itself and immediate context to the north, south and east) and when combined with the medium sensitivity of the site, would result in a **major/moderate** adverse level of effect.
- 7.5 The effects of the construction process will also be felt – although to a much lesser extent – on the landscape surrounding the site, which has a slightly higher sensitivity. Given the extent of mature vegetation and built form surrounding the site, the ability to experience the construction phase will be more limited (than for the site) and will likely be limited to noise impacts. An exception to this is from the immediate west and south, where topography and less dense vegetation combine to make changes more appreciable. With an anticipated low magnitude of change in these areas, and the medium/high sensitivity the level of effect would be **moderate/minor** to **minor** and adverse.
- 7.6 These effects would be temporary and extend only for the duration of the construction process. The effects are reversible, but to a new state rather than the original baseline state.

## **PREDICTED EFFECTS ON THE CHARACTER OF THE SITE (YEAR 1 AND COMPLETION)**

- 7.7 Following construction/establishment of the landscape strategy (whichever is sooner), the predicted effects take into account suitable and appropriate management of existing and proposed landscape features, undertaken in accordance with a landscape management plan or similar.
- 7.8 It is a consequence of the nature of the development proposed that visual and sensory character of the site would change substantially as a result of implementation. The magnitude of this level of change is not an indication of bad design but is to be expected as the result of the change of use of any green field site to residential development. Such a change also has to be considered in the context of the draft allocation of this site, and the assumed high-level acceptance that some change is inevitable.
- 7.9 The changes predicted to occur on the dimensions that contribute to the character of the site are described below and evaluated overall:
- **The Physical Landscape:** The primary changes to the topography of the site would be in relation to the provision of SuDS features and excavations for residential development and associated infrastructure, particularly within the southern parcel which is: (a) slightly steeper sloping; and (b) where the SuDS is largely proposed. The proposals include properties up to a maximum of 2-storeys across the site;
  - **Landscape Fabric and Habitats:** Changes to the fabric of the site would be limited to the removal of an area of agricultural grazing land of limited quality and the removal of short lengths of hedgerow to facilitate the accesses north onto Black Mill Lane and south onto Moat Road. Additional tree planting, including the enhancement of the western boundary hedgerow, and recreation/enhancement of the eastern boundary to the existing dwellings which back onto the site, as well as structural planting to provide the framework for discrete residential character areas, and landscaped surface water attenuation features within the southern green buffer, would introduce positive features to the site. The measures included within the scheme also address the requirements of the allocation, as follows:

*“Existing tree/hedgerow margins should be retained/enhanced in order to provide the opportunity for biodiversity habitat creation/enhancement.”;*

    - Trees and hedgerows within the site, and the large proportion of the boundary vegetation would be retained:

*“The proposed landscaping scheme shall respect and protect TPO trees within the site or adjacent to boundaries.”;*
    - The proposed development respects the TPOs within the site and on the boundaries:

*“The existing hedgerow fronting Moat Road shall be retained and enhanced and the impacts of any access junction minimised and mitigated.”;*



- This hedgerow will be retained and enhanced, except for a small loss to facilitate the access. The access has been designed specifically to avoid mature trees:

*“Vehicular access routes within the development shall feature tree planting”*; and

- The Illustrative Masterplan shows that trees are proposed throughout the development, and not only on vehicular access routes.

- 7.10 The activities involved in the change of use of the site from agricultural land to a residential development would result in a very large change to its visual and perceptual character. Following completion, the site will have undergone a wholesale change in use. As would be expected for any such development on a greenfield site, albeit one with some existing detractors (in the form of the adjacent settlement and other built features to the south), this would result in a fundamental change to the visual and perceptual aspects of the site's character.
- 7.11 These effects would be tempered, to some degree, by the fact that the site sits adjacent to mature and contemporary residential development in the village, and the landscape-led approach, which would ensure the retention, enhancement, and long-term management of existing characteristic landscape elements. The provision of new features which respect the aspirations of the LCA and draft allocation - particularly the retention of existing TPO trees and site boundary vegetation, and the provision of extensive green buffers along the south and west of the site, help limit effects.
- 7.12 In addition, the layout of the development (as illustrated on the Illustrative Masterplan at **Appendix EDP 1**) reflects the pattern of development set by the recent Bovis development to the north of the site, and represents, as a result, a logical extension in this part of the village's hinterland.
- 7.13 The proposals go further than merely retaining and enhancing existing features too, in line with the aspirations of the draft allocation. They have been sympathetically designed, as set out at **Section 6**, to reinstate and create new elements that would integrate with, and make a positive contribution to, the landscape fabric and biodiversity of the site that will increase as it matures.
- 7.14 The proposed scheme includes the retention, enhancement, and ongoing management of existing boundary landscape features alongside establishment of new hedgerows, hedgerow trees and species-enriched grassland. Ongoing sympathetic management would lead to a gradual, positive characteristic alteration to the landscape features as the planting matures, with this (importantly) including the retained mature trees running east to west between the two site parcels. This would replace the monoculture grazing land with characteristic, linked, landscape elements that integrate into the landscape and contribute to biodiversity.
- 7.15 The sensitivity of the site and its immediate environs is considered to be medium. Impacts would be of medium scale, restricted to within the site (though also visible within the immediate environs of the site), be long-term and permanent. The magnitude of change on the site is therefore assessed as high, resulting in a **moderate** adverse effect at Year 1, and at Year 15.

## **PREDICTED EFFECTS ON THE HEADCORN PASTURELANDS**

- 7.16 The area immediately surrounding the site would be subject to the greatest change to the defined LCA and this is predicted to diminish due to distance and intervening landform and features. Effects on the immediate surroundings and the wider area are described below. The overall sensitivity of the LCA examined in the baseline was judged to be medium to medium/high (varying with distance from the settlement).

