

**Proposed Equestrian Development at  
Swalcliffe Grange,  
Swalcliffe, Oxfordshire**

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**Landscape and Visual Appraisal for  
Swalcliffe Park Equestrian**

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a landscape and visual appraisal (LVA) of proposed equestrian development of land at Swalcliffe Grange Farm, Swalcliffe, Oxfordshire. The site is shown on **Plan No 1**.
- 1.2 Iain Reid Landscape Planning Ltd was commissioned by De Pol Associates, on behalf of Swalcliffe Park Equestrian to carry out this landscape and visual appraisal. Prior to the field work, carried out in November 2012 and May 2013, a desk review of existing planning policy and landscape character guidance relevant to the assessment site and surrounding area was undertaken. This report does not consider the full range of planning policy considerations, which are dealt with by others.
- 1.3 This assessment has been carried out in the light of the guidance set out in the "*Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition)*" (GLVIA) published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2013, and "*Landscape Character Assessment. Guidance for England and Scotland*" (LCA) published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish National Heritage 2002. Neither of these documents set out a prescriptive approach to how assessments should be done, but both identify principles and good practice. The methodology used for this assessment is set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 1.4 This report is structured as follows:
  - a. Section 2 provides a baseline description of the assessment site, the surrounding area and describes the proposed development.
  - b. Section 3 summarises the relevant parts of planning policy in respect of landscape and visual considerations.
  - c. Section 4 summarises published documents on local landscape character, and adds supplemental points based on a site visit to the area surrounding the development site to provide baseline description of landscape character.
  - d. Section 5 sets out a landscape and visual appraisal (LVA) of the site, based on a photographic survey undertaken in May 2013.
  - e. Section 6 sets out the landscape strategy for the proposed development.
  - f. Section 7 sets out an overall conclusion.

## 2.0 The Assessment Site and Development Proposal

### The Assessment Site and surrounding area: Baseline

- 2.1 The assessment site is located at NGR SP 372372 (centre of site), approximately 8km west south west of Banbury, 1.6km east of the village of Sibford Ferris and 0.9km south of the village of Swalcliffe, immediately to the north west of Swalcliffe Grange Farm, located at the junction of Grange Lane and Park Lane. It extends to ca 5.65ha and is currently sown for grass. The eastern side of the assessment site, bounded by an internal post and wire fence, is also laid to grass and used for equestrian purposes, with a number of fixed and moveable jumps.
- 2.2 The assessment site has a frontage to Grange Lane of ca 170 m and to Park Lane of ca 220m, with boundaries to both Grange Lane (to the south) and Park Lane (to the east). Grange Lane is in part sunken below adjacent field levels along the southern assessment site boundary; the field boundary on the north side of this section of Grange Lane is a timber post and rail/ wire mesh fence ca 1.2m high. To Park lane, the assessment site boundary comprises an established machine cut agricultural hedgerows (ca 1.5/1.8m high), although the southern part of the frontage to Park Lane (ca 55m in length), closest to Swalcliffe Grange is formed by a timber post and rail/ wire mesh fence ca 1.2m high, with two mature oak trees within the assessment site. Swalcliffe Grange and its associated farm buildings lie primarily to the south of Grange Lane, but also in part to the north. Immediately adjacent to the north of these existing buildings (used for equestrian purposes) is an area of stoned hard standing, used for the parking and loading/ unloading of horse boxes, accessed principally off Park Lane. The boundaries of this area to the assessment site are formed by a timber post and rail/ wire mesh fence ca 1.2m high with an access gateway into the site. The western site boundary is formed by a machine cut agricultural hedgerow (ca 2m high); the northern boundary is a post and wire fence ca 1.2m high. There is a single Oak tree within the assessment site close to the western boundary in the southern part of the site.
- 2.3 In terms of elevation, the nearby settlements of Burdrop, Sibford Gower, Sibford Ferris and Upper Todmarton are all situated on areas of higher ground within the gently undulating/ rolling limestone plateau that lies to the south west of Banbury. Swalcliffe village, traversed by the B4035, is sited at a lower elevation, and lies (generally) on a south facing slope, although development along Park Lane, south of the village lies along the floor of a valley that extends southwards essentially along the line of Park Lane into the assessment site. The head of this valley is evident within the assessment site. Swalcliffe Grange lies at the head of this valley, on the shoulder of a ridgeline that runs south to north then running north west towards a highpoint of 209m AOD at Sibford Elm (ca 700m to the north west). East of Park Lane, a separate ridgeline runs from north west to south east, from a high point of 191m AOD south of Park Wood (see below), with a further valley running from north to south towards the catchment of the River Stour. Swalcliffe Grange lies on a low saddle of land on the crest between these two shallow valleys; in the wider landscape are a further series of shallow valleys (although some are more deeply incised) and ridgelines, which contribute to an open and expansive elevated character. **Plan No 2** shows local topography in relation to the assessment site. In terms of level, the assessment site ranges in elevation from 181m/ 182m AOD along its eastern boundary to Park Lane, from 188m (in the west) to 182m AOD along its southern boundary to Grange Lane, and from 188m to 190m AOD along its

western boundary. There is greater change in level along the northern boundary, from 190m AOD in the north west corner of the assessment site, dropping to ca 176m AOD in the valley adjacent to the copse, before rising to ca 182m AOD on Park Lane. There are limited areas of woodland within the locality; Park Wood lies on the east side of Park Lane adjacent to the assessment site, with further small woodlands sited along the southern edges of Swalcliffe village. On the northern edge of the assessment site is a small copse containing a spring and small pond, which feed other water bodies further down the valley slope. A number of small copses are sited within individual fields, on field boundaries, or adjacent to individual farms. A number of hedgerows contain individual and groups of hedgerow trees, which are a feature of visual significance in the local landscape.

- 2.4 To the south of the assessment site, beyond Grange Lane, land is laid to grass and has been subdivided into a number of paddocks with post and wire fencing; south and west of the assessment site, Grange Lane is defined (on its north side) by a recently planted double hedgerow (currently only ca 1m in height) with a relatively new, but more substantial hedgerow (ca 1.6m high) along its south side. Apart from Swalcliffe Grange, there are only a limited number of residential properties in close proximity to the assessment site. To the west of the assessment site are 3 residential properties. The Old Grange is located ca 300m from the edge of the assessment site, some 120m south of Grange Lane, but is orientated to the south and is screened from the assessment site by intervening topography and vegetation. Swalcliffe House is located ca 330 from the edge of the assessment site, immediately south of Grange Lane and is screened from the assessment site by intervening topography and vegetation, including a 3m high hedgerow and a stand of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. The Folly is located ca 620m from the edge of the assessment site, south of Grange Lane, and, like the other two properties is screened from the assessment site by intervening topography and vegetation. The only other residential properties in relatively close proximity to the assessment site are Wykham and Grange Cottages, on Park Lane the southern edge of Swalcliffe village, approximately 270m north of the edge of the assessment site.
- 2.5 There are no listed buildings on the assessment site or in proximity to it; Swalcliffe Conservation Area covers the major part of Swalcliffe village and lies, at its closest point some 400m from the edge of the assessment site. There are a number of listed buildings and a scheduled ancient monument (Swalcliffe Barn) within the Conservation Area but none of these can be seen from the assessment site or vice versa (save for a long distance view to the St Peter and St Paul church tower). Land to the north of the assessment site, extending north towards Swalcliffe village, is laid to grass and used, in part for equestrian purposes, as is land to the west, extending towards Sibford Elm. East of Park Lane, land is used for arable, both north and south of Grange Lane. Grange Lane east of Park Lane/ Swalcliffe Grange, and rising up towards Tadmarton Heath, is not defined by hedgerow boundaries (unlike the section to the west).
- 2.6 No public rights of way (PRoW) cross or adjoin the assessment site. PRoW 374/8 runs east from Park Lane through Park Wood before turning south to connect with Grange Lane some 400m west of Swalcliffe Grange. This PRoW extends south of Grange Lane towards Lodge Farm (where it becomes PRoW 255/31. PRoW 374/9 runs south of Swalcliffe Grange towards Swalcliffe Common (located some 800m to the south), whilst PRoW 374/11 runs east to west from the south of the Grange towards the Old Grange, through the horse

paddocks referred to above, and connects with PRow 347/8 and 347/9 which run further to the west and south respectively.

## **The Development Proposal**

- 2.7 It is proposed to construct two equestrian areas within the assessment site; a main arena for events (80m x 65m) and a warm up arena (25m x 65m). Both arenas (and surrounding grass margins of 5m width to all sides) will be enclosed by timber post and rail fencing 1.5m high, and surfaced with a proprietary all weather sand based surface. To form the level platforms for the arenas, cut and fill of existing topography on site will be required; areas of new cut or fill slope will be laid to grass. The main arena will have a finished level of ca 180m AOD; the warm up arena will have a finished level of ca 183m AOD. Both arenas will incorporate low timber kickboards of ca 400mm in height, with the sand based surface ca 250mm above the surrounding grass margin. In association with the formation of the two arenas, it is proposed to construct a new internal access road ca 4m wide across the southern part of the assessment site (from the existing parking area north of Swalcliffe Grange) with a new gated exit onto Grange Lane formed ca 140m west of Swalcliffe Grange. Land adjacent (north and south) of this access road would be used for parking of vehicle and trailers/ horse boxes during events, and would be surfaced with stone planings. Within the assessment site, informal paths typically 3.5/4m in width between the parking areas and the warm up and main arenas would be surfaced in sand/ wood chippings.

### 3.0 Planning Policy Context

#### 3.1 The Development Plan

- 3.1.1 The Development Plan currently comprises the 'saved' policies of the adopted (1996) Cherwell Local Plan (CLP). The South East Regional Plan, which previously formed part of the Development Plan was partly revoked in March 2013. The surviving provisions of that Plan have no bearing on the assessment site or development proposal.

##### **Cherwell Local Plan**

- 3.1.2 As noted above, the CLP was adopted in 1996. Although it is 'time expired' in relation to the allocation of land for development needs (the CLP had an end date of 2001), a number of the plan policies have been 'saved', and until the new Cherwell Local Plan is adopted (see 3.3 below) the CLP remains the Development Plan. Policy *AG5 Development Involving Horses* sets out a presumption in favour of such development provided that there would be no adverse effect on the character and appearance of the countryside, or any detriment to the amenity of neighbouring properties and that, in other respects, there is no conflict with other plan policies. One of those other plan policies is Policy *C7 Landscape Conservation* which indicates that development will not normally be permitted if it would cause demonstrable harm to the topography and character of the landscape. Policy C9 is also potentially relevant in that it indicates that in the rural areas beyond the main towns of Banbury and Bicester development of a type, size or scale that is incompatible with a rural location will normally be resisted.
- 3.1.3 Policy *C13 Areas of High Landscape Value* identifies (inter alia) the Ironstone Downs (including the assessment site) as an Area of High Landscape Value where the priority is to conserve and enhance the environment. Policy *C14 Trees and Landscaping* lays emphasis on ensuring that in development projects existing trees, woodland and hedgerows should be retained, the ecological value of the site should not be reduced; and new tree and hedgerow planting using species native to the area should be provided. Policy C28 is a general policy dealing with design quality in rural areas and requires that the standards of layout, design and external appearance, including the choice of external-finish materials, should be sympathetic to the character of the context of the development, with particular emphasis in relation to (inter alia) the Areas of High Landscape Value.

