



**Land East of Ploughley
Road, Ambrosden**

Proof of Evidence of:

Ben Connolley

BSc (Hons), PGDipLA, CMLI

In respect of:

Landscape Matters

On behalf of:

Archstone Ambrosden Ltd,

Bellway Homes Ltd and

Rosemary May

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Section 1

Introduction

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1 This Proof of Evidence (PoE) on landscape matters has been prepared by Ben Connelley. My professional qualifications include a Post Graduate Degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Gloucestershire and a Degree in Countryside Management from The University of Wales, Aberystwyth. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.
- 1.2 I am an Associate Director at The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP). EDP is an established, independent environmental consultancy providing advice to public and private sector clients in the fields of archaeology and cultural heritage, ecology and protected species, arboriculture, masterplanning and landscape matters. EDP is a Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute and represents both public and private clients with land and development interests throughout the UK.
- 1.3 I have over 15 years' experience covering landscape design, landscape assessment and landscape management. In recent years, I have specialised in the assessment, in landscape terms, of a very wide range of development proposals, including development in designated and sensitive landscapes such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). I have been involved in the design and assessment of numerous mixed use and residential schemes, including many urban extensions, and addressed projects from the feasibility stage through to planning application and detailed construction phases.
- 1.4 As an experienced Landscape Architect, I have undertaken numerous Landscape and Visual Impact assessments (LVIA), regularly provide peer review of LVIA's for colleagues and provide regular in-house training at EDP in the application of the Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition (GLVIA3) - the nationally accepted guidance on undertaking LVIA's, published by the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA).
- 1.5 The evidence that I have prepared and provide for this inquiry is true and has been prepared, and is given, in accordance with the guidance of my Professional Institute. I confirm the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE APPEAL SITE AND ITS CONTEXT

- 1.6 I did not author the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) submitted as part of the application (Ref. 19/01071/OUT). However, during the preparation of the submitted LVA, I provided a peer review of the draft document to consider consultation with the LPA and the application of the methodology that underpinned the judgements of others at EDP. I did not visit the appeal site as part of that peer review.
- 1.7 I am familiar with the wider landscape context, having been involved in the planning applications for commercial development to the north of the Appeal Site, and also new residential development to the south of Ambrosden. However, in order to consider the

context of the appeal site fully, prior to accepting my instruction for this appeal, I visited the appeal site and its context in July 2023 to review the conclusions of the LVA, at which point I walked the network of local public rights of way (PRoW) surrounding the appeal site and drove local roads as part of my consideration of the scheme. I undertook a further site visit on 14 September 2023 and visited again on 18 October 2023. I have walked around the appeal site and the local residential area.

- 1.8 I was therefore not personally involved in the iterative assessment and design process that led to the planning application but am content that the principles of the LVA have informed the appeal scheme.
- 1.9 Based on my own site visits and analysis, I concur with the general conclusions in respect of landscape and visual effects contained within the LVA, though I provide my own consideration of the sensitivity of some receptors surrounding the appeal site. My conclusions are based on the same methodology used within the submitted LVA (**CD: A17**), which I consider to be in accordance with the GLVIA3.
- 1.10 Where this review has revealed differences of opinion to those in the original LVA, I have clarified this at relevant points within my PoE. Similarly, where I have identified that a different approach to mitigation (for example) might be appropriate, I have made this clear.

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

- 1.11 I have been instructed by Archstone Ambrosden Ltd, Bellway Homes Ltd and Rosemary May (the Appellant) to prepare a Landscape PoE in relation to an appeal against the refusal of outline planning permission for up to 120 residential dwellings, with all matters reserved except for access, on Land East of Ploughley Road, Ambrosden.
- 1.12 Within the Decision Notice, issued by Cherwell Borough Council (CBC) on 14 July 2023, there were two reasons for refusal (RfR), one of which specifically relates to landscape matters. My evidence has been prepared to address the landscape aspects of RfR 1, which states (my emphasis added):

“The site is located outside the built form of Ambrosden and within an area of open countryside. By reason of its location and the proposed scale of development, the proposal would have a poor and incongruous relationship with the existing settlement appearing prominent in the open countryside. Its development would therefore have an adverse effect on the landscape on the approach to Ambrosden to the detriment of the character and appearance of the countryside. In addition, the Council is able to demonstrate a 5.4-year housing land supply, and therefore the housing strategies in the Local Plan are up to date. It is considered that the development of this site would conflict with the adopted policies in the Local Plan to which substantial weight should be attached. The proposed development is therefore contrary to Policies ESD13, ESD15, BSC1, PSD1 and Villages 2 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1, saved Policy H18 of Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and Government guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework.”

- 1.13 The RfR conflates a number of different landscape issues, which I have highlighted above. In addition, the Council's Statement of Case (SoC) (**CD: G3**) includes a number of landscape

issues that are not referred to within the RfR, although during discussions as part of the Case Management Conference (CMC) on 29 September 2023 the Council confirmed that there was not a design reason for refusal, rather a focus on scale. I am not aware of any other concerns to those raised within the RfR and the Council's SoC and these provide the scope of the main landscape matters relevant to the determination of this appeal, which this PoE addresses. For clarity, I consider these to be:

- Firstly, is the design appropriately conceived and responsive to its context?;
- Secondly, would the appeal proposals have an adverse effect on the landscape on the character and appearance of the countryside?; and
- Third, would the appeal proposals 'have a poor and incongruous relationship with the existing settlement appearing prominent in the open countryside'?

STRUCTURE OF EVIDENCE

- 1.14 My written evidence comprises plans, key viewpoint images and appendices containing selected material drawn from the application documents, reproduced and adapted for the Inquiry, and supplemented with some additional photographs, plans and published material of relevance to landscape matters.
- 1.15 My evidence is to be read alongside and complements that of Mr David Bainbridge of Savills, who gives planning evidence for the Appellant in respect of RfR 2.

OTHER RELEVANT BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 1.16 The landscape issues relevant to this case are adequately summarised in a few relevant background documents. Therefore, rather than replicate previous documentation within numerous appendices with this statement, my evidence should be read in conjunction with the following key documents:
- EDP's 2022 Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) (Report Ref. edp4579_r005a) (**CD: A17**). This provides an introduction to the appeal site and its landscape context along with an appraisal of the appeal proposals. In the interests of brevity, I do not intend to wholly repeat either a description of the proposals, nor of the appeal site and its setting, in this PoE. I will, however, provide my own consideration of the appeal site and the proposals, and will refer to plans and appendices contained in the LVA as appropriate;
 - EDP's 2023 LVA Addendum ((Report Ref. edp4579_r010a) (**CD: B35**). This provides a further consideration of the appeal site and its context, being informed by a site visit undertaken during winter months when trees were not in leaf;
 - The Design and Access Statement (**CD: A14**);
 - CBC's Delegated Officer Report (Ref. 22/02866/OUT) (**CD: D45**);

- The application drawings and documentation submitted as part of the planning application; and
- In addition to the above, I have included some new material for the purposes of this appeal, which will be cross-referenced as appropriate.

1.17 In showing the effects of existing screening at the appeal site frontage, and in order to inform my evidence further, the Appellant has produced Verified View wireline imagery from Ploughley Road and also from PRow No. 105/6/20 (provided at my **Appendix EDP 1**) and contained within this document. These have been produced in accordance with LI Technical Guidance Note TGN 06/19 (**CD: L2**) in order to illustrate a typical viewing experience within the local context. The wirelines have been prepared using the Parameter Plan: Scale (Ref. 32948. 9601) (**CD: A6**)

Section 2

The Landscape and Visual Baseline

- 2.1 Before considering the key issues raised by the Council, I look at the value and sensitivity of the appeal site and question whether it exhibits some features of the published Landscape Character Type (LCT) to which it relates.
- 2.2 In this section, I consider the appeal site and its context, which I find generally to be adequately described in the LVA and elsewhere. I do not repeat detailed descriptions at length here but provide a brief 'scene setting' exercise which is helpful to my analysis later on.
- 2.3 My desk study was undertaken in September 2023, then supplemented with a site visit undertaken on 14 September 2023, and again on 17 October 2023, and the information derived from it is discussed below. The location of the appeal site is shown at LVA Plan EDP 1 (Landscape Designations Plan) which, for ease, I include at my **Appendix EDP 2**.

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING CONTEXT

- 2.4 LVA: Plan EDP 1 (Landscape Designations Plan) shows the environmental planning context of the appeal site with regard to landscape and visual issues, planning or landscape designations that may impose various levels of constraint on new development and contribute to an understanding of the extent to which the landscape is valued, including the following.

Landscape Matters

- The appeal site does not lie within any nationally designated landscapes such as National Parks or AONB;
- The appeal site does not lie within a locally designated landscape;
- The appeal site does not have strong physical or functional links with a designated landscape. Furthermore, the appeal site is not located within an identified gap, is not identified as being important with regards to the setting of the village and functions only as agricultural land adjacent to the settlement boundary; and
- The appeal site has no recreational value due to it being privately owned and inaccessible to the public.

Heritage Matters

- The closest conservation area to the appeal site is located within Bicester, some 2.5km from the appeal site. There is no intervisibility between the appeal site and the conservation area;

- There is one Scheduled Monument to the north-west of the appeal site (Wretchwick deserted medieval settlement), however, there is no relationship between it and the appeal site in landscape terms; and
- Listed buildings within the local context are generally clustered within the centre of Ambrosden, from which there are no views of the appeal site. Closer to the appeal site, there are two further listed buildings at Wretchwick Farm, however, mature tree cover on Ploughley Road serves to prevent any intervisibility.