### **The Site's Immediate Surroundings**

- 7.17 The area immediately surrounding the site will be subject to the greatest indirect change to the Headcorn Pasturelands LCA. The area affected would be focussed on the landscape immediately to the west and south (due to the existing settlement context to the north and east). It would further diminish due to distance and intervening landform and features. The assessments below therefore represent the worst-case effects (i.e., those at close range).
- 7.18 The magnitude of change on the immediate environs to the site (within circa 200–300m) would be high during construction and at Year 1, reducing to low by Year 15 once the proposed boundary planting has developed, and the development has become integrated. With a medium to medium/high sensitivity, the effect would be **major/moderate** to **moderate** adverse during construction and at Year 1, reducing to **moderate/minor** to **minor** adverse by Year 15

### **The Wider Area**

- 7.19 The Site falls within the Headcorn Pasturelands LCA. As a result of the mitigation measures and landscape strategy described above, the proposals would result in a limited effect on the characteristic physical fabric of the site itself – changes would be limited to the loss of a parcel of agricultural grazing land, and the proposals, in landscape terms, would be perceived as an extension to the existing village from most vantage points. There would be no physical effect of the proposed development beyond the site boundary, except for minimal changes to Moat Road, including a new footway and road markings.
- 7.20 The layout of the proposed development has taken into account the patterns of existing vegetation, including in particular field boundary hedgerows and other landscape features and elements within and surrounding the site, and also the pattern of development on the western side of the town. Critically, this includes the mature and contemporary settlement edge immediately adjacent to the east and north. In so doing, this has ensured that the scheme can be implemented without notable harm to the underlying, and overarching, character, the topography or setting to the local landscape, notwithstanding the elevated changes that will be observed locally.
- 7.21 The mitigation measures that are integral to the proposed scheme, and where these are enhanced with additional mitigation, are intended to conserve character where it exists, and to restore or enhance landscape features where they have deteriorated, in line with the published Summary of Actions for the LCA. This includes hedgerows with hedgerow trees and ensures that the proposals are well-integrated spatially.

- 7.22 In addition, the site represents only a very limited proportion of the host LCAs, and for these reasons it is concluded that there would be a very limited change to the landscape character of the overall LCA arising from the construction and operation of the proposals.
- 7.23 The impacts arising from the introduction of the proposed scheme would be long term and permanent. The proposed mitigation planting would have a lasting positive contribution to conserving the character of the local landscape, and in integrating the settlement into its landscape context. Adverse effects would be experienced only within the immediate setting of the site (and largely limited to the south and west), and these effects are likely to diminish further as the planting matures and is brought into long-term management.
- 7.24 The sensitivity of the host LCA is considered to be medium/high away from the settlement edge. The magnitude of change to the LCA in these areas is considered to be low, reducing to very low over time. Therefore, there is likely to be a direct, permanent, long-term effect which is considered to be **moderate/minor** to **minor** adverse for the LCA as a whole, reducing to **minor** to **minor/negligible** over time as the proposed planting develops and matures, and the development becomes a well-designed part of the wider landscape and townscape.

#### **Low Weald Landscape of Local Value**

- 7.25 This local designation covers a large area to the north, south, east and west of Headcorn, and is protected under Policy SP17 within the Local Plan. The designation aims to ensure that development within LLVs *“should, through their siting, scale, mass, materials and design, seek to contribute positively to the conservation and enhancement of the protected landscape.”*
- 7.26 Specifically, the Low Weald LLV is described as covering *“a significant proportion of the countryside in the rural southern half of the borough. The Low Weald is recognised as having distinctive features: the field patterns, many of medieval character, hedgerows, stands of trees, ponds and streams and buildings of character should be conserved and enhanced where appropriate.”*
- 7.27 In this context, the proposed development is likely to have some impact upon the designation, as it is simply not possible for development proposals – which inevitably result in change at various levels – to ‘conserve’ the landscape unchanged. This kind of ‘nil impact’ policy is contrary to good development planning and doesn’t recognise either the need for housing in greenfield locations, or indeed that development can be designed sensitively within rural areas.
- 7.28 As shown on **Plan EDP 2**, there is significant new development around Headcorn (and wider afield), all of which is located within the Low Weald LLV. This confirms that the designation should not be considered a complete restriction on development, but rather reiterates that if well planned and designed, development of the type proposed can be accommodated successfully within rural settlement hinterland. More important than its pure location within the LLV, is the way in which the development considers the site constraints and addresses those facets of the local, and wider, landscape which are most sensitive. It is considered that the site does this in the following ways:

- The proposed development retains the vast majority of the existing vegetation, and provides enhancements to this retained vegetation;
- The 'shape' of the built development reflects the new western settlement line defined by the new Bovis development to the north. A sinuous development edge provides a soft transition to the countryside to the west;
- The development provides extensive areas of public open space to the western and southern boundaries, which further softens the transition to the countryside, and provides extensive areas of formal and informal recreation, and significant biodiversity interest; and
- The development has been designed to ensure it takes advantage of the natural screening provided by existing vegetation, thereby ensuring that the integration of the northern parts of Headcorn with the Low Weald landscape is effective from the outset, and will be enhanced in the long term.

7.29 On the basis of the above, it is considered that whilst some change to the LLV is inevitable, within the wider context and aspiration of the designation, it is only impactful at a low level. This low-level change, combined with the high sensitivity, leads to a **moderate/minor** adverse effect. Importantly, this level of effect is only applicable at a local level, and overall the impact on the wider designated area is significantly reduced compared to this.

#### **PREDICTED EFFECTS ON VISUAL AMENITY**

7.30 The baseline visual amenity of the site is described in **Section 5** of this report. As a consequence of intervening vegetation and built form, in combination with the flat topography, it was found that only limited intervisibility between the site and publicly accessible areas (visual receptors) was available. Representative views are contained within **Appendix EDP 3 (Photoviewpoints EDP 1–15)**. These views do not represent the only areas from which there would be an effect, rather they provide a representative assessment that is used as a benchmark to understand the wider potential effects.