#### 3.2 The Emerging Development Plan

- 3.2.1 In December 2004 Cherwell District Council (CDC) resolved to discontinue work on the then emerging draft Cherwell Local Plan 2011, and to commence the preparation of a Local Development Framework (see 3.2.4 below). The Council also resolved at that time to approve the draft Cherwell Local Plan 2011 as interim policy - the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011. Relevant policies of this plan are considered here although this plan does not form part of either the extant Development Plan or indeed the now emerging Development Plan and thus its provisions carry negligible weight. .

### **Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011**

- 3.2.2 Policy EMP 7 Farm Diversification sets out a presumption in favour of farm diversification proposals, provided that they
- (i) are of a type, size or scale appropriate to their rural location;
  - (ii) will not cause harm to the character and appearance of the countryside in terms of its landscape, ecological, historic or amenity value;
  - (iii) will not involve the permanent loss of best and most versatile land;
  - (iv) will not lead to a conflict between established agricultural interests and other land uses;
  - (v) re-use existing rural buildings where available (provided such use complies with the conversion policies in the plan) in preference to the erection of new buildings; and
  - (vi) will not give rise to excessive or inappropriate traffic and will wherever possible contribute to the general aim of reducing the need to travel by private car.

Policy EMP 11 *Development involving Horses* is essentially the same as Policy AG5 in the adopted CLP and sets out a presumption in favour horse related development provided that:

- (i) the proposal would not have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the countryside; and
- (ii) the proposal would not be detrimental to the amenity of neighbouring properties.

- 3.2.3 Policy EN 22 *Biodiversity* requires development proposals to incorporate features of nature conservation value within the site, and existing features of value should be retained and enhanced wherever possible. Policy EN 34 *Landscape Character* is essentially the same as Policy C7 in the adopted CLP, and indicates that development will not be permitted if it would:

- (i) cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside;
- (ii) cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography;
- (iii) be inconsistent with local character;
- (iv) harm the setting of settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features;
- (v) harm the historic value of the landscape.

Similarly, Policy EN35 reflects elements of adopted CLP Policy C14, and indicates that important woodlands, trees, hedges, ponds, walls and any other features should be retained, although it is acknowledged that the loss of such features could be offset by appropriate mitigation and/or compensatory measures. Absent from the non statutory plan is any reference to the Area of High Landscape Value, as the designation was not maintained from the CLP.

### **Cherwell Local Plan**

- 3.2.4 The Pre-submission Cherwell Local Plan – previously the Core Strategy - was the subject of public consultation in Autumn 2012. Following the receipt and consideration of comments, the Local Plan has been amended and was subject to a period of further public consultation between March and May 2013. The relevant polices and other matters noted below are taken from the 2013 Pre-submission Local Plan. Following submission, the Local Plan will be subject to independent examination. Given that the Plan has not been subject to that examination, only negligible weight can be attached to its policies and provisions at the present time.



- 3.2.5 The plan sets out an overall Strategy for Development in Cherwell by reference to a number of Strategic Objectives; relevant to the development proposal are the following:
- SO 12. To focus development in Cherwell's sustainable locations, making efficient and effective use of land, conserving and enhancing the countryside and landscape and the setting of its towns and villages.
- SO 15. To protect and enhance the historic and natural environment and Cherwell's core assets, including protecting and enhancing cultural heritage assets and archaeology, maximising opportunities for improving biodiversity and minimising pollution in urban and rural areas.
- Policy SLE 1: *Employment Development* supports employment development in rural areas subject to certain criteria, including (in relation to landscape and visual effects) that:
- 'They will be well designed to a very high quality, using sustainable construction, and be of an appropriate scale and character to the village and its location; and*
- The proposal and any associated employment activities can be carried out without undue detriment to residential amenity, the highway network, village character and its setting, the appearance and character of the landscape and the environment generally including on any designated buildings or features (or on any non-designated buildings or features of local importance).'*
- 3.2.6 Policy ESD 10 deals with the *Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment* and seeks, inter alia, that in considering development proposals a net gain in biodiversity will be sought by protecting, managing, enhancing and extending existing resources, and by creating new resources. That includes the intent to protect (existing) trees and incorporate features to encourage biodiversity, and to retain and where possible enhance existing features of nature conservation value within the site; existing ecological networks should be identified and maintained to avoid habitat fragmentation.
- 3.2.7 Policy ESD 13 deals with *Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement*. The supporting text to the policy notes, inter alia, the contended value of the Ironstone Ridges and Valleys. The Policy provides that:
- 'Opportunities will be sought to secure the enhancement of the character and appearance of the landscape, particularly in urban fringe locations, through the restoration, management or enhancement of existing landscapes, features or habitats and where appropriate the creation of new ones, including the planting of woodlands, trees and hedgerows. Development will be expected to respect and enhance local landscape character, securing appropriate mitigation where damage to local landscape character cannot be avoided. Proposals will not be permitted if they would:*
- *Cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside*
  - *Cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography*
  - *Be inconsistent with local character*
  - *Impact on areas judged to have a high level of tranquillity*
  - *Harm the setting of settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features, or*
  - *Harm the historic value of the landscape.'*
- The policy also indicates that development proposals should have regard to the information and advice contained in the Council's Countryside Design Summary Supplementary Planning Guidance, and the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) (see below).

### 3.3 Supplementary Planning Guidance

3.3.1 As noted above, CDC has produced Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) in the form of the *Countryside Design Summary* (dated 1998). The SPG sets out an overall context and provides more detailed advice in respect of separate character areas within the district. The assessment sites lies within the Ironstone Downs character area. The essential facets of the character area are summarised at para 2.1: factors noted include the gently undulating landscape, dissected by the steep sided valleys; the predominance of mixed farming, with larger scale arable farmland on gentler slopes, the strong patterns of hedgerows; and the relative absence of woodland. A series of implications for new development are set out at para 2.2, as follow:

- (i) *New roads or access ways should cause minimal disturbance to valley floors, e.g., by careful alignment, the formation of cuttings, planting of hedgerows and other treatment sympathetic to the landscape.*
- (ii) *Trees and hedges should be retained to conserve the small-scale character of much of the landscape. Where new planting is required to help integrate new development into the landscape, this should reflect local landscape structure and character.*
- (iii) *All forms of development need to be sited with care in order to avoid locations where development would be either, prominent, visually intrusive, out of character or would harm a feature or site, which is important to the character of the area.'*

Other guidance in the SPG is specific to built development within villages and is thus not applicable to the current development proposal.

### 3.4 National Planning Policy Guidance

3.4.1 The provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) (March 2012) are material considerations. Para 17 of The Framework sets out a number of Core Planning Principles. Those relevant to the development proposal include the requirements to always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings, and the need to take account of the different roles and character of different areas, recognizing (inter alia) the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it. Para 28 sets out the approach to be adopted to secure a prosperous rural economy. The Framework considers that that can be secured by the following measures:

- *'support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings;*
- *promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- *support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres; and*
- *promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.'*

- 3.4.2 In relation to matters of design para 58 of the Framework notes that planning policies and decisions should ensure (inter alia) that developments respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation. Para 109 et seq of The Framework deals with *Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment*, and notes that the planning system should seek (amongst other matters) to protect and enhance valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils; recognise the wider benefits of ecosystem services; and minimise impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.
- 3.4.3 Para 215 of the Framework deals with the weight to be attached to extant development plans; in the light of that paragraph, the adopted CLP can carry only due weight in the determination of planning applications.

## 4.0 Landscape Character

- 4.1 The assessment of landscape character is a method of understanding of the particular attributes or factors that have influenced the historic development, and current and future features of an area, and what makes that area distinctive from other areas. Natural England describes landscape character assessment as a *'...systematic way of analysing and describing landscape identifying areas of distinctive character, classifying and mapping them. The process involves identifying the patterns, elements and features that give landscapes homogeneity and make them different from each other.'* Landscape characterisation is a process which has been developed extensively by local authorities to assist them in the planning process. Published studies of landscape character provide a source of information to enable the fuller understanding of landscape character – whether at a regional or national scale or at a local district scale: it is of course possible to carry through the process of analysis to individual sites or parts of sites. Typically, the published assessments provide character descriptions of specific areas and consider factors likely to influence future character and/ or set out prescriptions for change.
- 4.2 There is a range of published assessments at national county and district levels relevant to the assessment site. Each is considered below. All of the assessments have been prepared, with the exception of the district level of assessment, in the light of the guidance set out in the *'Landscape Character Assessment; Guidance for England and Scotland (2002)'* – widely regarded as the definitive guidance on the subject. That said, it is important to recognise that these are purely assessments of landscape character; they are not, and are not intended to be, the development plan, and thus what the documents may say about the potential effects of development in any location cannot of itself be considered determinative as a matter of policy.

### National Character Assessment

- 4.3 At a national level the subject site lies within the Cotswolds Area (National Character Area (NCA) 107) in the *Natural England National Character Assessment*. The area extends from Banbury in the north to the south of Bath in the south, defined primarily by the escarpment (and dip slope) that forms part of the Jurassic Limestone that runs from Dorset to Lincolnshire. The assessment site lies close to the north eastern edge of the Area; Banbury lies within the adjoin Northamptonshire Uplands NCA. The initial appraisal of the NCA was carried out in 1990's and an updated and revised Area Profile was published in March 2013.
- 4.4 Much of the assessment focuses on those geographic parts of the NCA that would be considered particularly 'Cotswold' and thus there are relatively few aspects of the assessment that apply directly to the assessment site and its environs. The assessment notes that *'...the dominant pattern of the Cotswold landscape is of a steep scarp crowned by a high, open wold; the beginning of a long and rolling dip slope cut by a series of increasingly wooded valleys.'* The assessment site lies within that area of long and rolling dip slope, where *'Farming is mixed, with much of the high wold dominated by arable on thin, brashy soils prone to erosion. Pasture is predominant in the valleys, and in particular on steeper slopes and on more clayey soils. Meadows and tree lined watercourses are found along the valley bottoms.'*

The eastern part of the NCA (including the assessment site) is described as '*merging gently*' with the neighbouring NCAs.

4.5 The profile sets out a number of key characteristics for the NCA. Those relevant to the assessment site and the surrounding area include the following:

- Open and expansive scarp and high wold dipping gently to the southeast, dissected by river valleys.
- Arable farming dominates the high wold and dip slope while permanent pasture prevails on the steep slopes of the scarp and river valleys with pockets of internationally important limestone grassland.
- Ancient beech hangers line stretches of the upper slopes of the scarp, while oak/ash woodlands are characteristic of the river valleys. Regular blocks of coniferous and mixed plantations are scattered across the open high wold and dip slope.