Ecology and Arboricultural Matters

- There are no ecological designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Special Areas for Conservation (SAC) on, or immediately adjacent to the appeal site;
- There are no Tree Preservation Order (TPO) trees on or adjacent to the site;
- There are no blocks of ancient woodland within or immediately adjacent to the appeal site; and
- There is one veteran tree located on the northern boundary of the appeal site.

2.5 With the exception of a veteran tree at the appeal site boundary, the appeal site is therefore substantially unconstrained in an environmental sense, and particularly so in a landscape sense. There is nothing that would indicate to me any particularly elevated value in landscape terms. I discuss sensitivity below.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER BASELINE

National Character Assessment

2.6 At the broadest scale, the appeal site lies within the Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area (NCA 108). I support the assessment set out in the LVA that while the description is broadly representative of the wider landscape, for the scale of development proposed, the description of landscape character undertaken at the sub-regional level is more relevant in establishing the landscape resource baseline. I defer therefore to the more local landscape character assessments detailed below.

Local Landscape Character Assessment

2.7 At the local level, an assessment of the local landscape context is provided within the Oxford Wildlife and Landscape Study, undertaken in 2004, and also within the Cherwell District Landscape Assessment, which was undertaken in 1995.

2.8 As set out within the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) (**CD: G6**), the Cherwell District Landscape Assessment, undertaken in 1995, is not considered to provide an up-to-date assessment of local landscape character. Furthermore, the more recent assessment undertaken in 2004, within the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS), covers a similar area to the 1995 assessment. As such, the most recent assessment of local landscape character is considered most relevant, being contained within OWLS, which

defines the appeal site as being within the Clay Vale LCT and Pasture Hills LCT. Both are accurately described within the LVA, however, for ease, I summarise the key characteristics below, with my own commentary.

2.9 The key characteristics of the Clay Vale LCT include (with my comments):

- *“A flat, low-lying landform”*. The appeal site is located on gently undulating landform, with the edge of Ambrosden being seen in local views from breaks in the roadside hedgerow on Ploughley Road as being on higher ground. Land immediately to the north of the appeal site is considered to be ‘low-lying’;
- *“Mixed land uses, dominated by pastureland, with small to medium-sized hedged fields”*. The appeal site comprises medium sized arable fields and, while it may be perceived as pasture at certain times of the year, is used for hay crop and not permanent pasture;
- *“Many mature oak, ash and willow hedgerow trees”*; There are no trees within the open field parcels of the appeal site. There are, however, mature trees within the field boundaries of the appeal site and, further north, mature oak trees are present within hedgerows;
- *“Dense, tree-lined streams and ditches dominated by pollarded willows and poplars”*. There are no watercourses within the appeal site. However, a watercourse is located approximately 100m to the north of the appeal site boundary, though there are relatively few trees along this hedge line; and
- *“Small to medium-sized nucleated villages”*. Ambrosden is perceived as a medium-sized nucleated village.

2.10 As set out within the LVA, the definition of the cultural patterns within the LCT is also useful, stating that (with my emphasis where relevant to the appeal site and its context):

“The field pattern is largely characterised by small to medium-sized fields, with larger arable fields around Chalgrove and Little Milton and improved grassland around Nether Worton. It is enclosed by a well-defined network of intact hedges dominated by hawthorn and elm. In some areas, there are significant drainage ditches adjacent to hedges. Characteristic landscape elements throughout are the mature, densely scattered hedgerow trees of oak, ash with some willow and field maple. Trees are more prominent within hedges bordering roadsides and ditches. The tree cover associated with hedgerows and watercourses imparts a wooded appearance to the landscape, filters views and creates a sense of enclosure.”

2.11 I would largely agree with the LVA that *“the site is generally representative of the Clay Vale LCT”* (paragraph 4.14), in that the appeal site boundaries exhibit some features of the wider LCT. However, I would emphasise that characteristics such as well-treed hedgerows that create a ‘wooded appearance to the landscape’ are more apparent within the lower-lying land between the appeal site and the A41 and, as I set out below, that the appeal site itself exhibits few of these characteristics.

2.12 The key characteristics of the Pasture Hills LCT (with my comments):

- *“Prominent hills standing out from the surrounding landscape”*. While there are ‘prominent hills’ within the surrounding context, namely Graven Hill to the west and Arnott Hill to the south of Ambrosden, the appeal site itself is located on undulating terrain and is not considered to contribute to this characteristic;
- *“Small fields, predominantly grassland, enclosed by prominent hedges”*. The appeal site comprises arable fields, being enclosed by mature hedgerows that are perceived, in local views, as contributing to a maturity of the landscape, particularly on lower land immediately to the north of the appeal site boundary;
- *“Small woodland copses and scrubby vegetation including gorse scrub”*. There is no woodland cover within the appeal site, with vegetation largely being limited to the appeal site boundary where mature hedgerows, scrub and a few hedgerow trees are found; and
- *“A sense of remoteness with no settlements”*. The appeal site is influenced by the settlement edge of Ambrosden, which can be seen in views from the immediate context. Furthermore, the appeal site’s proximity to commercial uses to the north, and vehicle movements on the A41, adversely affect the sense of both remoteness and tranquillity.

2.13 As above, the description of the cultural pattern of the landscape of the Pasture Hills LCT is also useful, which states that *“The field pattern is characterised by small, regularly-shaped fields, enclosed by tall hedges of hawthorn, blackthorn and occasionally elm. There is generally a strong network of hedges linked to the small woods adding structure to the landscape. Many mature oak and ash hedgerow trees, particularly along roads, reinforce this network. However, where arable land is the dominant land use, the hedges are low and more intensively maintained”*. In contrast to this, the management of the land immediately to the north is currently less managed and, therefore, there is a greater sense of enclosure arising from a greater maturity within the landscape features to the north of the appeal site.

Forces for Change

2.14 Of further use within published documentation for both the Clay Vale LCT and Pasture Hills LCT are a number of ‘Forces for Change’, as set out below with my own commentary:

Clay Vale LCT

- *“The hedgerow network is generally in good condition, except where arable farming is dominant and the hedges are either gappy or absent altogether. Hedgerow trees are also sparser in these arable areas”*: With regards to hedgerows, EDP’s Ecological appraisal (**CD: A15**) identified that *“none of the hedgerows were found to qualify as ‘important’ under the Wildlife and Landscape Criteria of the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, however, a single hedgerow, H7, is considered to be species-rich”* (paragraph 3.12). In landscape terms, hedgerows within the appeal site are perceived as mature, with some scattered oak trees;

- “The impact of residential development is generally low. There is some development, but it usually integrates with the existing village pattern. By contrast, industrial, commercial and residential development on the fringes of larger settlements such as north Banbury and Chalgrove can be visually intrusive...”. There is no mention of Ambrosden here. However, commercial development is now also found to the north of the appeal site, with clear views of it from the surrounding landscape context which, in combination with the appeal site’s relationship with the settlement edge, results in a reduction in remoteness and tranquillity;
- “The M40, and its associated infrastructure, has had an impact on the otherwise tranquil pastoral landscape. A row of pylons crossing the area to the north of Waterperry is highly visible and locally intrusive”. This is not relevant to the appeal site and its context;
- “Chalgrove airfield and its associated buildings impact on the surrounding flat open landscape”. There is no relationship between the appeal site and Chalgrove airfield and
- “Occasionally, the large agricultural buildings in the more intensively farmed areas appear out of character”. This is not relevant to the appeal site and its context.

Pasture Hills LCT

- “Hedges are becoming overgrown and gappy in many places, and need sympathetic management. Where arable farming dominates, the hedges are intensively maintained and have been removed or replaced in places by fences”: Similar to the above, hedgerows at the appeal site boundary have suffered to some degree through agricultural practices, though they are generally perceived as mature feature within the local context; and
- “A lack of settlements means that there is almost no impact from built development. A few agricultural buildings have been converted to housing, but this has generally been achieved sympathetically even though appropriate local materials haven’t always been used. Additional screen planting has also helped them to integrate with the surrounding landscape”. This is not relevant to the appeal site and its context.

2.15 Overall, the LVA (**CD: A17**) finds that *“The landscape character of the site is generally representative of the Clay Vale LCT”*, and that *“The eastern extent of the site is also considered to be representative of the Pasture Hills LCT”* (paragraph 4.14). While I would agree that this is true for the appeal site and its context, there are few features within the main body of the appeal site itself which contribute to the wider landscape structure, largely due to the appeal site being an open arable field parcel. Furthermore, given the age of the published documentation, judgements contained within it do not include the effects of recent developments such as the commercial units to the north, which serve to reduce the sense of remoteness. I discuss the influence of surrounding uses further below.

2.16 The LVA goes on to consider a number of management guidelines for the LCT. I review these points later in **Section 3** when considering whether the appeal proposals are appropriately conceived and responsive to the local context.