7.31 All effects are adverse, unless otherwise stated, with construction effects being short term and reversible, Year 1 effects being medium to long-term and permanent, and Year 15 effects being long-term and permanent.

#### **Rights of Way Users**

7.32 The following PRoW are identified within the baseline stage as being likely to experience an effect as a result of the proposals.

7.33 PRoW KH590 runs north-westwards through the western parts of the site, and then continues north-westwards to Summerhill, and users will experience open views of the development as it passes through the site and from immediately west of the site beyond the site boundary. The route will also change alignment slightly, although will be routed through a generous area of open space.

- 7.34 The change across a length of circa 360m will be stark, at close range, and will alter the experience of the route entirely. A typical view from the route within the site is provided by **Photoviewpoint EDP 1**, which is taken from within the site, whilst **Photoviewpoints EDP 5** and **6** shows the view from Black Mill Lane to the west of the site. In both views the existing settlement edge is visible, which is an important factor in judging the acceptability of the change.
- 7.35 Beyond the location illustrated by **Photoviewpoint EDP 5**, the route runs beyond the farm at the end of Black Mill Lane, and views will be correspondingly limited over this stretch.
- 7.36 Construction activities themselves would result in only temporary change, but the installed development would have long-term effects. The magnitude of change would be at worst very high during the construction phase (indeed, the PRoW would likely be mitigated with hoarding, etc. during this stage) and at Year 1, and with high sensitivity the level of effect would be at worst **major** adverse. For the route as a whole, the magnitude of change would be lower as the proposed development would not be visible from the whole of the path, and the scale of effect would be reduced accordingly.
- 7.37 By Year 15, the growth and development of the proposed landscaping within the site, and particularly the enhanced management of the existing western boundary hedgerow, would reduce the visibility of the proposed development from immediately west of the site, and the change would reduce to high, yielding a **major/moderate** adverse effect.
- 7.38 For the parts of the route which run through the site, the change would remain at a very high level. The magnitude of change would remain as very high, resulting in an ongoing **major** adverse effect for this stretch.
- 7.39 PRoW KH591 runs close to the site's north-western corner, and links to PRoW KH590 on Black Mill Lane, and accesses the countryside to the west of the site. There will be some fragmented views of the site through the western site boundary vegetation, and some more open views further to the west near Black Mill Farm. The PRoW is showing as closed north of Black Mill Lane on the Kent Definitive Map. **Photoviewpoints EDP 3** and **5** show representative views from this PRoW, or in close proximity to it.
- 7.40 Changes to the views for users will dissipate to the west of Black Mill Cottage, with the greatest levels of change likely over a short length of the route north-east of this. For this stretch the magnitude of change would be at worst high during the construction phase and high at Year 1, and with high sensitivity the level of effect would be at worst **major/moderate** adverse during construction, reducing to **moderate** adverse at Year 1.
- 7.41 By Year 15, the maturation of the landscape proposals along the site's western public open space, and the general integration of the development as an accepted part of the predominantly rural landscape (interspersed with built form and near the settlement edge), and the enhanced management of the existing hedgerow and trees on the western boundary, would together reduce the magnitude of change to medium, resulting in a long-term **moderate** adverse effect. This would be the worst-case effect, with lower effects to the west of Black Mill Cottage.

- 7.42 PRow KH618 runs south from KH591 at Summerhill Farm, to the west of the site, to meet Moat Road, and is unlikely to have open and clear views of the site due to the layers of vegetation between the PRow and the site. As shown by **Photoviewpoint EDP 7** the route will have fragmented visibility towards the western site boundary at a distance of around 400m, and the existing settlement edge is just visible from this area. The route is only short (circa 250m) and the change will be uniform across the route.
- 7.43 The proposed development would be visible, variously, through the western site boundary, with noise and construction traffic the most obvious sources of impact. At Year 1 the new dwellings would be partially screened by the boundary vegetation, but the landscape proposals would not have matured sufficiently to soften the impact further. The magnitude of change would be at worst medium during the construction phase, reducing to low at Year 1, and with high sensitivity the level of effect would reduce from **moderate** adverse to **moderate/minor** adverse. The level of effect would be at this level only for small sections of the route.
- 7.44 By Year 15, the maturation of the landscape proposals in the western POS, and the general integration of the development as an accepted part of the predominantly rural landscape (albeit with existing settlement visible), and the enhanced management of the existing hedgerow on the western boundary, would result in the magnitude of change remaining at low, resulting in an ongoing **moderate/minor** adverse effect.
- 7.45 PRow KH589 runs north from KH590 to Stonestile Road, north-west of the site, and may have some fragmented views of rooftops beyond the vegetation around Black Mill Farm and The Croft, and through the western boundary vegetation. Views of the southern parcel would be restricted due to the orientation of the footpath and the location of the site, and there are significant lines of vegetation to the south of the route (and KH590), which adds to this fragmentation of views.
- 7.46 Although the PRow is vegetated along part of its length, as **Photoviewpoint EDP 9** shows there are some more open views from this area, and a low level of change is anticipated. During the construction stage, there will likely be some noise and construction activities visible and perceptible, but any change will be low at worst, leading to a **moderate/minor** adverse effect for this high sensitivity receptor.
- 7.47 At Year 1 there will only be very limited, if any, views of the finished development given the intervening vegetation between the receptor and the site; views would also include the recently completed development north of the site. There would be a worst-case low magnitude of change, leading to a **moderate/minor** effect. At Year 15, the enhanced boundary vegetation and landscape proposals within the public open space would further reduce the perceptibility of the proposals, leading to a very low magnitude of change and a **minor** adverse effect.
- 7.48 Further to the north-east, beyond the A274, PRow KH585 and KH584 run north-eastwards towards Tattlebury, and may have very occasional views of rooftops beyond the Bovis development at distances of circa 250m to 1km. As shown on **Photoviewpoint EDP 10**, the Bovis development is visible as the new settlement edge on the north of the town, and any change resulting from the proposed development would be visible in combination with this, or to its right in the view.