The main profile is accompanied by a set of Supporting Documents. That relating to *Landscape Change* notes, in relation to '*Settlement and Development*' that:

*'There are pressures for the development of recreational features in the area, and especially on the scarp face, such as golf courses, riding stables and camping sites'*

and within the section describing '*Other Key Drivers*' comments that:

*'There is likely to be a continuing trend in conversion of medium-sized farm units into smaller horse paddocks and associated facilities with a resultant impact on wildlife and landscape, particularly around towns and villages or of them being amalgamated into larger farmed units.'*

4.6 The profile also sets out four Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO), relating to agriculture, the historic environment and geodiversity, landscape character, and the water environment. Those of relevance to the assessment site can be summarised as follows:

- Protecting the contrasts in character between scarp, high wold and dip slope.
- Maintaining and reinstating hedgerow management, including laying and coppicing existing hedgerows, and new hedgerow tree planting where appropriate on the dip slope and scarp, to retain these important landscape features for the future and safeguard their role in supporting the biodiversity of the area (Both SEO1)
- Maintaining and reinstating management of small woodlands, windbreaks and copses to retain these 19th-century features as an important part of the landscape, seeking opportunities to complement this pattern with new planting, where appropriate (SEO 2)
- Promoting sustainable farming practices to create a farmed landscape which is more permeable and able to provide for the movement and support of species.
- Targeted planting of woodland buffers to existing woodland or new woodland copses, and regenerating and restoring existing woodland.
- Seeking opportunities to link woodland with other habitats such as parkland to create functional networks.
- Seeking and realising opportunities to reinstate hedgerows, and hedgerow trees, where they have been lost, especially for the benefit of species ..... and to enhance landscape character.
- Management and restoration of ancient semi-natural beech woodland and small mixed oak woodlands on the scarp and valley slopes and dip slope, exploring coppicing and pollarding as means of increasing

management and resilience to changes in climate; expanding and relinking woodland in selected locations, particularly on scarp and dip slope.

- Maintaining the intricate rural road network characterised by seminatural grassland verges and ensuring that verges are sympathetically managed for their biodiversity value. (All SEO 3)
- Maintaining and restoring hedgerow boundaries characteristic of the valleys and scarp and associated field patterns.
- Creating woodland in appropriate locations to help reduce the impact of flooding and for the benefit of water quality. (Both SE04)

Additional Opportunities are also identified including:

- Planting new woodland, using native broadleaved species, between and within new developments to filter views and preserve the tranquillity of the area.

### County Landscape Character Assessment

4.7 The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS), was jointly funded by Oxfordshire County Council, (then) English Nature, the (then) Countryside Agency and the Northmoor Trust as a three year National Demonstration Project, completed in 2004. The aim of the project was to explore the relationship between landscape character and biodiversity and to produce a strategic framework for decision making by a wide range of stakeholders including local authorities and other statutory organisations. Within the framework of the national landscape character areas, OWLS identifies a number of subsidiary landscape character types and provides detailed descriptions for each type including forces for change and the preparation of specific landscape strategies and guidelines. The assessment site falls within the Rolling Village Pastures Landscape Type; land to the south and west is in the Wooded Pastures and Valleys Landscape Type, and land to the south east is in the Farmland Plateau Landscape Type. **Plan No 3** shows the boundaries of the Landscape Character Types in relation to the assessment site. The text below focuses primarily on the landscape, as opposed to the biodiversity findings of OWLS.

4.8 The Rolling Village Pastures Landscape Type covers the rolling pastoral landscapes in the north of the county around Swalcliffe, Hook Norton and South Newington, and is described as being '*... characterised by a distinctive landform of small rounded hills and narrow valleys. Unspoilt ironstone villages, with a strong vernacular character, form part of the tranquil countryside.*' The Key Characteristics of the type are listed as:

- A strongly undulating landform of rounded hills and small valleys.
- Small to medium-sized fields with mixed land uses, but predominantly pasture.
- Densely scattered hedgerow trees.
- Well-defined nucleated villages with little dispersal into the wider countryside.

The landform of the type is described as being '*...shaped into steeply-sided, convoluted valleys with narrow valley bottoms surrounded by rolling, rounded hills.*' The hill tops and gentler slopes are mainly in arable cultivation; semi-improved and rough grassland interspersed by scrubby vegetation and gorse dominate the steeper hillsides. Pony grazing is also evident throughout the area. Small copses and mixed plantations of oak, ash, larch and Scots Pine are characteristic features on the hilltops and slopes. Crack willows, along with

linear stretches of secondary woodland and scrub, border the streams and valley bottoms. Wet pasture lies adjacent to some watercourses. Fields are generally medium-sized and regular in shape, but they are smaller and more irregular when associated with grazing land. Hedges are generally tall and dominated by hawthorn and blackthorn with occasional elm. Those surrounding arable land are more intensively maintained. Although there are no large woodlands, the dense mature hedgerow trees of oak and ash, particularly those bordering roads, create filtered views and give the impression of a well-wooded landscape

4.9 Identified Forces for Change in the landscape are noted as:

- On the steeper slopes, where there is less arable cultivation, there remains an intact pattern of dense, thick hedges particularly bordering roads. However, where there is more intensively managed arable land the hedges tend to be low and gappy and the hedgerow trees much sparser. To the north of the landscape type many hedges have been removed and been replaced by fences.
- Development in the villages is mostly small scale, usually in character and contained within the existing settlement pattern.
- All the stone quarries in the area have been restored back to agriculture although some of the associated conifer screen planting can be visually intrusive.

4.10. The overall Landscape Strategy for the Rolling Village Pastures Landscape Character Type is to conserve the unspoilt character of the ironstone villages and surrounding countryside, and to conserve and enhance the pattern of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses. That strategy gives rise to a number of specific Guidelines, including the following:

- Strengthen the field pattern by planting up existing gappy hedges and replacing fences using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.
- Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type
- Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture, particularly remnants of ridge and furrow pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly along the valley sides and bottoms.
- Contain the size of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that are appropriate to this landscape type.
- Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak, ash and field maple.
- Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash, and where appropriate pollarding willow.

In overall terms, the Key Recommendations in respect of the Rolling Village Pastures Landscape Character Type are to:

- Safeguard and enhance the landscape character of the hedgerow network, small woodlands and tree-lined watercourses.
- Ensure that all priority habitats are in favourable condition and management

### **District Landscape Character Assessment**

4.11 The Cherwell District Landscape Assessment (CDLA) was published in 1995 and thus pre-dates the above two assessments. The study identified a number

of separate Landscape Character Areas and Landscape Character Types. The areas and types are not coterminous in geographic terms with those in the OWLS study and use different titles. The assessment site lies within the Ironstone Hills and Valleys Landscape Character Area (LCA) and in terms of Landscape Type, was described as a Strongly Undulating complex of farmed hills and valleys, part of the Overall Small Scale Enclosed Farmlands Landscape Type. The Ironstone Hills and Valleys – noted as an upland area forming the northern extent of the Cotswold Hills – is described as having an extremely complex topography, with unique ironstone villages and tranquil countryside that is remote and isolated, particularly towards the west of the character area.

- 4.12 In terms of detail the Area is typified by rolling hills with rich soils, with much of the area in arable cultivation; medium and large fields are surrounded by hedges and hedgerow trees although much of the higher land and gentler slopes now have a fairly open arable landscape, with local areas where clearance has been so extreme that even post and wire fences have not been retained to demarcate field boundaries. It is further noted that the area is riddled with steep sided valleys and narrow valley floors with a pattern of smaller fields and mixed farming, predominantly pasture, with many hedges unmanaged and growing out, and road verges including narrow stands of trees, giving a well treed impression (although there is an absence of larger woodlands). The strongly undulating complex of farmed hills and valleys landscape type is typical of the area, although where the landscape opens out onto rich fertile soils, then the landscape type becomes a rolling arable landscape with weak field pattern with large fields and weak and gappy hedges reinforced with fences. In addition, the significance of sunken lanes with the LCA is noted.
- 4.13 The study seeks to identify, for the differing landscape types within each LCA, a series of strategies; Conservation; Repair; Restoration; and Reconstruction. The assessment site is considered to lie within an area where the strategy should be one of conservation; the specific elements relative to that strategy are set out in para 4.11 of the CDLA include as follows:
- Conservation and good management of hedgerows. Removal of hedges should be strongly resisted and traditional hedge laying practices which are still followed in some areas should be encouraged with grants;
  - Continued renewal of hedgerow trees should be encouraged to prevent the decline of the hedgerow tree network, which locally tend to be of the same age structure; and
  - Development should only be permitted if it is sensitively sites and the scale, size, materials and character of the scheme are designed to blend in to the area.

#### **Local Landscape Character Assessment: Baseline**

- 4.14 The area surrounding and including the assessment site forms part of an established and settled local landscape character, as described in published landscape assessments, against which the likely change resulting from development can be considered. A number of the key characteristics of the Rolling Village Pastures landscape type (as set out in the OWLS) are present in the local area, i.e.:
- A strongly undulating landform of rounded hills and small valleys.



- Small to medium-sized fields with mixed land uses, but predominantly pasture.
- Field boundaries and lanes defined by hedgerows.
- Densely scattered hedgerow trees.

4.15 The local landscape character area can be further described as follows:

*Adjoining Land Uses*

The predominant adjoining land uses are all agricultural- primarily pasture but including arable to the south and east. The south east corner of the assessment site adjoins Swalcliffe Grange farm and its associated outbuildings.

*Built Elements*

There are no built elements or structures on the assessment site.

*Topography*

The assessment site lies at elevations of between 176 and 190m AOD, at the head of a dry valley that runs from south to the north towards and into Swalcliffe village. Levels within the immediate local area – typified by the undulating complex landform of valleys and ridges - range from highpoints of 209m AOD to the west at Sibford Elm, and 191 m AOD to the east to the south of Park Wood dropping down towards ca 150m AOD in Swalcliffe Village to the north.

*Vegetation*

There are established agricultural hedgerows along the western, southern (in part) and eastern (again in part) assessment site boundaries. Apart from the small copse on the northern boundary, that boundary is not marked by any vegetation feature. The existing vegetation on the site, including the limited hedgerow trees and single oak tree, is of structural landscape value. Field boundaries in the adjacent agricultural fields are primarily managed hedgerows with other boundaries formed by post and wire fencing (although even those are absent to the arable fields to the east). There are some hedgerow trees of stature and significance (although those to Park Lane have lost their hedgerow). The only woodland in the local area, Park Wood, is sited on rising ground immediately west east of Park Lane and is of local visual significance.

*Water Features*

There are no water features on the assessment site, although there is a small pond and spring within the copse adjacent to the northern site boundary

*Public Rights of Way*

No Public Rights of Way cross or adjoin the site.

4.16 The assessment site is agricultural land located within an area characterised by agricultural and agricultural related uses. The baseline landscape characteristics of the site can thus be summarised as follows:

*Baseline Landscape Condition*

The landscape condition of the site is considered to be ordinary. The western and part southern and eastern boundary hedges are established and well managed features.