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2022)

- 2.17 A recent assessment of landscape character was undertaken by The Environment Partnership in September 2022 (**CD: J44**) as part of the evidence base for the Council's Local Plan Review. It identified the appeal site within 'LS BIC4: Land North of Ambrosden', stating that *"this assessment unit comprises agricultural land characterised by medium to large scale agricultural fields. The northern assessment unit boundary is formed by the A41, the eastern boundary by the B4011, the southern boundary by the existing settlement edge of Ambrosden and the Bicester Military Railway, and the western boundary by the Bicester Military Railway at Graven Hill. Ploughley Road bisects the parcel. The landform is gently undulating."*
- 2.18 It identified a larger swathe of land to the north of Ambrosden as having a moderate sensitivity to residential development. This aligns with the sensitivity defined within the LVA (**CD: A17**).

THE APPEAL SITE AND ITS CONTEXT

- 2.19 The appeal site's location and site boundaries are illustrated variously in the application material (location also shown on **Proof Plan BC 1**). The appeal site is described at paragraphs 2.5 to 2.15 of the LVA, which considers in detail the context, topography and vegetation of the site, along with its key landscape features. I concur with the description provided.
- 2.20 I consider the main components of the appeal site and its context in relation to my evidence to be as follows:
- The appeal site comprises three field parcels of poor semi-improved grassland and is currently used as arable land;
 - The appeal site is bound by mature hedgerows that are often well maintained and, though there are a number of mature trees within the immediate landscape to the north, the appeal site itself contains, and is bounded by, a few mature trees;
 - The eastern boundary of the appeal site is formed by a mature hedgerow, with a greater number of mature trees within the south-eastern corner;
 - Residential development is a common characteristic of the local context; the appeal site's western boundary is formed by Ploughley Road and, at the edge of the settlement, by properties on Briar Furlong. Here, existing properties benefit from some visual screening afforded by mature trees, though being more apparent during winter months;
 - Furthermore, although a number of mature trees are present at the southern boundary, following the alignment of PRow no. 105/6/20, residential properties create a relatively hard settlement edge, albeit with some softening afforded by mature ash trees (these may succumb to Ash Dieback in future years);

- Ploughley Road runs along the western boundary of the appeal site, being well treed on its western side such that views are generally contained to the immediate setting, and with a mature field boundary to its eastern side. This hedgerow is mature and curtails many views, though its regular management can result in some views towards the settlement edge of Ambrosden on higher ground. The character of Ploughley Road is informed by urban uses, including road signage, neighbouring built form and metalled footways, though mature hedgerows can curtail views in some areas;
- The A41 runs west to east approximately 250m from the appeal site at its closest point. There are few, if any, obvious views of the appeal site from this busy, well-treed, vehicular corridor. Immediately to the north of the A41, large commercial units have been constructed in the last five years, materially altering the character of the local context, having an adverse effect on both wildness and tranquillity within the local context; and
- To the north of the A41 and the new commercial uses, a large housing allocation (Bicester 12) will see the edge of Bicester move further east. In combination with commercial uses, vehicular movements and activities associated with the Ministry of Defence (MOD), this will further reduce the sense of remoteness and tranquillity within the appeal site.

2.21 For completeness, I consider the appeal site context, being the area in which the appeal site may be perceived, or where landscape and visual effects may be experienced, is aligned with the Zone of Primary Visibility shown on my **Proof Plan BC 2**.

2.22 With regards to the appeal site's wider landscape context, I concur with the statement within the LVA (paragraph 2.7), in that *"Within the wider context, Arncott hill, a local high point, is located to the south-east of the site, reaching 111m aOD along PRoW ON/110/10/10. From the hill there are expansive views, but the site isn't discernible due to the relative distance from the site and the intervening landform around Ambrosden. Another local high point visible from within the site in the surrounding area is Graven Hill to the west, reaching 124m aOD. While there is a visual connection between Graven Hill and the site, this area on the south-eastern part of Graven Hill is not publicly accessible."*

2.23 Overall, I agree with the statements included within the LVA and following my own visit to the appeal site during July, September, and again in October 2023, I have included two current images (**Images EDP 2.1** and **2.2**) that represent the character and condition of the appeal site.



Image EDP 2.1: The appeal site, shown here in the foreground, is open agricultural land. Land immediately to the north appears well treed, although views of large commercial units to the north of the A41 can be seen, which along with vehicle movements within the local context, adversely affects wildness and tranquillity within the appeal site.



Image EDP 2.2: The proposed site access to the appeal site is at a point where urban influences are apparent, including road signage and a well-maintained amenity grass verge in the immediate context, and also views of the existing settlement edge from breaks in roadside vegetation

PLANNING POLICY MATTERS

- 2.24 The latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published by the Government in September 2023. Like its predecessor, the new Framework continues to identify a hierarchy of landscapes - albeit not in express terms - with differing values in the planning balance:

- Paragraph 174 (b) reminds us that all landscapes have some intrinsic value that should be ‘recognised’ in decision-taking and when establishing planning policies;
- Greater weight is attached to ‘Valued Landscapes’. Paragraph 174 (a) states that such landscapes should be protected and enhanced. Valued Landscapes are not defined in the Framework but case law and recent LI guidance has provided some clarification that Valued Landscapes are not the same as designated landscapes; and
- Greater weight again is attached to nationally designated landscapes. The Framework's paragraph 176 directs that: *“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.”*

2.25 The status of landscapes in this hierarchy affects the weight to be afforded in the planning balance to land use change, such that (at the top end) there is a presumption against permission for major development in nationally designated landscapes, except in exceptional circumstances (paragraph 177). By the same token, change to undesignated landscapes, or landscapes with limited demonstrable value, should weigh least in the planning balance.

Local Policy Context

2.26 The relevant policies for landscape matters mentioned within the decision notice are reviewed below.

Adopted Local Plan (Published)

2.27 The adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011–2031 Part 1 (adopted July 2015) includes overarching general development policies. There are no policies that are specifically related to the site; however, the following relevant policies are referred to within the decision notice:

- Policy ESD 13: ‘Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement’, which with particular reference to urban fringe locations, notes that *“Development will be expected to respect and enhance local landscape character, securing appropriate mitigation where damage to local landscape character cannot be avoided.”*;
- Policy ESD 15: ‘The Character of the Built and Historic Environment’ states that *“New development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design. All new development will be required to meet high design standards. Where development is in the vicinity of any of the District's distinctive natural or historic assets, delivering high quality design that complements the asset will be essential”*. Further, the policy text continues to provide a number of more detailed considerations, including that new development should *“Contribute positively to an area's character and identity by creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness and respecting local topography and landscape features...”*; and
- Policy Villages 2 ‘Distributing Growth across the Rural Area’ states that *“In identifying and considering sites, particular regard will be given to... whether significant adverse landscape impacts could be avoided”*.

2.28 In summary, the appeal site has no designatory status within the adopted development plan. As such, I consider next whether the appeal site has any identified value, exhibiting attributes that take it beyond mere countryside.

LANDSCAPE VALUE AND SENSITIVITY

2.29 ‘Having value’ and ‘being valued’ (in the context of paragraph 174 (a)) are not one and the same. The NPPF does not provide a methodology for the assessment of landscape value; however, in *Stroud DC v SSCLG (2015) EWHC 488 (Admin) (CD4/7)*, Mr Justice Ouseley observed at (18) that to be ‘valued’, a piece of land should exhibit “*demonstrable physical attributes*”, taking it beyond mere countryside¹.

2.30 It is clear then, that simply by virtue of being a rural land parcel outside of the existing settlement boundaries, and having some features of value, is not the same as possessing landscape value worthy of the ‘protect and enhance’ status afforded landscapes under paragraph 174(a) of the NPPF.

2.31 The matter was considered by the PINS Inspector, Neil Pope, in the St Austell decision (Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/A/14/2222789) (CD4/14):

“26. While some residents consider the appeal site to be an attractive area of countryside, all landscapes have some value. (...) There is greater force in the appellant’s argument that unless some objective landscape assessment is undertaken, arguments concerning valued landscapes could be applied to all sites where development is proposed. This in turn would be likely to frustrate the Government’s objective to boost significantly the supply of housing.” (my emphasis)

2.32 The LVA does not expressly define value and susceptibility for the appeal site, summarising receptor sensitivity at paragraph 4.19 (this table appears to incorrectly state the overall ‘value’, when I consider this to be concluding the overall sensitivity). Notably, the scope of the LVA and its methodology, was not challenged by the Council during the application. However, in assisting the conclusions made, an assessment against the criteria set out within the Landscape Institute’s ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’ (**CD: L5**) would perhaps assist in informing any conclusions made.

2.33 GLVIA3 (**CD: L1**) and the 2021 LI Technical Note TGN 02-21 (**CD: L5**) assist in delivering a framework for an objective landscape assessment of value – this is a useful exercise for my evidence.

2.34 In undertaking this appraisal, Box 5.1 on page 84 of GLVIA3 and Table 1 of TGN 02-21 identify criteria relevant to the judgements about landscape value – for my appraisal I have used the criteria from the Technical Note, including the examples of indicators of landscape value, this being an evolution of the GLVIA criteria. These criteria are reproduced in

¹ Following the Stroud case, it is commonly accepted that a landscape should exhibit demonstrable physical attributes taking it beyond mere countryside. Within Paragraph 174 of the NPPF (2023), there is requirement is to protect and enhance valued landscapes in a manner commensurate with their identified quality in a development plan. Notably, the appeal site is not identified within the development plan, or any published document, as a valued landscape.

Table EDP 2.1, with my observations alongside, based on published material and from my own field assessment. For each of the nine criteria, based on the indicators of landscape value included within TGN 02-21, I judge the site and local area on the basis of a range from ‘poor’, through ‘ordinary’ to ‘good’ in terms of the performance against these criteria and consider whether I consider the appeal site to exhibit ‘demonstrable physical attributes’ that takes it beyond mere countryside.