- 7.49 In this context the change would be limited arising from the proposed development, and at the construction stage there may be cranes or other tall structures visible, but noise impacts would be reduced due to distance and the presence of the A274. Any change at the construction stage would be low at worst, leading to a **moderate/minor** adverse effect. At Year 1 any visible dwellings would be hard to discern from the Bovis scheme or other buildings in the town and would lead to a very low change and a **minor** adverse effect. The same would be the case at Year 15, with a very low change and a long term **minor** adverse effect.
- 7.50 Further to the south, beyond the railway line and River Beult, PRoW KH597 and 596 may have occasional distant views of the development.

#### **Road Users–Main Roads**

- 7.51 The only major road in the Study Area is the A274 Maidstone Road, where potential views might be available looking south and west from certain open parts of the route. Receptors using this road exhibit a low sensitivity.
- 7.52 There may be very occasional glimpsed views through roadside dwellings towards the site, but these would be within an urban context and not widely available. At the construction stage the change would likely be the greatest, and result in a low magnitude of change and a **minor/negligible** adverse effect. This would reduce to very low at Year 1 and Year 15, and result in a **negligible** adverse effect.

#### **Road Users–Minor Roads**

##### ***Moat Road***

- 7.53 Moat Road runs past the southern site boundary and would afford open views of the site access and also offer some views into the main body of the site. Views would be restricted to the part of the road which runs along the site boundary, with views further east limited by the built development in Headcorn and to the west by the layering of vegetation both along the road, but also intervening field boundaries. Views from this route are shown on **Photoviewpoint EDP 2**.
- 7.54 The change would be most apparent as road users passed the site's southern boundary, where views of both the new access (and the small required loss of hedgerow) and the residential built development would change the context of the route over a short length of circa 280m. Changes to the highway would also be visible. From further afield (to the west) more limited change might be visible, but this would be through site boundary and other vegetation.
- 7.55 Over this short length of the route the change at the construction stage would be very high leading to a major/moderate adverse effect. Good construction practices and mitigation would help reduce impacts but owing to proximity the change would be stark. At Year 1 the development would be visible through and over the site boundary vegetation, and wouldn't benefit from mitigation planting along the boundary and within the southern area of public open space. The magnitude of change would be very high and the effect **major/moderate** adverse. At Year 15, the southern boundary vegetation, and the further mitigation planting,

would have matured reducing the extent of change to high, leading to a **moderate** adverse effect.

### ***Black Mill Lane***

- 7.56 Black Mill Lane runs to the west of the site and is a dead-end lane providing access to residents of Black Mill Farm and a number of other dwellings. Views of the site would be available in winter when looking east, and the existing settlement edge would form part of the baseline in these views, as shown by **Photoviewpoints EDP 5 and 6**.
- 7.57 The development would likely be visible, to varying degrees, from the entirety of this road route north of Moat Road. The change during construction would see construction activities visible through the site's western boundary vegetation, but in the context of the existing backdrop of the settlement edge. Being closer to the receptor, the change would be clear, and result in a high magnitude of change and a **moderate** adverse effect.
- 7.58 At Year 1 and Year 15 the change would result from the settlement edge becoming closer to the viewer and more prominent as a result. At Year 1 the proposed landscaping within the western public open space would not have matured, and there would still be a relatively elevated change of high, leading to a **moderate** adverse effect. At Year 15 the growth of the proposed landscaping would result in much reduced visibility and a likely low magnitude of change and a **minor** adverse effect.
- 7.59 For pedestrian users of this route, the effects would raise on account of the higher sensitivity of these receptors. The effects would therefore be **major/moderate** (at construction and Year 1) and **moderate/minor** (Year 15).

### ***Water Lane***

- 7.60 Water Lane is heavily vegetated over most of its course as it routes south from Moat Road, and views are further restricted by the vegetation along the River Beult. As such, any views would be more likely to be available in winter, where some limited fragmented visibility might be available. The change at construction, Year 1 and Year 15 would never raise above low, leading to worst case **minor** adverse effects.

### ***Stonestile Road***

- 7.61 This lane runs broadly west from the A274 and provides access to rural farmsteads and dwellings. It is relatively well-vegetated along its route, with only occasional glimpsed views. Views south include the northern extents of Headcorn, and particularly the newly completed Bovis development immediately north of the site, which would screen most views due its juxtaposition with the site. Any open views would be similar to those presented by **Photoviewpoint EDP 9** from an adjacent PRow, and the change would be low in the worst case, at all temporal stages.
- 7.62 Combined with a medium sensitivity, this would lead to worst case effects at construction, Year 1 and Year 15 of **minor** adverse.



### **New House Road**

- 7.63 New House Road runs broadly south-east from Water Lane to the south of the railway, and is bordered by well-cut agricultural hedgerows, most of which restrict views for car users due to their height. Over these hedges, and where gaps in the vegetation allows, and during winter when there is an absence of leaf cover, there may be some views north as represented by **Photoviewpoint EDP 8**. This location provides a rare open view from a stream crossing.
- 7.64 Any available views are over a relatively long distance, and largely incidental to the experience of the route, whilst the existing settlement edge is already visible in these views. With tall cranes and construction machinery, there would be a noticeable change during construction, which would lead to a worst-case medium magnitude of change, and a corresponding **moderate/minor** adverse effect.
- 7.65 At Year 1 the new residential development would be a relatively stark new addition to available views, and although set against, and within a view containing, the existing settlement edge, would lead to a medium magnitude of change, and a **moderate/minor** adverse effect. This level of change would only be available in relatively few locations along a section of the route of approximately 620m, and in the main effects would be lower.
- 7.66 At Year 15 the southern boundary vegetation would have been managed to restrict visibility to a greater degree, and the proposed landscaping within the southern public open space would have matured sufficiently to limit change and soften the view. This would result in a long-term change of low, yielding a **minor** adverse effect.