*Baseline Landscape Value*

The landscape value of the site is considered to be moderate. The site is not unique (in terms of quality) or rare, in the context of the locality. The limited existing features within the site offer some scope for retention and enhancement.

*Baseline Landscape Sensitivity*

The landscape sensitivity of the site, and the local landscape area within which it is located is considered to be moderate.

## 5.0 Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 5.1 The assessment site is agricultural land located within an area characterised by agricultural uses. Equestrian uses are established at Swalcliffe Grange Farm and are an evident and unexceptional feature in the locality. Other equestrian uses can be found in the locality (e.g. Lodge Farm). The landscape condition of the site is considered to be ordinary; the landscape structure of the assessment site comprises established and well managed hedges to the western and part southern and eastern boundaries. The landscape value of the site is considered to be moderate, and the site is not unique (in terms of quality) or rare, in the context of the locality. The limited existing features within the site offer some scope for retention and enhancement. The landscape sensitivity of the site, and the local landscape area within which it is located is considered to be moderate.

### *Visual Envelope*

- 5.2 The visual envelope of the assessment site is defined in part by built development at Swalcliffe Grange but more generally by topography and off site vegetation; as shown on **Plan No 4**. The envelope is curtailed by the ridgelines to the east and to the west, by Park Wood to the north, and in part by the buildings at Swalcliffe Grange and topography to the south. There is an area of rising ground towards Tadmarton Heath, and Lodge Farm, approximately 1.6km to the south east from where views towards parts of the assessment site are possible, but the site is set within a wide and expansive panorama. The assessment site is not visible from nearby residential properties.

- 5.3 The main area of visibility towards the site is from the open agricultural land extending south and east from the site and from the public rights of way that cross this land. In addition, there are views from Grange Lane and Park Lane (although these are limited in length) adjoining the assessment site and in longer distance views from Grange Lane near Tadmarton Heath and from the Wiggington Heath - Hook Norton road near Lodge Farm.

### *Potential Visual Receptors*

- 5.4 The sensitivity of each of the visual receptors has been rated as high, moderate, low, insignificant or not sensitive. The findings are summarised in **Table 1**.

- 5.5 From the potential visual receptors, a number of viewpoints were selected as representative and photographs taken to present the nature of views towards the site. The locations of the photographs are shown on **Plan No 4**. All of the photographs were taken from publically accessible locations. The Photograph Descriptions are set out in **Table 2**; the photographs are at **Figures 1-5**.

- 5.6 The main views towards the assessment site, and which are most likely to be sensitive to the development of the site, are from the two sections of road (Grange Lane and Park Lane) that adjoin its boundaries to the south (in part) and east (in part) and from the public rights of way and roads to the east.

### *Effects upon Landscape Character*

- 5.7 The development proposals would entail minor change to the character of the site from an agricultural field – primarily used for pasture - to a site primarily (but not exclusively) for equestrian use, as the grassed parts of the site not used for the arenas would be laid to grass and be capable of accommodating

stock (Is this correct?) The 'loss' of part of the site to the construction of the arenas and parking area would however be reversible. As part of the development it is considered appropriate to retain (and to supplement) the existing hedgerows on the southern, eastern and western assessment site boundaries.

- 5.8 The assessment site has no existing value for recreation, save that part of the site, adjacent to Park Lane (and extending north towards Swalcliffe village) has historically been used on an occasional basis for equestrian purposes. The design of the proposed development has the potential to have a positive effect on the landscape character of the site and its immediate locality. The overall magnitude of landscape change would be low, in that there would be some limited loss of existing landscape features – the formation of new access ways through the existing western boundary hedge and to form the new vehicular access onto Grange Lane west of the assessment site - but would be off set to a substantial degree by the management of the boundary hedgerows and the proposed new hedgerow and woodland planting. The resulting impact on the site's landscape character would be low neutral/ beneficial (through the new planting proposed) and reversible.

#### *Visual Effects*

- 5.9 The effects of the proposed development at completion on the views from the area surrounding the site are set out in **Table 3**. Both the magnitude and the significance of impact on the views are set out. The assessment has been carried out for the development on completion (Year 1) and then some 15 years after completion (Year 15). The assessment has taken into account the implementation of the elements of landscape strategy discussed in Section 6 below.

- 5.10 The proposed development on the assessment site is, in terms of overall scale and height, of relatively modest proportions. Essentially the development comprises of three main elements:

- Earthworks to re-profile the undulating landform within the assessment site;
- The formation of the two arenas, surrounded by post and rail fencing of a form wholly typical of rural environments; and
- The construction of the parking area adjacent to Grange Lane and the formation of the new access road within the site parallel to Grange Lane, and new gateway onto Grange Lane to the west.

The first of these, of itself, would entail no tangible change to the character of the site (although in terms of landform it would clearly be different to the existing landform). The second would entail limited built development – the surfacing of the arenas and the enclosing fencing - whilst the third would also entail built development in terms of the new hard surfacing of part of the site. In practice, however, although the second and third elements would entail change to the surface character of the assessment site, their formation, on their own would not entail any significant visual effect. It is however acknowledged that the use of the arenas and the parking areas, during events/ other occasions/ would, to a greater or lesser degree be visible from a number of locations – primarily from parts only of Park lane and Grange Lane and from PRow 374/8 to the north east and east.

- 5.11 The proposed development would have no visual effects on the residential properties in the vicinity of the assessment site, save that in oblique views from upper floor windows at Swalcliffe Grange Farm part of the site and

development upon it could be seen, over the existing outbuildings (used as a livery stable) on the north side of Grange Lane. It is acknowledged that from the upper floors of two properties adjacent to Grange Lane (Swalcliffe House and Folly Farm) it might be possible to see vehicles going to/ from the assessment site, notwithstanding the presence of substantial intervening planting on the south side of the Lane adjacent to the properties

- 5.12 The proposed development, and its operation, would be visible from PRow 374/8 through part of Park Wood (the footpath runs close to the southern edge of the wood towards its eastern end, away from Park Lane, although there are other informal paths within the wood itself) and from Park Wood south until it crosses Grange Lane some 460m east of the assessment site. This north-south section of this footpath is shown on the Oxfordshire CC Definitive Footpath Map as running along the west side of a north-south hedgerow, although there is an agricultural track along the east side which appears to be used by walkers in preference to the definitive route. Although this appraisal has assessed the effects and considered them from the line as shown on the Definitive Map, in practice, those using the track would not have any view of the assessment site or development upon it on account of the intervening hedgerow. South of Grange Lane, from PRow 374/8 views towards the assessment site and to the proposed development upon it would be screened in part by the existing farmhouse and buildings at Swalcliffe Grange Farm, and by off-site vegetation on the south side of the Lane. As this footpath drops in level as it moved to the south, intervening landform screens views to either the Farm or the assessment site. The assessment site cannot be seen (and neither would development upon it) from PRow 374/11 running south of Grange Lane on account of intervening topography south of Grange Lane and the hedgerow on the south side of the Lane.
- 5.13 In practice, the principal visual effects of the proposed development, and its operation, would be seen from the southern part of Park Lane (from the edge of Park Wood/ where PRow 374/8 enters Park Wood) and from Grange Lane, from just beyond the western boundary of the assessment site, extending down to Swalcliffe Grange Farm and beyond to the east, until existing development and vegetation provide screening. The overall extent of these views is limited and immediate, but from both Lanes would be seen in the context of the existing operations at Swalcliffe Grange Farm. In that sense, the development would appear as a logical and functional part of the Swalcliffe Grange Farm complex, directly related to it in physical and visual terms.
- 5.14 There are longer distance views available towards the assessment site from roads, from the south east at Tadmerton Heath and (in places) from the Wiggington Heath-Hook Norton road between the Heath and Lodge Farm, and from PRow 255/31 as it rise in level towards Lodge Farm. In these views (which are generally in excess of 1.5km) the assessment site is largely screened from view by the buildings at Swalcliffe Grange Farm, and the proposed development would not be capable of being distinguished from the background patchwork of agricultural fields. Even if it was possible to see elements of the site during operational use, the effects would be insignificant in the wide panoramic views available from these more distant viewpoints.

#### *Summary of Visual Effects*

- 5.15 In summary, the overall magnitude of visual change in the area immediately surrounding and adjoining the assessment site will be low to moderate at the completion of the development, particularly where the development will change

the appearance of the site when viewed from the adjacent and nearby roads and public rights of way. Visual effects on these local views will be perceived as neutral, in that the open nature of the site, and the locality will not be lost to development. In any event these locations are limited in number and in general terms, in closer views, the proposed development will bring about at worst only moderate magnitude of visual change at Year 1, and with the limited mitigation measures proposed, that will generally lessen to a low magnitude by Year 15. The resulting overall visual effects on closer views will be slight/ insignificant and neutral.

- 5.16 In middle distance views will generally be generally be low, as the proposed development would be screened (in main part) by intervening topography to the west, east and (in part) to the south, and existing on and off-site vegetation to the west, north -east and south-east. Visual impacts on the (generally) middle distance views from the east/ south east would be low/ insignificant.
- 5.17 There will be no adverse visual impact on longer distance views, where the effects would be insignificant
- 5.18 Development of the assessment site would not give rise to any significant adverse landscape or visual impacts that would require further substantive mitigation, although certain elements of new planting/ landscape management are considered as part the landscape strategy in Section 6 below.