Table EDP 2.1: Consideration of Landscape Value

| GLVIA/TGN Factor | Author’s Observations |
|---|--|
| | The Appeal Site and it’s Context |
| <p>Natural Heritage: Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest, which contribute positively to the landscape.</p> | <p>Ordinary. While I would agree that the landscape character of the appeal site context exhibits some features of the wider LCT, though largely at its boundaries, there are few features within the main body of the appeal site itself, which contribute to the wider landscape structure.</p> <p>EDP’s Ecological Appraisal (CD: A15) found that (paragraph 5.19) <i>“The Site is dominated by three fields poor semi-improved grassland with areas of tall ruderals, scattered scrub and marshy grassland towards the field margins. These are of site-level ecological value. The most ecologically valuable habitats on the Site are the hedgerows and broadleaved scattered trees which are considered to be of local-level importance given their maturity, botanical diversity and location within the local ecological network. Hedgerows also have the status of a Priority Habitat although none of the hedgerows within the Site are considered to be ‘Important’.”</i></p> <p>To the north of the appeal site, mature trees and hedgerows do provide some contribution to the sense of an aged landscape. The appeal site or immediate context contains no sensitive features of natural heritage importance.</p> |
| <p>Cultural Heritage: Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest, which contribute positively to the landscape.</p> | <p>Ordinary. As set out within EDP’s Archaeological and Heritage Assessment (CD: A11), (paragraph S3) <i>“With regard to archaeological remains, based on an analysis of the known resources, this assessment has identified that the Site has the potential for late prehistoric, Roman, medieval, and post-medieval deposits to survive within the Site. If present, these will mostly likely relate to historic agricultural practices, such as ditches and plough furrows. Such remains would be of low value, and it is unlikely that they would be of such significance that they would preclude development of the Site, subject to the implementation of appropriate mitigation strategy, if necessary.”</i></p> |
| <p>Landscape Condition: Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure.</p> | <p>Ordinary to Good. The appeal site itself is ordinary, being poor semi-improved grassland. However, hedgerows which bound the appeal site, with the occasional mature tree provide a greater contribution to the overall landscape structure. To the north of the appeal site, on lower ground, a greater presence of hedgerows and mature oak trees contribute to a mature structure that is less prominent within the appeal site. However, these elements are adversely affected by detracting features such as the commercial units to the north.</p> |

| GLVIA/TGN Factor | Author's Observations |
|--|--|
| The Appeal Site and it's Context | |
| <p>Associations: Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts.</p> | <p>Poor. There are no known associations relating to the appeal site or its context.</p> |
| <p>Distinctiveness: Landscape that has a strong sense of identity.</p> | <p>Ordinary. The site is relatively unremarkable, in a perceptual or physical sense. To the north of the appeal site, landscape features include hedgerows, mature trees and occasional small blocks of woodland found at the boundaries of field parcels, which provide some containment to the appeal site and contribute to the vegetated appearance of the landscape. The appeal site boundaries exhibit some features of the wider LCT, though there are few features within the main body of the appeal site itself to contribute to the wider landscape structure. From PRoW and local road corridors, the appeal site is of limited interest, and where views are possible, is perceived as open agricultural land adjacent to a settlement edge.</p> |
| <p>Recreational: Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important.</p> | <p>Poor. While there are PRoW within the immediate context of the appeal site, including Bridleway No. 105/6/20, which runs along the southern boundary of the appeal site, the appeal site is privately owned agricultural land and there is no access within it. There are no PRoW to the north of PRoW 105/6/20 and land between Ploughley Road and the A41 is inaccessible.</p> |
| <p>Perceptual (Scenic): Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense.</p> | <p>Ordinary. The landscape immediately to the north of the appeal site, and to the south of the A41, is perceived as open agricultural land with mature hedgerows and a number of mature oak trees. While this contributes to a maturity within the local context, the appeal site itself has few features to provide such contribution. In the immediate context, the settlement edge of Ambrosden, commercial uses immediately to the north of the A41 and numerous vehicle movements is such that the scenic quality of the local landscape is reduced. Furthermore, there are very few locations where the site can be seen; where the appeal site is visible, these locations are often adversely affected by neighbouring urban uses.</p> |
| <p>Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity): Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies.</p> | <p>Ordinary. The appeal site itself is open agricultural land and, while there are some mature features within the land immediately to the north, being south of the A41, the local landscape is adversely affected by vehicle movements, varying styles of built form and noise. Notably, noise from road corridors, the MOD site at Graven Hill and commercial uses to the north adversely affects tranquillity and wildness, such that the appeal site is not devoid of urban influence. The appeal site is barely perceptible in views from the surrounding context, with any views being limited to very short sections of Ploughley Road at field access points.</p> |

| GLVIA/TGN Factor | Author's Observations |
|---|--|
| | The Appeal Site and its Context |
| Functional: Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape. | Ordinary. The appeal site does not form part of a designated landscape, nor does it have strong physical or functional links with a designated landscape. Furthermore, the appeal site is not located within an identified gap and functions only as agricultural land adjacent to the settlement boundary. |

- 2.35 To date, and as agreed within the SoCG, no party has suggested that the appeal site is a 'valued landscape' in the context of paragraph 174 (a) of the NPPF. Following my own review above, I conclude that the appeal site should not receive any elevated status beyond that intrinsic to all open countryside in accordance with paragraph 174 (b) of the NPPF (i.e. that it should be 'recognised') and that its intrinsic value in a landscape sense does not preclude development.
- 2.36 GLVIA3 sets out the requirements for considering sensitivity of landscape resources at paragraphs 5.39 to 5.47, and states here that "*Landscape receptors need to be assessed firstly in terms of their sensitivity, combining judgements of their susceptibility to the type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape*". The 'susceptibility' and 'value' of those receptors identified above are therefore considered below.

Scenic Quality, Tranquillity and Visual Prominence

- 2.37 I concur with the judgement within the LVA (paragraph 2.13), that "*Due to the site's location in proximity to a road and on the settlement edge, there are several detractors present within local views. Furthermore, noise from nearby roads is also audible on site. Commercial development is visually prominent to the north of the site. This has an urbanising influence on the area of undeveloped land between Ambrosden and the commercial development on the A41 and the landscape surrounding the site.*" As such, tranquillity within the appeal site is reduced due to the proximity of busy road corridors, residential built form and commercial uses which are seen in short-distance views.
- 2.38 As I discuss further below, I do not consider this a prominent site, helped by rolling topography within the wider setting, which prevents many views of it from the surrounding context; this limitation is also aided by the fact that there are very few PRoW surrounding the appeal site. In fact, I consider the appeal site to have limited interest and is barely perceptible in views from within the surrounding context. Views of the appeal site are extremely localised, generally only perceived by receptors passing along a relatively busy road (Ploughley Road), which passes the western boundary of the appeal site, and also from a PRoW, which runs along the southern boundary within a peri urban context.

Value of the Appeal Site and its Context in Landscape Terms

- 2.39 Having assessed the appeal site in accordance with GLVIA3 Box 5.1 and Table 1 of TGN 02-21 above, I conclude that the appeal site itself is no more than ordinary and does not have

any elevated landscape value or importance above the rest of the local or wider context. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the local community places special weight on the site, meaning overall the site is considered to be of no more than local landscape value. Other than the mature landscape features at its boundaries, I do not consider that the appeal site makes a notable contribution to the key characteristics of the local context. My appraisal also highlights some of the factors that make the appeal site more acceptable in landscape terms for the type of development proposed - i.e. lack of wildness/tranquillity and a lack of recreational opportunity or cultural associations.

- 2.40 Overall, I consider the value of the appeal site and its context in landscape terms to be medium (for ease, I include the LVA methodology at my **Appendix EDP 3**, which provides the definition of a medium value).

Susceptibility of the Landscape

- 2.41 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. Whilst there are some higher quality elements within the appeal site, namely the mature landscape features at the northern site, the settlement edge location, proximity to commercial uses and busy road corridors, means that perceptually the appeal site is impacted by the proximal housing and built form. The appeal site is located within a transitional landscape, with land to the north of it exhibiting features that are more representative of the wider LCT and the appeal site itself being largely featureless, located adjacent to a relatively hard urban edge.
- 2.42 Although there are some mature trees at the northern edge of Ambrosden, where views are possible, the current settlement edge being perceived as quite hard, particularly during winter months. I consider that the landscape of the appeal site itself is of low to medium susceptibility to the change proposed, while the appeal site context, aligning with the ZPV shown on **Proof Plan BC 2**, and the wider LCT is of medium susceptibility (Thresholds are provided in my **Appendix EDP 3**).

Overall Landscape Sensitivity

- 2.43 Using EDP's methodology, the same methodology that formed the basis of the LVA (**CD: A17**), my own analysis of the sensitivity of the landscape resource, based upon the above description of the local context and my site field work is as follows:
- Sensitivity of the landscape features of the appeal site: Medium;
 - Sensitivity of the appeal site landscape character: Medium; and
 - Sensitivity of the appeal site context: Medium.
- 2.44 An overall medium sensitivity of the appeal site and its context arises from a 'medium' value and a 'low to medium' susceptibility to the type of change proposed.

- 2.45 My conclusion of the appeal site's overall medium sensitivity aligns with the sensitivity considered by the LVA.