### **Residential Dwellings/Groups**

- 7.67 This LVIA focusses predominantly on views from publicly accessible locations. Views from private residential properties, although likely to be of high to very high sensitivity to changes in the view, are not protected by national planning guidance or local planning policy. Accordingly, changes to the character, 'quality' and nature of private views are not a material planning consideration in the determination of a planning application.
- 7.68 However, they remain relevant to this review of the predicted extent and nature of visual change, so are assessed below.
- 7.69 The dwellings bordering the entire eastern site boundary, within the residential area known as 'Bankfields' (which generally border the southern site parcel) and the dwellings along the western side of Maidstone Road (which border the northern site parcel). These dwellings generally back on to the site, and have a variety of different boundary treatments, from no discernible physical boundary to heavily vegetated boundaries, which are visually impermeable. This variation in back garden boundaries has a significant influence on the extent of change anticipated, but this assessment considers the worst case.
- 7.70 Given the proximity of the dwellings to the site and proposed development, the extent of change at the construction stage and Year 1 is likely to be very high, leading to potential **substantial** adverse effects. As noted above, this is likely to be the worst case, with the majority of effects much lower than this. Even with this potential effect, the proposed development layout has sought to offset any impacts through three primary mitigation

measures; firstly, the provision of gardens within new properties along the eastern side of the development, secondly, the provision of enhanced boundary planting to be planted prior to the building of the new houses, and thirdly, the provision of a 10m buffer along the site's northern and eastern boundary.

- 7.71 At Year 15 the visual change is likely as a result to have lessened, with a magnitude of change of high predicted over this timeframe. This leads to a **major** adverse effect, although this change and effect needs to be considered in the context that at this point the development would have become an established part of the neighbourhood.
- 7.72 To the north of the site, residents of the new Bovis development will likely have some views across the site, although the double line of vegetation along Black Mill Lane east of PRoW KH591 restricts many views, particularly in summer months.
- 7.73 **Photoviewpoint EDP 3** shows the view from the public open space within the Bovis development and demonstrates how this mature vegetation visually separates the two areas completely in the current form. Some change may be evident during the construction stage, with cranes and other infrastructure potentially visible above the hedgerows. Noise would also be a perceptible impact. Considering the hedgerows without leaf cover, the change at the construction stage could be high, leading to potentially **major** adverse effects. These effects would reduce at Year 1, with built development (where visible) appearing consistent with the general context of the area. The change predicted at Year 1 would be medium, and the effect **major/moderate** adverse. There would be limited additional reduction at Year 15 and the effect would remain **major/moderate**.
- 7.74 Individual dwellings to the west of the site – including The Croft, Old Mill House, Black Mill Farm and Black Mill Cottage – will all have some visibility of the proposals, through the western site boundary vegetation. These views would be from main living rooms, and garden areas, but will be visually restricted to varying degrees. **Photoviewpoint EDP 5** shows the view from Black Mill Lane, which will be similar to the views at these dwellings and shows how even in the worst case the views would be fragmented.
- 7.75 The highest anticipated change would be from the dwellings closest to the site boundary, so Black Mill Farm, where the development would be visible through the western boundary vegetation and in the context of the existing settlement edge. The change at construction and Year 1 would be high, with the settlement extending much closer to the receptor. This would lead to potential **major** adverse effects. At Year 15 the extensive vegetation proposed within the western public open space would be more mature and would add to the visual screening afforded by the existing boundary vegetation. The magnitude of change would reduce to medium leading to **major/moderate** adverse effects.
- 7.76 Further west again, there may be some more limited visibility from Summerhill Farm, The Billiards House and Summerhill House, but again this would be visually restricted – by both built form and existing vegetation. **Photoviewpoint EDP 7** shows the view from a PRoW in this vicinity and illustrates the limitation in potential views. At the construction stage when change might be anticipated to be the worst, the change would only be low, leading to **moderate** adverse effects. At Year 1 a low impact is also possible without leaf cover, again leading to a **moderate** adverse effect. At Year 15 the change would reduce to very low with

the establishment of the western public open space landscaping, which yields a **moderate/minor** adverse effect.

- 7.77 Some properties along Moat Road to the east of the site will have views of either the built development, or changes along Moat Road, including The Moat, Springfields and Willow Bank. Due to the orientation of views there would be limited change at these receptors, but there would be an increase in traffic that would be perceptible, particularly during the construction stage. Considering the proximity of these receptors, there would be a medium magnitude of change during the construction stage, leading to a worst case **major/moderate** adverse effect. Once constructed the change would reduce to low, and in the long term to very low with the establishment of the landscaping in the eastern parts of the southern public open space. This would lead to **moderate** and **moderate/minor** effects respectively.

#### **Other Receptors**

- 7.78 The only other receptor is Black Mill Lane to the east of Black Mill Farm, which isn't a formal PRow but is frequently used, and equivalent to a formal PRow in terms of sensitivity. Changes would be as assessed for Black Mill Lane (pedestrian receptors) provided above.