## 6.0 Landscape Strategy

- 6.1 The separate assessments of landscape character considered in Section 4 above all identify a number of common themes in relation to guidance on how the local landscape - and development within it - could (and should) be managed retain its inherent distinctive character. Aspects of these are also included in extant and emerging planning policy and in guidance on design, as considered in Section 3. These themes include:
- Maintaining and managing existing hedgerows.
  - Strengthen the field pattern by planting up existing gappy hedges and replacing fences using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.
  - Restoring hedgerow boundaries.
  - Planting of new hedgerow trees.
  - Planting new woodland, and new deciduous woodland blocks and woodland copses using native broadleaved species such as oak, ash and field maple.
  - Sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary.
  - Maintaining road grass verges and ensuring that verges are sympathetically managed for their biodiversity value.
- 6.2 The landscape and visual assessment of the assessment site and development proposal set out in Section 5 identifies that the most significant – in terms of potentially visible elements of the development proposal are from locations along Grange Lane and Park Lane and from the public footpath network to the east. The assessment site and the development proposal would be well contained by existing landform in respect of middle distance to longer views, and also screened by existing built development. The assessment also notes the relative and absolute value of existing sections of hedgerow and areas of woodland in providing visual screening to views and also notes those locations, immediate to the site, where some additional planting would benefit the overall structure and visual appearance of the local landscape.
- 6.3 When there two aspects – of need for change and opportunity for change – are considered together it is possible to develop a simple but effective landscape strategy for the site that is appropriate in terms of context, scale and effect. The proposed landscape strategy would comprise 4 main elements:
- *New hedgerow planting to Grange Lane and Park Lane:*  
Typically a new double planted native hedgerow (e.g. Hawthorn, Blackthorn, and Elder), supplemented by informal planting of occasional individual and groups of hedgerow trees (e.g. Oak, Field Maple, and Sycamore).  
These new sections of hedgerow would be located along the north side of the southern boundary of the assessment site to Grange Lane, and along part of the western side of Park lane (between the two mature Oak trees on the eastern edge of the assessment site), and along the eastern side of Park lane from the southern end of Park Wood as far south as Grange Lane.
  - *New hedgerow tree planting in existing hedgerows:*  
Informal Planting of occasional individual and groups of hedgerow trees (e.g. Oak, Field Maple, and Sycamore) in existing hedgerows on the edge of the assessment site

- These new hedgerow trees would be planted in the western boundary hedgerow to the of assessment site, and in the existing (young) hedgerow planted along the north side of Grange Lane (from the western boundary of the assessment site as far west as access to the Old Grange);
- *New areas of woodland planting:*  
New small native woodlands (e.g. Oak, Field Maple, Beech, Sycamore, Birch and Alder (the latter two as nurse species)) along the margins of the assessment site.  
It is proposed that these new woodland blocks/ copses would be planted (typically with feathered whips/ forestry transplants at 1.2 m centres with ca 10% of the planting as standard trees) in a number of locations:  
2 separate blocks on the west side of Park Lane on west side of Park Lane;  
2 separate blocks on the on the north side of Grange Lane within the assessment site; and  
1 block adjacent to western assessment site boundary between that boundary and the new access onto Grange Lane.
- *Internal tree belt within parking area*  
A 10m wide native woodland block (e.g. Oak, Field Maple, Beech, Sycamore, Birch and Alder (the latter two as nurse species)) running at right angles across the proposed parking area (i.e. along the contour line) to provide internal visual screening and to break up, visually, the extent of the hard surfacing.

6.4 The disposition of these elements of planting relative to the development proposals is shown on **Plan No 5**. This plan shows, based upon an aerial photograph view of the site how the site with the development proposed would appear once the new planting has developed (at Year 15). This shows how the new panting, with the existing landscape structure would:

- Provide linkages between existing sections of established or recently planted hedgerow;
- Incorporate areas of new small woodlands consistent with existing areas of woodland adjacent to the site (especially further north towards Swalcliffe Village);
- Supplement existing hedgerow trees and thus provide continuity for the future (bearing in mind that some of the existing hedgerow trees on and adjacent to the site are now over mature); and
- Provide a landscape context for the proposed development that is consistent, in scale with, and reinforces the landscape character of the locality and of the landscape character area that surrounds it.

6.5 The effects of the landscape strategy in relation to specific views towards and of the assessment site and the development proposal on it, are shown in **Plan No 6**. This plan shows 3 cross sections drawn through the site showing the location of the development elements within it, the position of existing and new planting, and how these elements together provide for visual screening and enhancement to the site and the locality. The plan also shows what the effects would be of planting developing, in terms of height, over 15 years; it has been assumed that new hedgerows will attain height of ca 3m in that period and new woodland ca 5/6m. The Sections can be summarised as follows:

*Section 1* shows the relationship between Swalcliffe House, the assessment site and the edge of Park Wood. In this section it is clear that the new arenas would lie below the level of the western site boundary to the assessment site

and thus the development would not be seen from either the House or from Grange Lane adjacent.

*Section 2* is taken from the south west corner of the assessment site to the northern edge (adjacent to the existing copse). This shows that there would be a view into the assessment site initially but as a consequence of new hedgerow and native woodland planting those views would be screen by Year 15. It also shows how the arenas are set into the cross slope of the assessment site.

*Section 3* shows an east west view through the assessment site from higher ground to the west through to PRow 374/8 to the east. It shows how the landform to west and east encloses the assessment site, and how the existing western site boundary hedgerow, and ultimately, new planting along both sides of Park Lane assist in providing visual screening (the former completely; the latter to a degree and only after 15 years) from west and east respectively.



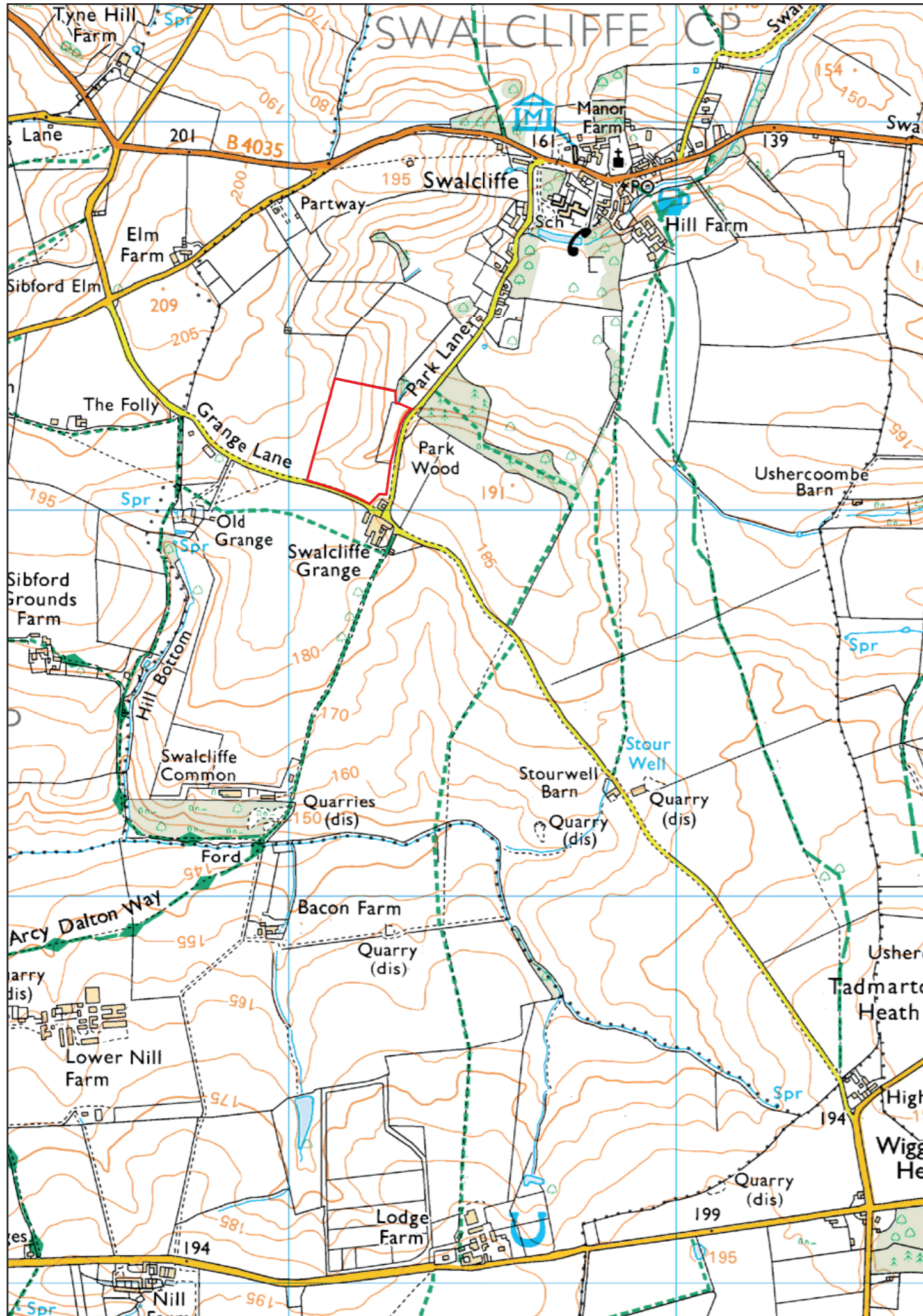
## 7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 The assessment site is agricultural land located within an area characterised by agricultural uses. Equestrian uses are established at Swalcliffe Grange Farm and are an evident and unexceptional feature in the locality. Other equestrian uses can be found in the locality (e.g. Lodge Farm). The landscape condition of the site is considered to be ordinary; the landscape structure of the assessment site comprises established and well managed hedges to the western and part southern and eastern boundaries. The landscape value of the site is considered to be moderate, and the site is not unique (in terms of quality) or rare, in the context of the locality. The limited existing features within the site offer some scope for retention and enhancement. The landscape sensitivity of the site, and the local landscape area within which it is located is considered to be moderate.
- 7.2 The development proposals would entail minor change to the character of the site from an agricultural field – primarily used for pasture - to a site primarily (but not exclusively) for equestrian use, as the grassed parts of the site not used for the arenas would be laid to grass and be capable of accommodating stock (Is this correct?) The 'loss' of part of the site to the construction of the arenas would however be reversible. As part of the development it is considered appropriate to retain (and to supplement) the existing hedgerows on the southern, eastern and western assessment site boundaries.
- 7.3 The overall magnitude of visual change in the area immediately surrounding and adjoining the assessment site will be low to moderate at the completion of the development, particularly where the development will change the appearance of the site when viewed from the adjacent roads and public rights of way. Visual effects on these local views will be perceived as neutral, in that the open nature of the site, and the locality will not be lost to development. In any event these locations are limited in number and in general terms, in closer views, the proposed development will bring about (at worst) only a moderate magnitude of visual change at Year 1, and with the limited mitigation measures proposed, that will generally lessen to a low magnitude by Year 15. The resulting overall visual effects on closer views will be slight/ insignificant and neutral. In middle distance views will generally be generally be low, as the proposed development would be screened (in main part) by intervening topography to the west, east and (in part) to the south, and existing on and off-site vegetation to the west, north -east and south-east. Visual impacts on the (generally) middle distance views from the east/ south east would be low/ insignificant. From longer distance views the effects would be insignificant.
- 7.4 Although the development of the assessment site for the equestrian uses proposed would not give rise to any significant adverse landscape or visual impacts that would require further substantive mitigation, the need for change to the character and appearance of the local landscape (as set out in the successive assessments of local landscape character) and the opportunity for that change (arising from the development) – allow the development a simple but effective landscape strategy for the site that is appropriate in terms of context, scale and effect. The proposed landscape strategy, as shown on Plan No 5, comprises 4 elements:
- New hedgerow planting to Grange Lane and Park Lane:
  - New hedgerow tree planting in existing hedgerows:
  - New areas of woodland planting, and

- Internal tree belt within the proposed parking area.
- The new planting proposed in the landscape strategy would:
- Provide linkages between existing sections of established or recently planted hedgerow;
  - Incorporate areas of new small woodlands consistent with existing areas of woodland adjacent to the site (especially further north towards Swalcliffe Village);
  - Supplement existing hedgerow trees and thus provide continuity for the future (given that some of the existing hedgerow trees on and adjacent to the site are now over mature); and
  - Provide a landscape context for the proposed development that is consistent, in scale and reinforces the landscape character of the locality and of the landscape character area that surrounds it.