VISUAL BASELINE

- 2.46 Paragraphs 5.8 to 5.17 of the LVA provide an appraisal of the visual receptors likely to be affected by the appeal proposals, including PRow users, road users including pedestrians and residents. I have reviewed this appraisal, in particular the Zone of Primary (ZPV) drawings and the 16 representative viewpoints. I provide my own consideration of the ZPV, being the zone where views of the appeal proposals would be close-ranging and open, whether in the public or private domain, on foot, cycling or in a vehicle, at my **Proof Plan BC 2**.
- 2.47 A summary of the visual context of the appeal site from all angles is provided at paragraph 5.6 of the LVA and based on my own site visits, I find that the description of views and key receptors is broadly accurate. However, I have identified that the LVA only assessed vehicle users on Ploughley Road and did not specifically identify pedestrians as a separate user group. I consider this further below.
- 2.48 A total of 16 representative viewpoints are provided by the LVA; although the locations of these viewpoints were presented to the LPA, as stated at paragraph 1.11 of the LVA, *“Consultation with the LPA was initiated in early 2022 to sign off proposed viewpoint locations. This was unsuccessful due to high workloads within the landscape department of the LPA.”*
- 2.49 I have not identified any additional photoviewpoint locations to those set out within the LVA Addendum (**CD: B35**). As illustrated at **Proof Plan BC 2**, the visual envelope of the appeal site is extremely localised – the ZPV, being an area where views of the appeal proposals would be close-ranging and open, whether in the public or private domain, on foot, cycling or in a vehicle. Notably, the area that I define as the ‘ZPV’ is slightly larger than that defined within the LVA.
- 2.50 In addition to this photography, I provide a number of wirelines of the appeal proposals, showing the massing of the development parameters in typical views from the local context (Refer to my **Appendix EDP 1**). These have provided to illustrate the typical viewing experience from Ploughley Road and also from PRow No. 105/6/20 to consider whether *“this part of the countryside serves as a visually significant landscape buffer between Industrial and residential urban areas”* as set out within the Council’s SoC (paragraph 2.7) (**CD: G3**)
- 2.51 Following my own appraisal of the appeal site and its context, I consider the key viewing experiences within the local context to be those from Ploughley Road and also from PRow No. 105/6/20, which runs along the southern boundary of the appeal site. Beyond these areas, I have not identified any views from the wider context where the appeal site would be deemed an identifiable component of the view.

From Ploughley Road

- 2.52 My **Appendix EDP 4** provides a set of images which illustrate the current user experience for receptors travelling north and south along Ploughley Road (the location of this imagery is provided at **Proof Plan BC 2**). As can be seen, for the most part, views from Ploughley Road are extremely limited, with views curtailed by mature hedgerows, and often informed by existing urban elements. During winter months, as illustrated within the photography included within the LVA Addendum (**CD: B35**), there may be some increased intervisibility with the settlement edge of Ambrosden and the landscape to the north.
- 2.53 From within the village (**PVP BC 1**) the appeal site is not visible, and it is only at the existing field gate access (**PVP BC 2**) where views of it become apparent. Here, the appeal site is seen as open agricultural land at the settlement edge, with the field gate access enabling views of commercial built form to the north of the A41. Heading northwards along a metalled footpath, views are then limited to the immediate context by a mature hedgerow aligning Ploughley Road. Notably, the mowing regime for the roadside verge extends to the point of the proposed access of the appeal site (refer to **Proof Plan BC 1**), extending a peri-urban character further north along Ploughley Road than the existing field gate access to the appeal site. Views into land on the eastern side of Ploughley Road only become apparent at another field gate access much closer to the junction with the A41 (**PVP BC 3**).
- 2.54 For receptors travelling south, views are again largely limited to field gate access points. However, from the A41, where commercial built form, lighting and traffic signals urbanise the immediate context, filtered views of the settlement edge of Ambrosden are possible (**PVP BC 4**). These views are quickly lost due to the maturity of the hedgerow along Ploughley Road, again limiting views to field gate access points (**PVP BC 5**). As the receptor travels south along a metalled footway, the landscape to the east, including the appeal site, is only seen in heavily filtered views and from few sections of the footway (**PVP BC 6**). Closer to the appeal site, illustrated at **PVP BC 7**, views to the east remain limited, though urban influences become apparent in the view, including road signage, well maintained roadside verges and an 'Ambrosden: Please Drive Carefully' sign.
- 2.55 For receptors travelling in both directions, with the exception of a view at the existing field gate into the appeal site on Ploughley Road, I do not consider the appeal site to form an important part of the appreciation of the approach to the village. Views along Ploughley Road are curtailed by a mature hedgerow and I have not identified any 'significant views into open countryside' as suggested within the Council's Statement of Case (paragraph 2.6) (**CD: G3**). There may be some increased visibility during winter months, such that there is a perception of open countryside to the north of Ambrosden. However, I do not consider winter visibility to amount to a 'significant view into open countryside'. Furthermore, where winter views of the appeal site may be possible, it would be seen in the context of existing built form at the edge of Ambrosden, as illustrated within the photography included within the LVA Addendum (**CD: B35**).

From the PRoW to the South of the Site

- 2.56 At the southern boundary of the appeal site, PRoW No. 105/6/20 runs east to west from Ploughley Road. The character of the route, where it runs along the southern boundary of the site, is enclosed with numerous urban elements characterising the view.

- 2.57 For receptors travelling west, although there are some heavily filtered views to the north of Ambrosden (**PVP BC 9**), urban clutter along this PRow adversely affects the experience for users; a combination of views of private garden, domestic boundary treatments and the tipping of garden waste at the boundary of the site all serve to enclose and urbanise the route. For the most part, views along the route, where it runs along the appeal site boundary, are enclosed, as illustrated at **PVPs BC 9 and 10**.
- 2.58 For receptors travelling east, views along the PRow are much the same, being enclosed and characterised by urban influences. Where the route then opens out to open countryside, at the south easternmost corner of the appeal site, the outlook is less urban, though large commercial uses are visible in middle-distance views (**PVP BC 11**).
- 2.59 In consideration of the viewing experiences within the local context, noting that I do not consider the appeal site itself to exhibit demonstrable physical attributes taking it beyond mere countryside, I have not found any views in which the appeal site would be considered to be important in providing ‘visually significant views into the open countryside’, as set out within the Council’s SoC (paragraph 2.7) (**CD: G3**). Furthermore, where views of it are possible, it is seen in the context of the existing settlement.

SUMMARY IN RESPECT OF THE LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE

- 2.60 With regards to the landscape and visual context of the appeal site, the key points on which I draw later in my evidence in relation to the appeal site are:
- The appeal site is undesignated in landscape, ecological and heritage terms;
 - The appeal site does not form a prominent or important part of the appreciation of the wider landscape. In fact, the appeal site is seen as having limited interest and is barely perceptible in views from within the surrounding context;
 - I do not consider the appeal site to contribute to any ‘visually significant views into open countryside’, as contended by the LPA;
 - Views of the appeal site are generally only perceived by receptors passing along a relatively busy road (Ploughley Road), which passes the western boundary of the appeal site, and also from a PRow which runs along the southern boundary within a peri urban context;
 - It is agreed that the appeal site is not a Valued Landscape under the provisions of the Framework; paragraph 174. I consider the appeal site and its context to exhibit a medium overall sensitivity to development, which arises from a medium value and a low to medium susceptibility; and
 - I consider the appeal site to exhibit few features of the wider LCT, though land to the north of it is more established. I concur with the LVA that *“there are a number of features which detract from the site’s rural appearance, namely the adjacent residential developments along Hawthorn Road and Ploughley Road, commercial units to the north-west and both Ploughley Road and the A41.”*

Section 3

Analysis of the Issues

ASSESSING LANDSCAPE CHANGE - SOME FUNDAMENTALS

- 3.1 All residential development on ‘greenfield’ land, such as the appeal site, involves a change to the appeal site itself. All too often this change is assessed predominantly (or even exclusively) in terms of ‘what we see’, focusing on loss of openness and change to visual character, which is presumed harmful where development replaces open space. I accept that there will be both loss of open character and some change to visual character (and correspondingly, harm to those dimensions of landscape).
- 3.2 The concept of ‘landscape’, however, embraces much more than its open character and appearance. The European Landscape Convention (ELC), to which the UK is a signatory, defines landscape thus:
- *“Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.*
- 3.3 The GLVIA3 (**CD: L1**), paragraph 2.4, reminds us that the importance of the ELC definition is that it:
- *“...moves beyond the idea that landscape is only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity”.*
- 3.4 Landscape assessment requires that proposed changes are assessed holistically in two important respects:
- First, in terms of all dimensions of the landscape resource. Those other dimensions include whether the site has historical or cultural relevance, its habitats, its landscape fabric and its long-term management. Frequently we find that loss of openness and change to visual character are counterbalanced by neutral or even positive impacts on other dimensions of the landscape resource (such as enhancements to biodiversity, or mitigation of existing built form); and
 - Second, by recognising that the landscape is not just the open land beyond the settlement boundary (on which published landscape character assessments usually focus) but includes the settlements themselves. This affects the assessment of whether the ‘change’ brought about by a development proposal is appropriate with regards to the landscape and/or settlement edge context.

ISSUE 1: IS THE DESIGN OF THE APPEAL PROPOSALS APPROPRIATELY CONCEIVED AND RESPONSIVE TO ITS CONTEXT?