## Section 8 Summary and Conclusions

- 8.1 EDP is an independent environmental consultancy and Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute specialising the assessment of developments at all scales across the UK.
- 8.2 This report has summarised the findings of a comprehensive landscape data trawl and field appraisal undertaken by EDP's landscape team (**Sections 2,3,4** and **5**). In **Section 6**, the proposed development is described with any proposed mitigation. **Section 7** undertakes an assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects having regard to the above and based on a combination of the thresholds set out in **Appendix EDP 2** coupled with professional judgement.
- 8.3 In terms of landscape, the character of the site would alter through the introduction of the proposed residential development and associated infrastructure. The development, and therefore the effects upon landscape character, would be permanent and long-term but would only result in the permanent loss of areas of arable agricultural grazing land, and two short lengths of hedgerow to facilitate the northern and southern site accesses. No mature trees would be lost to facilitate these accesses.
- 8.4 The character would also be altered through the proposed planting proposals, resulting in some long-term, permanent, beneficial effects in landscape character terms (which are consistent with the Summary of Aims of the LCA and the aspirations of the Allocation), including the long-term management of a number of TPO trees and hedgerows. The development also provides the opportunity to provide a more effective and attractive transition from urban to rural than exists currently.
- 8.5 Significant new areas of formal and informal public open space is proposed, with this including circular walks through meadow land (with visual and biodiversity interest added by the SuDS features), formal play provision, and areas of scrub and woodland within the western parts of the site. This multifunctional green space would not only be a positive resource for new residents but provide features that are largely unavailable within the wider village. The southern boundary includes a significant area of public open space and a wide buffer to Moat Road, helping landscape integration on this boundary.
- 8.6 It is considered that the site forms a relatively 'normal' part of the Headcorn Pasturelands LCA, being closely associated as it is with the existing settlement edge to the north and east, and the road to the south. The proposals commit to providing enhancement in line with the Summary of Actions set out in the LCA, and also the defined Draft Allocation requirements, and although there would be localised harm, the more effective transition between the settlement and surrounding rural landscape means on balance the landscape-scale impacts are considered to be acceptable.
- 8.7 Notable effects on landscape character would be limited to the site and its immediate environs during the construction phase and at Year 1. By Year 15, the growth and development of the existing and proposed planting (particularly that along the southern and

western boundaries) would reduce landscape character effects within the environs of the site.

8.8 The visual effects of the proposal would be localised and limited and except for minor roads and a small number of PRow which run close to the site, and residential properties which lie directly adjacent to its western, eastern and northern boundaries, views of the site are generally filtered and not especially extensive from public or private locations. The flat undulating topography to the south has the effect of foreshortening views and making vertical features more effective at screening/filtering the proposals than would otherwise be the case, whilst the new housing to the north screens many views from this direction. There is sufficient layering of vegetation within the surrounding landscape to ensure the extensiveness of visual change would be limited to a limited number of local receptors.

8.9 Notable effects on visual amenity would be limited to:

- Private residences adjacent to the northern and eastern site boundaries;
- Private residences along Moat Road and Black Mill Lane; and
- PRow KH590, 591 and 589, which generally run in close proximity to the site to the north and west, or in the case of KH590, through the site.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

8.10 The assessment demonstrates the extent to which sensitive layout and strategic planting proposed in the Illustrative Masterplan would mitigate views, retain and reinforce the characteristic landscape fabric and pattern of the site, and assimilate the proposed development into the settlement and rural landscape of the site context. In addition, this LVIA shows how the proposed development would make a positive contribution to visual, recreational and wildlife amenity.

8.11 Accordingly, this LVIA concludes that the site has the capacity for the development as proposed on the Illustrative Masterplan, and that there is no 'in principle' or policy, landscape or visual reason why the site should not be developed as proposed.

**Appendix EDP 1**  
**Illustrative Masterplan**  
**(Sketch Layout Masterplan – 01 CATE211030 SKMP-01 VL/HP)**



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Rev	Description	Date	Au	Ch
A	Planning Issue	08.11.22	VL/GJ	---/
A1	Revised Layout	22.08.23	VL/HP	
A2	Amendments	29.08.23	VL/HP	

Project	Moat Road, Headcorn		
Drawing	Sketch Layout Master Plan - 01		
Client	CATESBY ESTATES PLC		
Job no.	CATE211030	Date	08.11.22
Dwg no.	SKMP-01	Rev.	A2
Author	VL/HP	Checked	-/-
Status	PLANNING	Scale	1:1000@A0
Client ref.	-	Office	Romsey

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## Appendix EDP 2

### Methodology: Thresholds and Definitions of Terminology used in this Assessment

- A2.1 Landscape and Visual Assessments are separate, though linked procedures. Landscape effects derive from changes in the physical landscape fabric, which may give rise to changes in its character and how this is experienced. Visual effects relate to changes that arise in the composition of available views as a result of changes to the perception of the landscape, to people's responses to the changes and to the overall effects with respect to visual amenity.
- A2.2 A number of factors influence professional judgement when assessing the degree to which a particular landscape or visual receptor can accommodate change arising from a particular development. Sensitivity is made up of judgements about the 'value' attached to the receptor, which is determined at baseline stage, and the 'susceptibility' of the receptor, which is determined at the assessment stage when the nature of the proposals, and therefore the susceptibility of the landscape and visual resource to change, is better understood.
- A2.3 Susceptibility indicates "the ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue negative consequences"<sup>3</sup>. Susceptibility of visual receptors is primarily a function of the expectations and occupation or activity of the receptor.
- A2.4 **Table EDP A2.1** provides an indication of the criteria by which the overall sensitivity of a landscape receptor is judged within this assessment and considers both value and susceptibility independently.

**Table EDP A2.1:** Defining the Sensitivity of the Landscape Baseline.

<b>EDP Assessment Terminology and Definitions</b>	
Landscape Baseline – Overall Sensitivity	
Very High	<p><b>Value:</b> Nationally/internationally designated/valued countryside and landscape features; strong/distinctive landscape characteristics; absence of landscape detractors.</p> <p><b>Susceptibility:</b> Strong/distinctive landscape elements/aesthetic/perceptual aspects; absence of landscape detractors; landscape receptors in excellent condition. Landscapes with clear and widely recognised cultural value. Landscapes with a high level of tranquillity.</p>
High	<p><b>Value:</b> Locally designated/valued countryside (e.g. Areas of High Landscape Value, Regional Scenic Areas) and landscape features; many distinctive landscape characteristics; very few landscape detractors.</p>