7.5 The proposed development would have no adverse effect upon the character and appearance of the area or affect adversely any important views within the area. In association with the proposed development the incorporation of a range of modest (but wholly typical) landscape measures would reinforce and maintain local landscape character.


## Plans



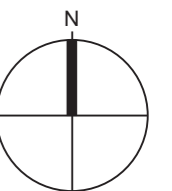
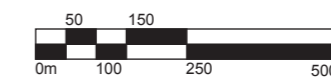
Land at Swalcliffe Grange, Banbury

Plan No 1: Site Location

Key

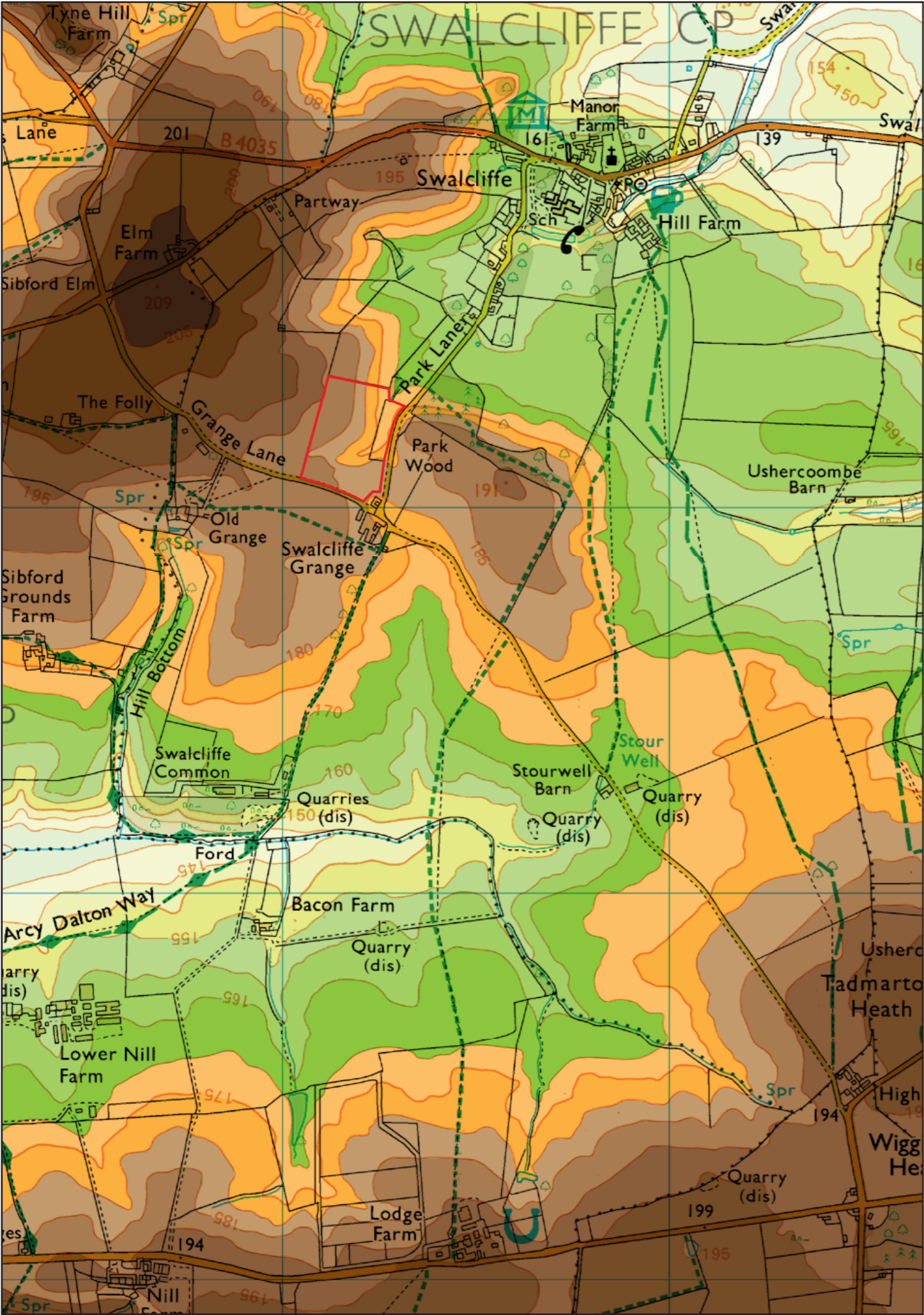
 Assessment Site Boundary

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

















Land at Swalcliffe Grange, Banbury

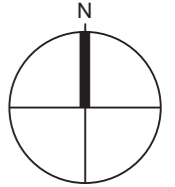
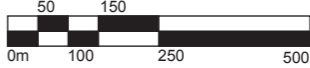
Plan No 2: Topography



Key

-  Assessment Site Boundary
-  205-210m
-  200-205m
-  195-200m
-  190-195m
-  185-190m
-  180-185m
-  175-180m
-  170-175m
-  165-170m
-  160-165m
-  155-160m
-  150-155m
-  145-150m
-  140-145m
-  135-140m
-  130-135m

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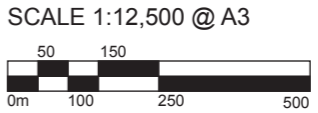
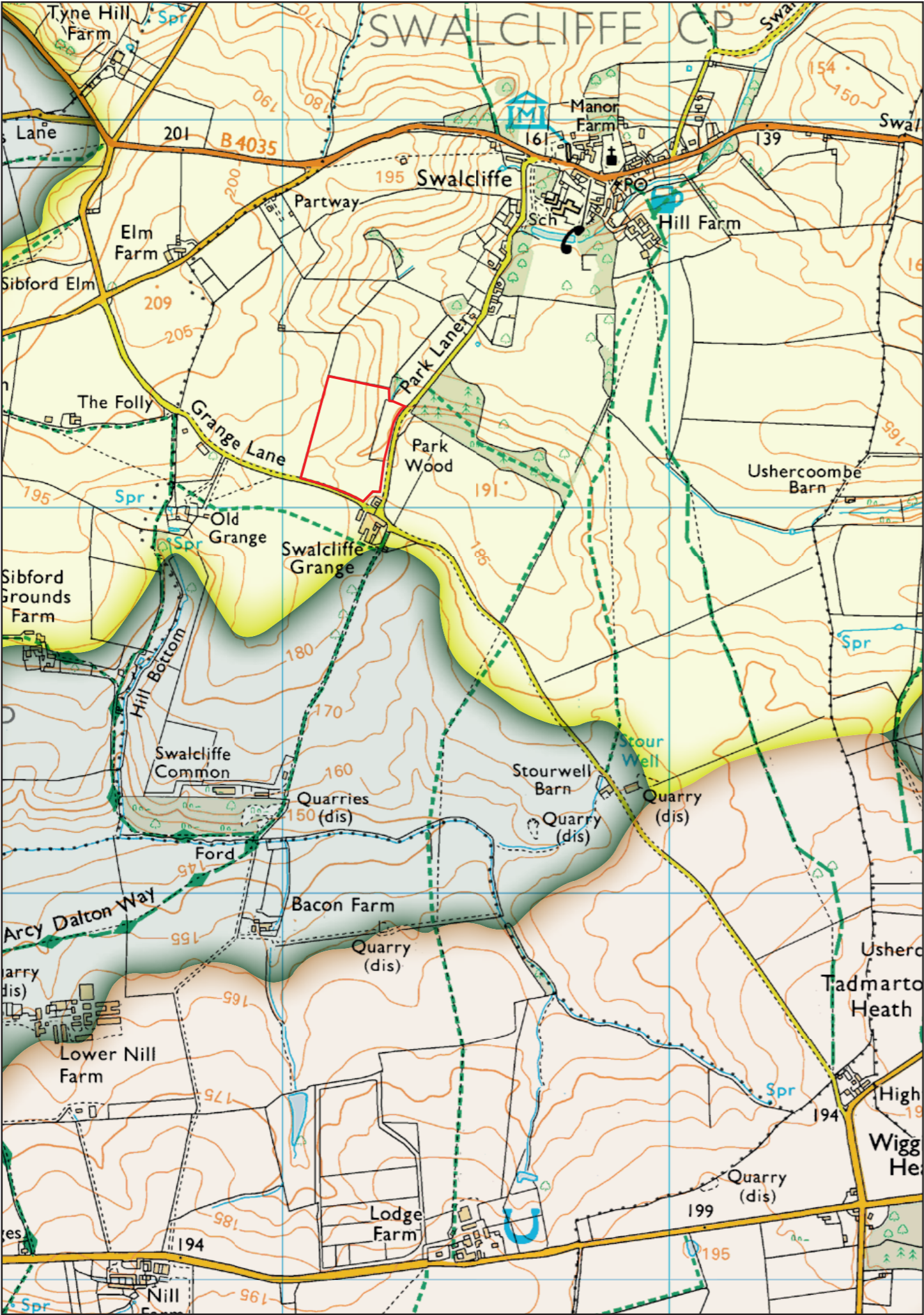
Land at Swalcliffe Grange, Banbury