- 3.5 In order to consider the effects arising from the appeal proposals, with reference to my review of the landscape and visual baseline of the appeal site and its context, I consider

below the design of the proposals and whether it is appropriately conceived and responsive to its context.

The Appeal Proposals: Design and Effects on Landscape Fabric

- 3.6 Related to the appropriateness of the appeal site in a spatial sense is the matter of whether, having identified the appeal site, the proposals for it have been handled sensitively and appropriately.
- 3.7 A key to the consideration of the appeal proposals being ‘sustainable’ (NPPF; paragraph 8), is whether the proposed masterplan is well-conceived and appropriate to its context. In this regard, I discuss below the reasons why I find the scheme responsive to its context.
- 3.8 In line with acknowledged best practice, the masterplan employs the natural infrastructure of the appeal site as a framework for the proposals; the masterplan option seeks to retain the best of the existing natural features in line with adopted policy and enables the provision of a large area of Green Infrastructure within the northern areas, which would assist in mitigating the transition from built form to open countryside.
- 3.9 A useful starting point are the landscape strategy guidelines for both the Clay Vale LCT and the Pasture Hills LCT. Section 6 of the LVA (**CD: A17**) provided the overall landscape strategy for the appeal proposals and identified landscape mitigation and landscape enhancement measures in response to the key characteristics of the Clay Vale LCT and the Pasture Hills LCT.
- 3.10 For completeness, I provide my own commentary against each of the guidelines for the Clay Vale LCT and the Pasture Hills LCT below:

Clay Vale LCT

- *“Strengthen the small-scale field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash particularly within roadside hedges”* - I concur with the LVA that *“Existing hedgerows would be enhanced through planting, which would reinstate typical field boundaries within the LCT”* (paragraph 7.13). Furthermore, the planting of new trees, scrub and wildflowers would add to the landscape fabric and biodiversity value of both the appeal site and the immediate context, as would the planted Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) features;
- *“Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type”* – As above, I consider the landscape proposals to be in accordance with this guidance;
- *“Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and, where appropriate, pollarding willows”* – The appeal site is not located adjacent to a water course and the planting of willows and ash (noting the current Ash Dieback restrictions) would be inappropriate. As set out within the LVA, the landscape strategy does, however, include *“An extensive buffer of species rich meadow is proposed on the northern and western edge of the site. This area is intended to*

enhance the biodiversity within the site and incorporates proposed tree planting to add structure and visual screening in views from the west”;

- *“Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak and ash” – As set out within the LVA, “An avenue of trees is proposed alongside the amenity space to create a soft transition between this area and the proposed area of meadow planting”;*
- *“Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture, particularly ridge and furrow, and promote arable reversion to grassland particularly on land adjacent to watercourses” – The appeal site is not considered to be permanent pasture as it has been cultivated within the last five years;*
- *“Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns, villages and farms with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside” – As set out within the LVA, “Linear tree planting is proposed alongside built form to break up the roof scape in views towards the site. This ensures the quantum of built form is broken up into smaller scale elements and integrates better into the existing landscape”; and*
- *“Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that are appropriate to this landscape type. Local building materials should be used, such as ironstone and stone tiles in the Ironstone area, limestone and stone tiles in the Upper Thames area, and bricks, or stone with bricks, and clay or stone tiles in the Vale of Aylesbury and Vale of White Horse.” – I discuss the matter of scale with regards to the evolution of the settlement of Ambrosden below. To summarise, I find the scheme responsive to its context and I do not consider the appeal proposals to be out of scale, in landscape terms, with the settlement.*

Pasture Hills LCT

3.11 The guidelines for the Pasture Hills LCT largely reflect those set out above for the Clay Vale LCT. However, for completeness, I respond to each below:

- *“Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash” - I concur with the LVA that “Existing hedgerows would be enhanced through planting, which would reinstate typical field boundaries within the LCT” (paragraph 7.13);*
- *“Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type” - As above, I consider the landscape proposals to be in accordance with this guidance;*
- *“Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak and ash” – As set out within the LVA, “An avenue*

of trees is proposed alongside the amenity space to create a soft transition between this area and the proposed area of meadow planting”; and

- *“Conserve permanent pastures and all remnants of semi-natural vegetation including the distinctive patches of gorse scrub”* – The appeal site is not considered to be permanent pasture as it has been cultivated within the last five years.

3.12 In respect of local constraints and opportunities, the LVA set out the overall landscape strategy at paragraph 6.4, setting out the strategy, mitigation measures and proposed landscape enhancements within the appeal site. This gives rise to beneficial effects within the appeal site itself, through the introduction of new landscape features that reflect the character found to the north. This addresses local character by aiding the transition from a relatively hard urban edge to one that is more organic (I deal with the proposed change in the context of the evolution of Ambrosden below).

Other Published Documentation

Village Analysis

3.13 In considering the principal and scale of development within this context, a useful ‘village analysis’ was undertaken by WYG as part of the evidence base for the Council’s unmet needs plan (**CD: L8**), dated June 2017. It shows that the appeal site is largely unconstrained and, notably, that there are no key views, nor any middle or long-distance views across the appeal site.

3.14 A further analysis was undertaken within the Parish Profiles as part of the evidence base to the current local plan consultation (**CD: L9**), dated September 2021, which states that (with my emphasis):

“Ambrosden village is primarily residential and has developed in association with the surrounding land uses of Graven Hill and Arncott Hill which lie beyond the arable and pasture land use surrounding the village. The existing housing style within the village varies comprising larger properties with mature gardens in the east and a higher density of properties in the west. The south of the village is subject to ongoing residential development with views to the south beyond the development to Arncott. To the north, the topography falls beyond the village limits enabling slightly elevated long distance views over the top of vegetation barriers within the arable landscape towards Graven Hill. The historic core of the village is located in the west; the Church of St Mary the Virgin (Grade II listed) and its associated tower for a noticeable visual landmark within the historic core. There are also a number of other designated heritage assets within the historic core associated with the church that are of importance. In the west of the village, infill development has taken place amongst listed buildings although the area is still recognisable as the historic core. The village is located to the south of Akeman Street Roman Road. The west of the village is considered to be of highest sensitivity due to its historic references and the integrity of this should be protected, with particular importance placed upon the church tower. There are two Archaeological Constraint Priority Areas also within this located which should be protected as they reflect the medieval core of the village in the west.”

3.15 Within the text description of the Parish Profiles, the reference to “*slightly elevated long-distance views over the top of vegetation barriers within the arable landscape towards Graven Hill*” is reflected within the village analysis and shows views looking north-west from the western side of Ploughley Road. It is noteworthy that these views have not been identified across the appeal site.

Cherwell Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

3.16 As above, a 2022 study of landscape character provided a number of ‘guidance and recommendations’ for new development. This included that development should (with my commentary):

- “Retain hedgerows and replace hedgerow trees where possible”. I concur with the LVA that “*Existing hedgerows would be enhanced through planting, which would reinstate typical field boundaries within the LCT*” (paragraph 7.13);
- “Avoid development on higher ground, including the ridge which forms a continuation of Blackthorn Hill to the north”. Where the appeal site can be seen, it is viewed in the context of the existing settlement edge of Ambrosden. It is not located on the higher, open ridge that is associated with Blackthorn Hill;
- “Maintain the sense of separation between Ambrosden and Bicester”; The provision of new public open space alongside new tree planting, in accordance with the guidelines for the host LCT, would serve to reinforce the landscape structure immediately to the north and maintain a physical and perceptual separation with Bicester; and
- “Plan for successful integration of development in the landscape through sensitive design and siting, including use of appropriate materials and landscape mitigation to enhance sense of place”; I consider that the appeal proposals have been designed appropriately and in response to the local context. Notably, the delivery of new tree planting at the northern edge of proposed built form serves to both protect and enhance local landscape character.

Settlement Character

3.17 The extents of Ambrosden have evolved in recent years with development to the south and east of the village. With this in mind, and to consider the scale of development in this location, it is necessary to consider the historical growth of the village.

3.18 A review of historic mapping has shown that, at the turn of the 20th century (illustrated below at **Image EDP 3.1**), built form within Ambrosden was located further west than it is now, with St Mary’s Church forming the eastern most part of the town.



Image EDP 3.1: Historic map of Ambrosden (dated 1888-1913).

- 3.19 The extent of Ambrosden largely remained until the mid to late 20th century, at which time development started to move eastwards. A statement on www.oxfordshirevillages.co.uk (accessed 11.10.23) states that “*Since the Second World War Ambrosden has housed army personnel stationed at St. George's Barracks, which is at nearby Arcott and consequently much of Ambrosden now has the character of a barracks, and this is emphasised by the military family facilities at the Garrison Centre in the village.*” This is reflected in historical mapping (refer to **Image EDP 3.2**) where military uses become evident within close proximity to the appeal site.