<sup>3</sup> Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition Page 158



<b>EDP Assessment Terminology and Definitions</b>	
	<b>Susceptibility:</b> Many distinctive landscape elements/aesthetic/perceptual aspects; very few landscape detractors; landscape receptors in good condition. The landscape has a low capacity for change as a result of potential changes to defining character.
Medium	<b>Value:</b> Undesignated countryside and landscape features; some distinctive landscape characteristics; few landscape detractors.
	<b>Susceptibility:</b> Some distinctive landscape elements/aesthetic/perceptual aspects; few landscape detractors; landscape receptors in fair condition. Landscape is able to accommodate some change as a result.
Low	<b>Value:</b> Undesignated countryside and landscape features; few distinctive landscape characteristics; presence of landscape detractors.
	<b>Susceptibility:</b> Few distinctive landscape elements/aesthetic/perceptual aspects; presence of landscape detractors; landscape receptors in poor condition. Landscape is able to accommodate large amounts of change without changing these characteristics fundamentally.
Very Low	<b>Value:</b> Undesignated countryside and landscape features; absence of distinctive landscape characteristics; despoiled/degraded by the presence of many landscape detractors.
	<b>Susceptibility:</b> Absence of distinctive landscape elements/aesthetic/perceptual aspects; presence of many landscape detractors; landscape receptors in very poor condition. As such landscape is able to accommodate considerable change.

A2.5 For visual receptors, judgements of susceptibility and value are closely interlinked considerations. For example, the most valued views are those which people go and visit because of the available view – and it is at those viewpoints that their expectations will be highest and thus most susceptible to change.

A2.6 **Table EDP A2.2** provides an indication of the criteria by which the overall sensitivity of a visual receptor is judged within this assessment and considers both value and susceptibility together.

**Table EDP A2.2:** Defining the Sensitivity of the Visual Baseline.

<b>Visual Baseline – Overall Sensitivity</b>	
<b>Very High</b>	<b>Value/Susceptibility:</b> View is designed/has intentional association with surroundings; recorded in published material; from a publicly accessible heritage asset/designated/promoted viewpoint; nationally/internationally designated right of way; protected/recognised in planning policy designation.
	<b>Examples:</b> May include views from residential properties; National Trails; promoted holiday road routes; designated countryside/landscape features with public access; visitors to heritage assets of national importance; open Access Land.
<b>High</b>	<b>Value/Susceptibility:</b> View of clear value but may not be formally recognised e.g. framed view of scenic value or destination/summit views; inferred that it may have value for local residents; locally promoted route or PRoW.

<b>Visual Baseline – Overall Sensitivity</b>	
	<b>Examples:</b> May include from recreational locations where there is some appreciation of the visual context/landscape e.g. golf, fishing; themed rights of way with a local association; National Trust land; panoramic viewpoints marked on OS maps; road routes promoted in tourist guides and/or for their scenic value.
<b>Medium</b>	<b>Value/Susceptibility:</b> View is not widely promoted or recorded in published sources; may be typical of those experienced by an identified receptor; minor road routes through rural/scenic areas.
	<b>Examples:</b> May include people engaged in outdoor sport not especially influenced by an appreciation of the wider landscape e.g. pitch sports; views from minor road routes passing through rural or scenic areas.
<b>Low</b>	<b>Value/Susceptibility:</b> View of clearly lesser value than similar views from nearby visual receptors that may be more accessible.
	<b>Examples:</b> May include major road routes; rail routes; receptor is at a place of work but visual surroundings have limited relevance.
<b>Very Low</b>	<b>Value/Susceptibility:</b> View may be affected by many landscape detractors and unlikely to be valued.
	<b>Examples:</b> May include people at their place of work, indoor recreational or leisure facilities or other locations where views of the wider landscape have little or no importance.

## MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE

A2.7 The magnitude of any landscape or visual change is determined through a range of considerations particular to each receptor. The three attributes considered in defining the magnitude are:

- Scale of Change;
- Geographical Extent; and
- Duration and Reversibility/Proportion.

A2.8 **Table EDP A2.3** provides an indication of the criteria by which the geographical extent of the area will be affected within this assessment.

**Table EDP A2.3:** Geographical Extent Criteria.

<b>Landscape Receptors</b>	<b>Visual Receptor Criteria</b>
Large scale effects influencing several landscape types or character areas.	Direct views at close range with changes over a wide horizontal and vertical extent.
Effects at the scale of the landscape type or character areas within which the proposal lies.	Direct or oblique views at close range with changes over a notable horizontal and/or vertical extent.

Landscape Receptors	Visual Receptor Criteria
Effects within the immediate landscape setting of the site.	Direct or oblique views at medium range with a moderate horizontal and/or vertical extent of the view affected.
Effects at the site level (within the development site itself).	Oblique views at medium or long range with a small horizontal/vertical extent of the view affected.
Effects only experienced on parts of the site at a very localised level.	Long range views with a negligible part of the view affected.

A2.9 The third, and final, factor, in determining the predicted magnitude of change is duration and reversibility. Duration and reversibility are separate but linked considerations. Duration is judged according to the defined terms set out below, whereas reversibility is a judgement about the prospects and practicality of the particular effect being reversed in, for example, a generation. The categories used in this assessment are set out in **Table EDP A2.4**.

**Table EDP A2.4:** Factors Influencing Judgements on Magnitude of Change.

Duration	Reversibility
Long Term (20+ years)	Permanent with unlikely restoration to original state e.g. major road corridor, power station, urban extension, hydrocarbons.
Medium to long term (10 to 20 years)	Permanent with possible conversion to original state e.g. agricultural buildings, retail units.
Medium term (5 to 10 years)	Partially reversible to a different state e.g. mineral workings.
Short term (1 to 5 years)	Reversible after decommissioning to a similar original state e.g. renewable energy development.
Temporary (less than 12 months)	Quickly reversible e.g. temporary structures.

**Table EDP A2.5:** Defining the Magnitude of Change to the Landscape and Visual Baseline.

Magnitude of Change	
(Considers Scale of Proposal/Geographical Extent/Duration and Reversibility/Proportion)	
<b>Very High</b>	<b>Landscape:</b> Total loss/major alteration to key receptors/characteristics of the baseline; addition of elements that strongly conflict or fails to integrate with the baseline.
	<b>Visual:</b> Substantial change to the baseline, forming a new, defining focus and having a defining influence on the view.
<b>High</b>	<b>Landscape:</b> Notable loss/alteration/addition to one or more key receptors/-characteristics of the baseline; or addition of prominent conflicting elements.
	<b>Visual:</b> Additions are clearly noticeable and part of the view would be fundamentally altered.
<b>Medium</b>	<b>Landscape:</b> Partial loss/alteration to one or more key receptors/characteristics; addition of elements that are evident but do not necessarily conflict with the key characteristics of the existing landscape.