Plan No 3: Landscape Character Areas

Key

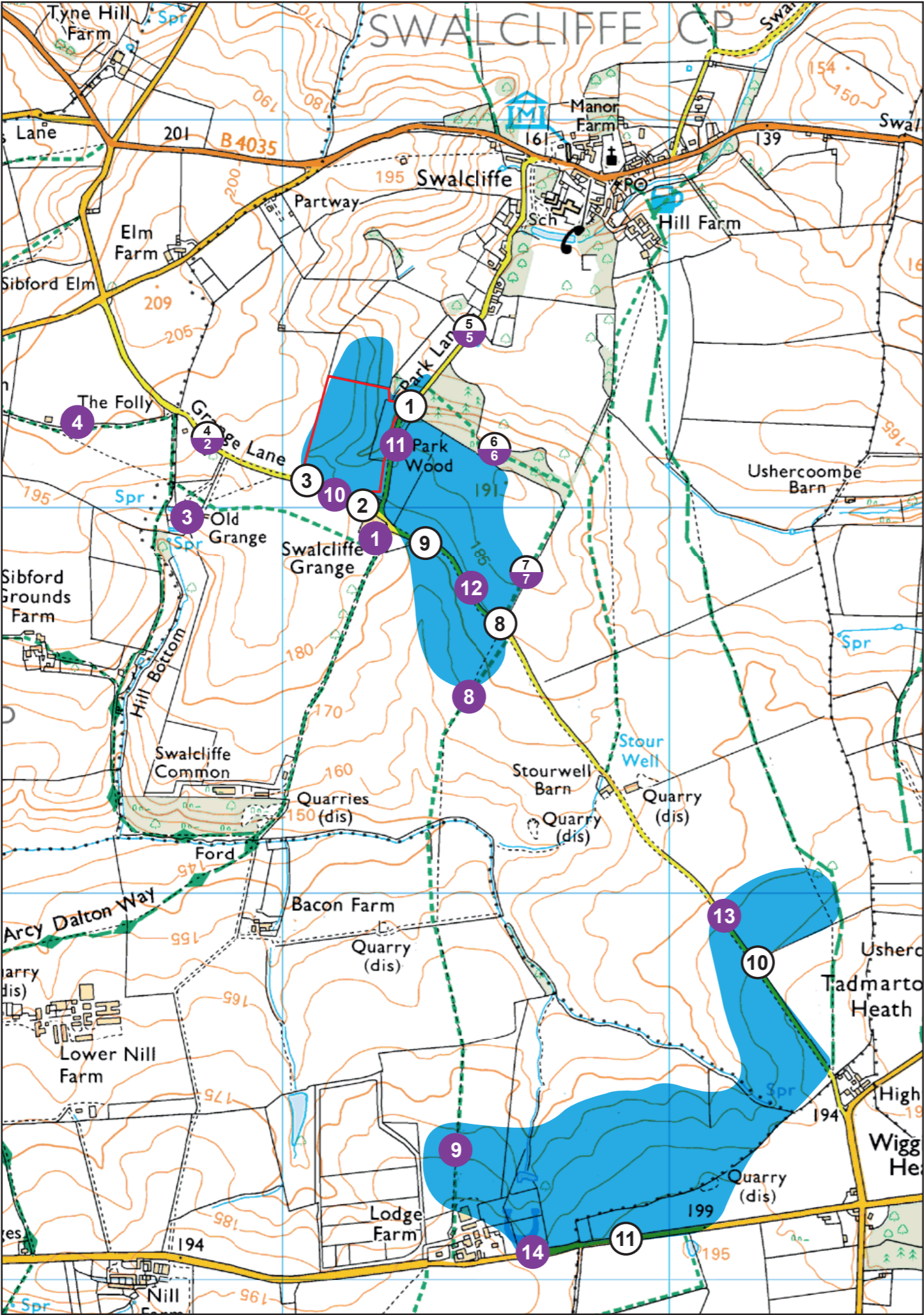
-  Assessment Site Boundary
-  Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes
-  Farmland Plateau
-  Rolling Village Pastures

Source: Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS)



Land at Swalcliffe Grange, Banbury

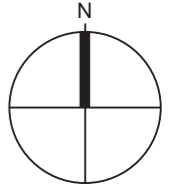
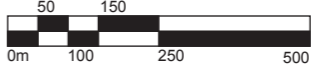
Plan No 4: Visual Assessment



Key

- Assessment Site Boundary
- Approximate Visual Envelope
- X Photograph Location Point
- X Potential Visual Receptors
- X  
X Photograph Location Point / Potential Visual Receptor

SCALE 1:12,500 @ A3



# Land at Swalcliffe Grange, Banbury

## Plan No 5: Landscape Strategy

### Development elements

1. Main arena for events (80m x 65m)
2. Warm up arena (25m x 65m).
3. Parking for vehicle and trailers/ horse boxes
4. Internal access road
5. New gated exit onto Grange Lane
6. Paths between parking areas and arenas

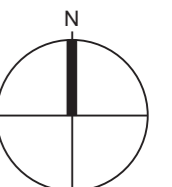
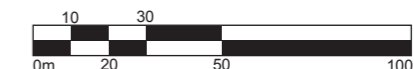
### Elements of Landscape Strategy

- A. New hedgerow and hedgerow tree planting to:
  - North side of Grange Lane;
  - West side of Park Lane; and
  - East side of Park Lane.
- B. New hedgerow tree planting in existing hedgerows:
  - West side of Assessment site; and
  - North side of Grange Lane west of the assessment site.
- C. New areas of woodland planting (typically 15/20m deep):
  - North side of Grange Lane between Lane and new parking area;
  - West side of Park Lane adjacent to existing parking area;
  - Adjacent to western assessment site boundary including existing Oak tree; and
  - Adjacent to new gated exit on Grange Lane on north side of Lane
- D. 10m wide internal tree belt within the proposed parking area.

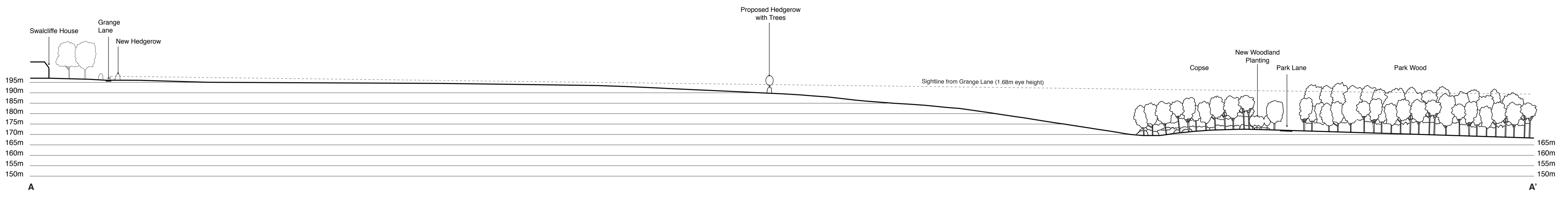


Plotted Scale - 1:2,000

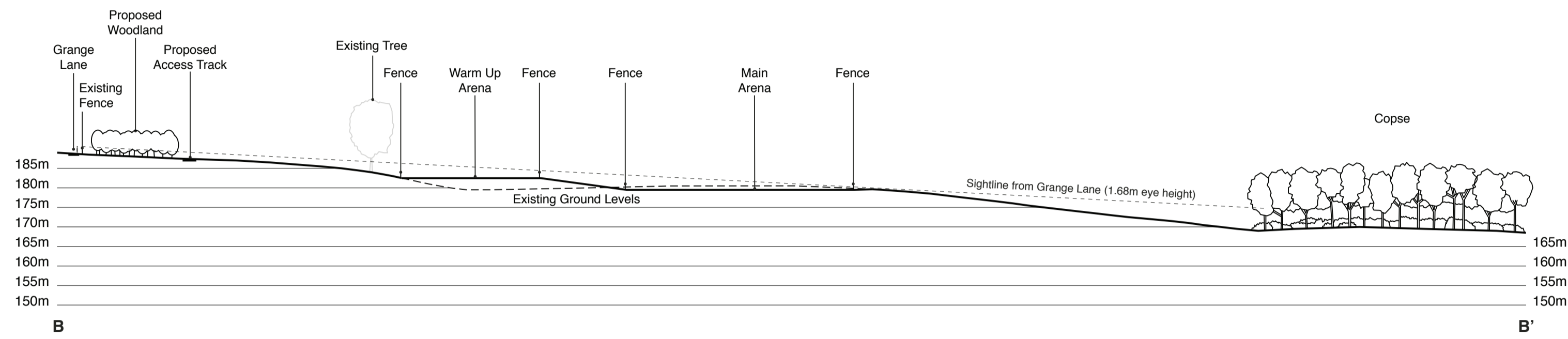
SCALE 1:2,000



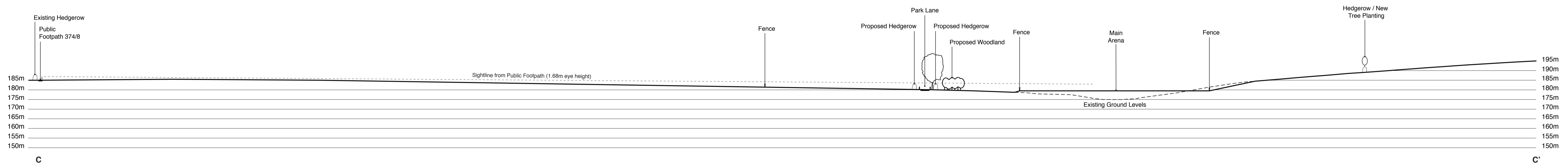




Scale: 1:1000

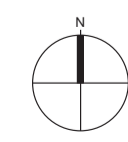
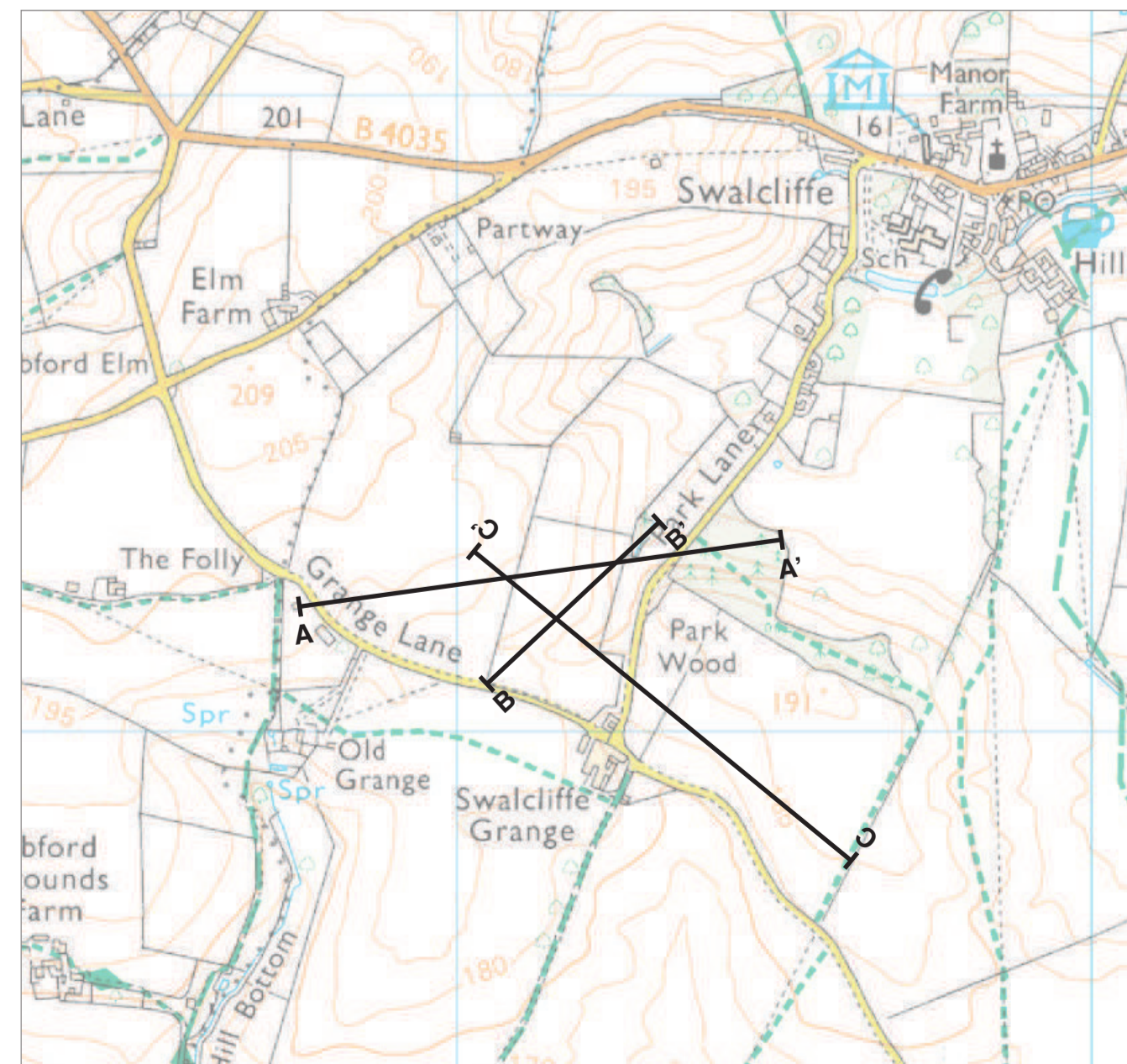