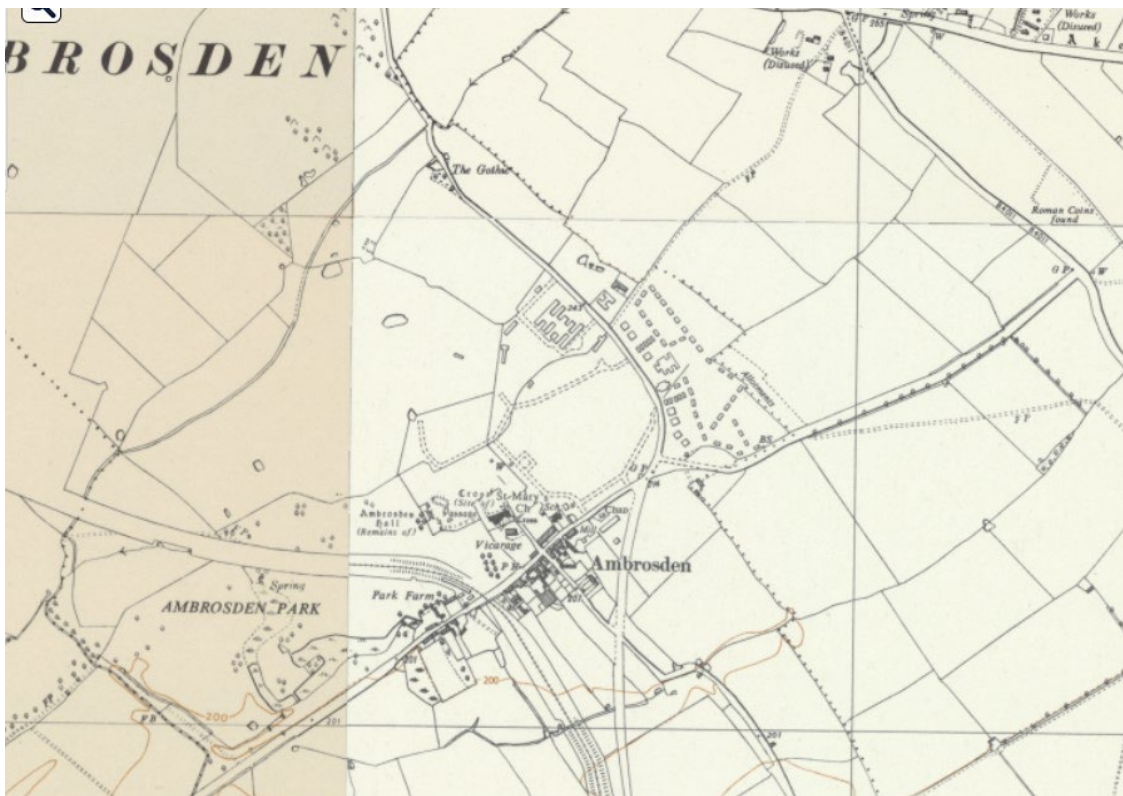


Image EDP 3.2: Historic map of Ambrosden (dated 1949-1972).

- 3.20 As such, the settlement pattern and character of Ambrosden has evolved over time, noting that since the mid-20th century, development within Ambrosden has largely been focussed on the eastern side of the village, extending along Blackthorn Road and also, in recent years, development at Ambrosden Park.
- 3.21 Further to the above, I have provided further imagery and review at my **Appendix EDP 5**, which shows the evolution of Ambrosden in the last 10 years. This has shown that the edges of Ambrosden have evolved over this time, moving beyond hard linear boundaries, particularly to the south of the village, to become more of an organic edge. An aerial image of the current extent of Ambrosden is shown at **Image EDP 3.3**, which shows the character of the military housing to the west of Ploughley Road, new housing taking place at the western edge of Ambrosden at Ambrosden Park and also the new, more organic, settlement edge to the south of Ambrosden.



Image EDP 3.3: Aerial image of Ambrosden (Dated 2022)

3.22 Generally, with regards to scale and settlement pattern, the settlement pattern of Ambrosden has moved north-east from its origins, with the current settlement edge moving beyond hard, linear boundaries. This matter was referenced within the appeal decision for the development on Land at Merton Road, to the west of Ambrosden, (Appeal Ref: APP/C3105/W/19/3228169) (**CD: M6**), where the Inspector noted that (paragraph 51) (with my emphasis):

“The Council suggests that the abrupt and stark transition from what is described as an ‘urban’ to a rural environment at the south-western end of the village is part of local distinctiveness. I am not convinced that this is a particularly beneficial characteristic that necessarily needs to be respected by new development or one which would be undermined if the proposal went ahead”.

3.23 Given the references within published documentation (see above) that “*The west of the village is considered to be of highest sensitivity due to its historic references*”, it is surprising that recent development has moved the settlement edge further west. Here, as illustrated at **Image EDP 3.4**, the user experience is that of a road corridor flanked by open countryside with long views to the settlement edge, with a staggered entrance to the village (as can be seen in my **Image EDP 3.3**).



Image EDP 3.4: View looking east towards the settlement edge of Ambrosden. Land at Merton Road, to the left of the image, can be seen in longer distance views.

Conclusions in Respect of Issue 1: Is the Design of the Appeal Proposals Appropriately Conceived and Responsive to its Context?

- 3.24 Any development on green field land results in a change to land that is currently open. This is not a reason in and of itself to refuse permission, with the character of the land, and the type of development proposed, critical to determining the acceptability of the suggested change. I find the appeal proposals have been designed to retain the existing mature landscape fabric, which provides a contribution to the character of the local context and provides an opportunity to provide a more suitable transition to the wider open countryside.
- 3.25 As I have identified above, the appeal site is located within a transitional landscape, with land to the north of it exhibiting features that are more representative of the wider LCT and the appeal site itself being largely featureless, located adjacent to a relatively hard urban edge. The provision of new public open space alongside new tree planting, in accordance with the guidelines for the host LCT, would serve to reinforce the landscape structure immediately to the north.
- 3.26 Therefore, I consider that the appeal proposals have been designed appropriately and in response to the local context. Notably, the delivery of new tree planting at the northern edge of proposed built form serves to both protect and enhance local landscape character. Accordingly, I consider that the appeal proposals would accord with the thrust of the NPPF in landscape and visual terms and would be sympathetic to local character.

ISSUE 2: WOULD THE APPEAL PROPOSALS HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE?

- 3.27 Based upon the assertions made within the RfR and the Council's SoC, it is necessary for me to consider the extent to which the appeal proposals affect the existing landscape character of the appeal site and its context (including its features, topography, open

character of the area) and also the Landscape Character Area (LCA) more widely to consider how development on the appeal site might encroach into the countryside. I consider these are all aspects which contribute to the intrinsic character referenced within the RfR and, in particular, the character of the approach to Ambrosden.

The Effects of the Appeal Proposals on the Character and Appearance of the Countryside

- 3.28 I examined the character of the appeal site and its context earlier in my evidence and ascribed it a medium sensitivity in landscape terms. This aligns with the sensitivity of the appeal site itself as considered by the LVA.
- 3.29 With regards to the predicted effects, I summarise these below in line with the different temporal stages of construction, Year 1 and Year 15. In broad terms, these are consistent with the long-term effects (those at year 15) set out in the LVA (**CD: A17**) in Section 7, paragraphs 7.2 to 7.29.
- 3.30 Although the LVA stated that (paragraph 7.11) *“Additional tree planting is provided throughout the site which has positive effect on the proposed street scape”*, it did not provide an assessment of the effects on the landscape features of the appeal site, focussing largely on the overall change in character in perceptual terms. As set out within the LVA, the retention of much of the existing vegetation, its enhancement through additional sympathetic planting and ongoing management, together with its incorporation within a coherent Green Infrastructure that is linked across the appeal site and to the wider landscape, would ensure retention of characteristic landscape elements and fabric and benefits for biodiversity. This would give rise to some beneficial effects although, with regard to the character of the appeal site itself, largely through the retention of mature tree and hedgerow stock at the appeal site boundaries, I therefore find that the long-term change to the landscape fabric dimension of landscape character to be beneficial.
- 3.31 The LVA concluded that the overall magnitude of change to landscape character within the appeal site would be high on the basis that built form would be introduced into an agricultural field parcel, resulting in a moderate adverse effect on a medium sensitivity receptor. I do not disagree that the effects of the appeal proposals, from construction to completion at Year 1, would result in a marked change within the appeal site itself, although I concur with the general LVA comment that (paragraph 7.9) *“The magnitude 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”*.
- 3.32 In the long term, I accept that the overall magnitude of change to the perceptual dimension of landscape character within the appeal site itself would be high, giving rise to a moderate adverse effect. However, and importantly, I consider this effect to apply only to the appeal site itself, not its immediate context, being described by the EDP methodology as *“Effects that result in noticeable alterations to a few of the key characteristics of the baseline landscape resource or aspects of visual amenity.”*
- 3.33 Essentially, when assessing a field parcel in isolation, it is inevitable for an effect to be defined as above; any proposal to extend a settlement onto countryside beyond the settlement boundary is likely to give rise to a degree of harm to the visual and sensory character of the land. However, it is the effect on the appeal site context that is important.