Magnitude of Change	
	<b>Visual:</b> The proposed development will form a new and recognisable element within the view which is likely to be recognised by the receptor.
<b>Low</b>	<b>Landscape:</b> Minor loss or alteration to one or more key landscape receptors/- characteristics; additional elements may not be uncharacteristic within existing landscape.
	<b>Visual:</b> Proposed development will form a minor constituent of the view being partially visible or at sufficient distance to be a small component.
<b>Very Low</b>	<b>Landscape:</b> Barely discernible loss or alteration to key components; addition of elements not uncharacteristic within the existing landscape.
	Proposed development will form a barely noticeable component of the view, and the view whilst slightly altered would be similar to the baseline.
<b>Imperceptible</b>	<i>In some circumstances, changes at representative viewpoints or receptors will be lower than 'Very Low' and changes will be described as 'Imperceptible'. This will lead to negligible effects.</i>

## PREDICTED EFFECTS

A2.10 In order to consider the likely level of any effect, the sensitivity of each receptor is combined with the predicted magnitude of change to determine the level of effect, with reference also made to the geographical extent, duration and reversibility of the effect within the assessment. Having taken such a wide range of factors into account when assessing sensitivity and magnitude at each receptor, the level of effect can be derived by combining the sensitivity and magnitude in accordance with the matrix in **Table EDP A2.6**.

**Table EDP A2.6:** Determining the Predicted Levels of Effects to the Landscape and Visual Baseline.

Overall Sensitivity	Overall Magnitude of Change				
	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
<b>Very High</b>	Substantial	Major	Major/- Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/- Minor
<b>High</b>	Major	Major/- Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/- Minor	Minor
<b>Medium</b>	Major/- Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/- Minor	Minor	Minor/- Negligible
<b>Low</b>	Moderate	Moderate/- Minor	Minor	Minor/- Negligible	Negligible
<b>Very Low</b>	Moderate/- Minor	Minor	Minor/- Negligible	Negligible	Negligible/- None

**Table EDP A2.7:** Definition of Effects

Definition of Effects	
<b>Substantial</b>	Effects that are in complete variance to the baseline landscape resource or visual amenity.

<b>Definition of Effects</b>	
<b>Major or Major/Moderate</b>	Effects that result in noticeable alterations to much ( <i>Major effect</i> ) or some ( <i>Moderate/Major effect</i> ) of the key characteristics of the landscape resource or aspects of visual amenity.
<b>Moderate</b>	Effects that result in noticeable alterations to a few of the key characteristics of the baseline landscape resource or aspects of visual amenity.
<b>Minor or Minor/Negligible</b>	Effects that result in slight alterations to some ( <i>Minor effect</i> ) or a few ( <i>Minor/Negligible</i> ) of the key characteristics of the landscape resource or aspects of visual amenity.
<b>Negligible or Negligible/None</b>	Effects that result in barely perceptible alterations to a few ( <i>Negligible effect</i> ) or some ( <i>Negligible/None effect</i> ) of the key characteristics of the landscape resource or aspects of visual amenity.
<b>None</b>	No detectable alteration to the key characteristics of the landscape resource or aspects of visual amenity.

A2.11 Effects can be adverse (negative), beneficial (positive) or neutral. The landscape effects will be considered against the landscape baseline, which includes published landscape strategies or policies if they exist. Changes involving the addition of large-scale man-made objects are typically considered to be adverse, unless otherwise stated, as they are not usually actively promoted as part of published landscape strategies.

A2.12 Visual effects are more subjective as peoples' perception of development varies through the spectrum of negative, neutral and positive attitudes. In the assessment of visual effects the assessor will exercise objective professional judgement in assessing the level of effects and, unless otherwise stated, will assume that all effects are adverse, thus representing the worst-case scenario. Effects can be moderated by maturation of landscape strategies.

A2.13 The timescale of each effect is also important and effects are generally assessed at time stamps in the whole development life cycle: temporary (at a mid-point in construction), short-term (completion at year 1), medium-term (typically 15 years), medium- to long-term (15+ years). In some cases, the operational phase of a scheme could be considered 'temporary'.

## **Appendix EDP 3**

### **Representative Photoviewpoints**

**(edp5739\_d008a 15 November 2022 GYo/CMY)**

**Photoviewpoint EDP 1:** PRoW KH590 on Site's Southern Boundary

**Photoviewpoint EDP 2:** Moat Road at Site's South-Eastern Corner

**Photoviewpoint EDP 3:** New Bovis Development North of the Site

**Photoviewpoint EDP 4:** Bankfields East of the Site

**Photoviewpoint EDP 5:** Black Mill Lane West of the Site (1)

**Photoviewpoint EDP 6:** Black Mill Lane West of the Site (2)

**Photoviewpoint EDP 7:** PRoW KH618 West of the Site

**Photoviewpoint EDP 8:** New House Lane

**Photoviewpoint EDP 9:** PRoW KH589 North of the Site

**Photoviewpoint EDP 10:** PRoW KH585/583 Junction North-East of the Site

**Photoviewpoint EDP 11:** PRoW KH596 South of New House Lane

**Photoviewpoint EDP 12:** PRoW KH622 South of the Site

**Photoviewpoint EDP 13:** PRoW KH580 near Hearnden Green

**Photoviewpoint EDP 14:** PRoW KH575 near Little Hawkenbury

**Photoviewpoint EDP 15:** Stickfast Lane near Little Ulcombe



To be viewed at comfortable arm's length



To be viewed at comfortable arm's length