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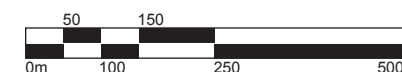


Scale: 1:1000

Section Location Plan



SCALE 1:10,000



## Tables

**Table 1: Potential Visual Receptors**

See Plan No 4 for locations of visual receptors and photographs

No	Potential Visual Receptor	Approximate Distance of Receptor from Edge of Assessment Site	Sensitivity of Visual Receptor	Notes
<b>Residential Receptors</b>				
1	Swalcliffe Grange Farm and outbuildings <b>See Photograph No 2</b>	Adjoining 0-50m Close	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main aspect of Grange Farm is away from assessment site and/ or obscured by other farm buildings</li> <li>• Oblique Views from upper floors may be possible over outbuildings.</li> <li>• Hedgerow on western site boundary forms skyline and curtails views beyond</li> <li>• Longer distance views over site towards higher ground/ Park Wood</li> </ul>
2	Swalcliffe House <b>See Photograph No 4</b>	330m Middle	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No view of assessment site</li> <li>• Property surrounded by substantial vegetation which screens views into (and out of) property from/ to Grange Lane)</li> <li>• Longer distance views potentially available from upper floor over foreground towards Park Wood</li> </ul>
3	The Old Grange	300m Middle	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No view of assessment site</li> <li>• Aspect of The Old Grange is to south away from assessment site and/ or obscured by other farm buildings</li> </ul>
4	Folly Farm	385m Middle	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No view of assessment site</li> <li>• Longer distance views potentially available from upper floor over foreground towards Park Wood</li> </ul>
5	Properties on southern edge of Swalcliffe <b>See Photograph No 5</b>	245m Close	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No view of assessment site</li> <li>• Off site vegetation screens views towards Swalcliffe Grange and assessment site</li> </ul>
<b>Public Rights of Way (PRoW)</b>				
6	ProW 374/8 within Park Wood <b>See Photograph No 6</b>	170m Close	Moderate/ High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View from within wood (where FP in places comes close to southern edge of wood) over intervening fields towards assessment site.</li> <li>• Higher ground beyond western site boundary forms skyline and curtails views beyond</li> </ul>
7	ProW 374/8 south of Park Wood <b>See Photograph Nos 6 and 8</b>	430-460m Middle	Moderate/ High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View from southern section of FP (south of Park Wood and where it crosses road) over intervening fields towards assessment site.</li> <li>• Higher ground beyond western site boundary forms skyline and curtails views beyond</li> </ul>

8	ProW 374/8 leading to PRoW 255/31	460-580m Middle	Moderate/ High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View towards assessment site from section of FP south of road over intervening fields towards assessment site.</li> <li>• Visual screening progressively provided by roadside vegetation, Swalcliffe Grange Farm buildings and topography, as land drops way to the south.</li> <li>• Higher ground beyond western site boundary forms skyline and curtails views beyond</li> </ul>
9	PRoW 255/31	1600-1870m Long	Moderate/ High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long distance views from rising ground north of Lodge Farm, partially screened or filtered by intervening vegetation adjacent to Swalcliffe Grange Farm and the farm buildings</li> <li>• Assessment site seen as part of extensive panorama below skyline.</li> </ul>
<b>Roads</b>				
10	Grange Lane south/ west of assessment site <b>See Photograph Nos 2,3 and 4</b>	Adjoining 0-350m Close/ Middle	Moderate/ High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close and open views into assessment site from adjacent to Swalcliffe Grange Farm and to the west, although part of this section of Grange Lane is sunken.</li> <li>• In views from eastern extent of Grange Lane, adjacent to the Farm/ outbuildings, the hedgerow on western site boundary forms skyline and curtails views beyond.</li> <li>• West of assessment site views towards assessment site are limited by existing hedgerow on western site boundary, such that assessment site cannot be seen.</li> </ul>
11	Park Lane north/ east of assessment site <b>See Photograph Nos 1 and 5</b>	Adjoining 0-250m Close	Moderate/ High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close and open views into assessment site from adjacent to Swalcliffe Grange Farm and from southern part of Park Lane,</li> <li>• Hedgerow on western site boundary forms skyline and curtails views beyond</li> <li>• In views from north, the existing hedgerow on western side of Park Lane and off site vegetation increasingly screens the assessment site from view</li> </ul>
12	Grange Lane south east of assessment site <b>See Photograph Nos 8 and 9</b>	10-480m Close/ Middle	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In views from immediately east of Swalcliffe Grange Farm/ outbuildings, the assessment site can be seen, behind/ beyond the buildings north of Grange Lane, although full extent of the assessment site is not apparent.</li> <li>• Higher ground beyond western site boundary forms skyline and curtails views beyond.</li> </ul>
13	Grange Lane/ Wiggington Heath - Hook Norton Road, south east of assessment site <b>See Photograph Nos 10 and 11</b>	1370-2000m Long	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long distance views from rising ground north of Tadmarton Heath and from Wiggington Heath - Hook Norton Road, partially screened or filtered by intervening vegetation adjacent to Swalcliffe Grange Farm and the farm buildings</li> <li>• Assessment site seen as part of extensive panorama below skyline.</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Photograph Descriptions**

Photograph 1:	This photograph shows the view south from Park Lane at the northeastern corner of the assessment site. The buildings at Swalcliffe Grange Farm are not visible on account of existing vegetation. The assessment site lies below the skyline – formed by the western boundary hedge. The small copse on the northern assessment site boundary is just visible on the right of the view
Photograph 2:	This photograph is taken from Grange Lane adjacent to the Swalcliffe Grange Farm buildings (on the right) at the south eastern corner of the assessment site. The assessment site lies below the skyline – formed by the assessment site western boundary hedge. The valley leading down towards Swalcliffe village is seen in the right hand side of the view, with higher ground to the north visible beyond.
Photograph 3:	Taken from the south western corner of the assessment site on Grange Lane, this view shows the fall across the site from west to east (towards Park Lane). The outbuildings to Swalcliffe Grange Farm are just visible along the line of the lane. Park Wood, sited on rising ground to the east of Park Lane, forms the skyline. There is a view down the valley towards the tower of the church of St Peter and St Paul in Swalcliffe.
Photograph 4:	This photograph is taken looking north east from Grange Lane from a location close to Swalcliffe House, looking over higher ground to the west of the assessment site. Neither the assessment site nor Swalcliffe Grange Farm buildings can be seen. Park Wood, sited on rising ground, forms the skyline to the view.
Photograph 5:	In this view, taken from the southern end of Swalcliffe Village adjacent to 'Wykham' (the last property along Park Lane) towards the assessment site, neither the assessment site nor Swalcliffe Grange Farm buildings can be seen due to off-site vegetation and landform. Park Wood is on the right hand side of the view.
Photograph 6:	In this view looking south/south west from PRow 374/8 within Park Wood, the existing buildings at Swalcliffe Grange Farm are seen set into the landform, defined to the west by higher ground (the western site boundary is visible below the skyline) and higher ground in the foreground. The major part of the assessment site is visible.
Photograph 7:	Taken at the high point of PRow 374/8 south of Park Wood, this view is similar to Photograph 6; the buildings of Swalcliffe Grange Farm lie within a fold in the landscape, with the assessment site set below the skyline, and the western site boundary visible, with the main part of the site lying below and in front of the hedgerow. Park Wood is seen on the right hand side of the view.
Photograph 8:	This photograph is taken where PRow 374/8, south of Park Wood crosses Grange Lane east of the assessment site. The view is similar to that seen in Photograph 7, although as the elevation of the viewpoint is lower, the extent of assessment site that can be seen is reduced. Off site vegetation on the south side of the lane provide screening to views towards the site.
Photograph 9:	Taken from Grange Lane closer to the assessment site (than Photograph 8), existing vegetation is seen on the left hand side of the view. Existing buildings north of Swalcliffe Grange Farm are visible, with the assessment site set behind, but below the skyline. Park Lane is not visible from here but vegetation on/ adjacent to it is (the two oak trees in the centre of the view)
Photograph 10:	Taken from Grange Lane where it rises towards Tadmarton Heath, this view shows a wide panorama with Park Wood visible in the centre right of the view and Swalcliffe Grange Farm just visible in the centre of the view (to the right of the yellow field of oilseed rape). The line of Grange Lane leading towards Swalcliffe Grange Farm is visible in the centre of the view, above Stourwell Barn, set in the valley floor. The assessment site lies beyond Swalcliffe Grange Farm, below the skyline.
Photograph 11:	This view taken from the Wiggington Heath – Hook Norton road south of the assessment site shows a similar view to Photograph 10. The assessment site can just be seen, below the skyline, lying to the right of, and behind the buildings of Swalcliffe Grange Farm in the centre of the view. Park Wood forms the skyline to the east (to the right).

**Table 3**  
**Assessment of Visual Effects**

<i>Receptor</i>		<i>Distance to edge of site (m/ km)/</i>	<i>Sensitivity of Visual Receptor</i>	<i>Effect at Year 1 (Magnitude)</i>	<i>Effect at Year 15 (Magnitude)</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>	<i>Significance of Effect</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>Location</i>							
1	Swalcliffe Grange Farm and outbuildings	0-50m (Close)	High	<b>Low</b> Views from outbuildings and from farmhouse will be subject to minor change through development of new arenas	<b>Low</b> As at Year 1.	New hedgerow / small woodland planting along Grange Lane and Park Lane	<b>Insignificant</b>	When site is in use for events, parked vehicles and activity on/ adjacent to the arenas will be visible
2	Swalcliffe House	330m (Middle)	High	<b>No Effect</b> Development on assessment site not visible	<b>No Effect</b> As at Year 1.	None	<b>No Effect</b>	When site is in use for events, vehicles accessing the site along Grange Lane will be visible, but parked vehicles on site will not be visible
3	The Old Grange	300m (Middle)	High	<b>No Effect</b> Development on assessment site not visible	<b>No Effect</b> As at Year 1.	None	<b>No Effect</b>	
4	Folly Farm	385m (Middle)	High	<b>No Effect</b> Development on assessment site not visible	<b>No Effect</b> As at Year 1.	None	<b>No Effect</b>	When site is in use for events, vehicles accessing the site along Grange Lane will be visible, but parked vehicles on site will not be visible
5	Properties on southern edge of Swalcliffe village	245m (Close)	High	<b>No Effect</b> Development on assessment site not visible	<b>No Effect</b> As at Year 1.	None	<b>No Effect</b>	