- 3.34 The LVA defined the effect upon the appeal site's local context as part of the effect upon the host landscape types, concluding that the long-term effect would be moderate adverse. However, this has been incorrectly stated, as a medium magnitude of change on a medium sensitivity receptor, according to EDP's methodology (refer to the methodology included at **Appendix EDP 3**), should be concluded as a moderate/minor effect. I would agree that the area immediately surrounding the appeal site, this area aligning with the ZPV shown on **Proof Plan BC 2**, would be subject to a medium magnitude of change, being described within EDP's methodology as a "*Partial loss/alteration to one or more key receptors/characteristics*", and the "*addition of elements that are evident but do not necessarily conflict with the key characteristics of the existing landscape.*" In the long-term, this would give rise to a **moderate/minor** effect upon the appeal site's local context, which is predicted to diminish as the distance to the site increases, resulting in a **minor** adverse effect on the LCT as a whole.
- 3.35 With regards to the Wooded Hills LCT, the LVA (**CD: A17**) acknowledges that (paragraph 7.18) "*The proposed development would introduce residential dwellings on the edge of Ambrosden which would be noticeable from this area contained in the Wooded Hills LCT. While this would introduce new built form on the settlement edge, it would not be unusual in the local context where areas of settlement are frequently visible from local high points.*"
- 3.36 However, while I agree that there are views towards Graven Hill from the appeal site and its context, I have found no publicly accessible areas on the eastern side of Graven Hill that afford views of the appeal site. With regards to the effects arising from the appeal proposals on the Wooded Hills LCT, I would consider there to be a barely discernible loss or alteration to key components with the addition of elements not uncharacteristic within the existing landscape. As such, I find the magnitude of change to be very low, giving rise to a **minor/negligible** adverse effect on a medium sensitivity receptor.
- 3.37 Given the limited wider change to the landscape and visual resource that the development would be seen as a new part of a wider settlement character at this point, I am confident that the year 15 effect on the appeal site and its context would fall somewhere between moderate and minor. This effect should be considered in the following terms:
- Although the effect on the appeal site is permanent, the loss of openness to visual character, and subtle changes to topography, represents harm to only these dimensions of the landscape resource. Such change is barely perceptible beyond the immediate context of the appeal site and would be experienced in the context of existing built form within Ambrosden;
 - This harm is offset to a degree by gains in other dimensions of landscape, i.e. significant gains to the fabric of the landscape (a net gain in tree numbers and hedgerows) and to its social function (through the addition of public open space (POS) and access, which isn't currently available); and
 - The landscape is more than 'what we see' - in this respect the harm to the change of character of the appeal site is reduced when weighed against other dimensions of the landscape resource. Any residual harm needs also to be weighed against the benefits of the scheme in other respects and that balance is undertaken in the evidence of Mr Bainbridge.

Conclusions in Respect of Issue 2: Would the Appeal Proposals Have an Adverse Effect on the Character and Appearance of the Countryside?

- 3.38 In summary, the proposed change would inevitably (and unavoidably) alter the character of the appeal site itself, although this is often the case for development sites beyond the settlement boundary. Neither the appeal site nor proposals are unique in this respect, and I find that the proposals have taken account of the prevailing topography, the existing settlement pattern, the existing vegetation framework and the key perceptual sensitivities of the environment, with beneficial effects arising through the delivery of new landscape features that are in accordance with the guidelines set out for the LCT.
- 3.39 I find that for any views in which the appeal proposals would be considered an identifiable component of the view, this would be limited to a short section of a busy road corridor, the character of which is already informed by a number of urban elements in local views. At this location, the appeal proposals would only be visible by road users, being low sensitivity receptors, and by roadside pedestrians who I would consider having slightly higher sensitivity at medium. In both cases, I do not consider that either receptor group would be present for the enjoyment of the view within this largely peri-urban context.
- 3.40 Overall, the appeal proposals would introduce elements that may conflict with the characteristics of the appeal site itself, due to its existing agricultural use, but not necessarily the immediate setting due to the neighbouring residential use. Furthermore, as agreed within the SoCG (**CD: G6**), effects arising from the appeal proposals are predicted to be extremely limited in the wider context.
- 3.41 **Table EDP 3.1** provides my consideration of the landscape effects of the appeal proposals:

Table EDP 3.1: BC Summary of Landscape Effects

| Receptor | Sensitivity | Magnitude of Change | Effect |
|---|-------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Landscape Features and Elements of the Appeal Site: | | | |
| <i>The make-up of the landscape features within the site, including, but not limited to, woodlands, trees, hedgerows, scrub, and grasslands</i> | | | |
| Year 1 | Medium | Medium | Moderate/Minor adverse |
| Year 15 | Medium | Medium | Moderate/Minor beneficial |
| Landscape Character of the Appeal Site itself: | | | |
| <i>The character of the site including, but not limited to, changes to perceptual qualities, topography, recreation and access and any cultural references</i> | | | |
| Year 1 | Medium | High | Moderate adverse |
| Year 15 | Medium | Medium | Moderate adverse |
| Landscape Character of the Appeal Site Context (forming part of the Clay Vale LCT) | | | |
| <i>The character of the site context including, but not limited to, changes (direct or indirect) to perceptual qualities, topography, recreation and access and any cultural references</i> | | | |
| Year 1 | Medium | Medium | Moderate/Minor adverse |
| Year 15 | Medium | Medium | Moderate/Minor adverse |
| Landscape Character Type: Clay Vale LCT | | | |
| <i>As published</i> | | | |

| Receptor | Sensitivity | Magnitude of Change | Effect |
|--|-------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Year 1 | Medium | Low | Minor adverse |
| Year 15 | Medium | Low | Minor adverse |
| Landscape Character Type: Pasture Hills LCT | | | |
| <i>As published</i> | | | |
| Year 1 | Medium | Low | Minor Adverse |
| Year 15 | Medium | Low | Minor Adverse |
| Landscape Character Type: Wooded Hills LCT | | | |
| <i>As published</i> | | | |
| Year 1 | Medium | Very Low | Minor/Negligible Adverse |
| Year 15 | Medium | Very Low | Minor/Negligible Adverse |

ISSUE 3: WOULD THE APPEAL PROPOSALS ‘HAVE A POOR AND INCONGRUOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EXISTING SETTLEMENT APPEARING PROMINENT IN THE OPEN COUNTRYSIDE’?

3.42 In the wider context, I would agree with the LVA that the effects of the appeal proposals would be limited to a short section of Ploughley Road (as agreed within the SoCG (**CD: G6**)). Here, receptors would experience views of the proposed development although, given the character of Ploughley Road at this location, I do not consider residential development to form an entirely ‘new’ characteristic.

3.43 With regards to visual amenity, I concur with the assessment provided within the LVA. In visual terms, I have found that the appeal proposals would cause limited harm to wider landscape character and visual amenity by virtue of the following:

- The presence of existing development already within views and forming part of local character, including new and consented development throughout other parts of Ambrosden;
- With the exception of access, which would require a formal access point, the retention and enhancement of key landscape features at the appeal site boundary would respond to the landscape strategy for the wider LCA, including the delivery of new landscape features to assist in maintaining a physical separation between Ambrosden and the commercial uses to the north;
- The appeal proposals would only be visible from a short section of Ploughley Road, being experienced by vehicle users (low sensitivity) and pedestrians (medium sensitivity), where the focus is largely on the road rather than the wider landscape context. From this location, where views are available, particularly during winter months, there is already an appreciation of the settlement of Ambrosden; and
- Strong visual containment of the appeal site from the wider context, owing to mature tree cover, aided by local topography, with limited inter-visibility with the surrounding landscape. I do not, therefore, consider the appeal site to be ‘prominent’ in the wider context and I do not consider that any specific views valued highly by the general public

or essential to the appreciation of the area (in terms of openness or otherwise), would be unduly harmed by the appeal proposals.

- 3.44 In visual terms, as a consequence of intervening vegetation, mature woodland cover and local topography, the LVA found that only very limited intervisibility between the appeal site and publicly accessible areas (visual receptors) was available.
- 3.45 As above, a summary of the visual context of the appeal site from all angles is provided at paragraph 5.6 of the LVA (**CD: A17**) and, based on my own site visits, I find that the description of views and key receptors is broadly accurate. However, having visited the appeal site and its context, I have identified that:

Ploughley Road

- The LVA only assessed vehicle users on Ploughley Road and did not specifically identify pedestrians as a separate user group. This resulted in the sensitivity of pedestrians being afforded a low sensitivity in line with vehicle users. However, following my own site appraisal, though I would agree that the sensitivity of pedestrians is low where views are influenced by commercial built form to the north and urban influences to the south, I would consider roadside pedestrians here to warrant a higher sensitivity of medium (this applies to Photoviewpoints 3, 4 and 5 within the LVA (**CD: A17**)); and
- For these receptors, in the long-term, the maturation of landscape proposals within the appeal site would assimilate the development into this context, giving rise to some beneficial effects through a softening of the edge of the settlement, similar to new development found elsewhere within the village. During the summer months, the layering of the new landscape scheme is such that the proposed development would only be partly visible from this location, though during the winter views would remain and, as such, I agree with the LVA that the long-term magnitude of change to be high, giving rise to a moderate, adverse and permanent effect.

PRoW Users

- The LVA assessed the sensitivity of PRoW users throughout its study area as having a high sensitivity. However, I consider the susceptibility to change to vary, being low at the southern boundary of the appeal site due to the influence of neighbouring residential built form (Refer to **Images BC 10** and **11** at **Appendix EDP 4**). As set out within EDP's methodology, this is described as a "*View of clearly lesser value than similar views from nearby visual receptors that may be more accessible*", where "*visual surroundings have limited relevance*". I consider this susceptibility to change to increase to medium as the receptor moves further east along PRoW No. no. 105/6/20. As such, I consider that a lower susceptibility to change would reduce the overall sensitivity of the receptor at the southern boundary of the appeal site from high to medium; and
- For these receptors at year 1, I consider that the magnitude of change at year 1 would be high, though built form would not necessarily be in conflict with the character of the immediate context. At year 15, the magnitude of change is likely to reduce to medium as the character of views along this route would largely remain, with domestic boundary

treatments lining the route, with only the loss of part of a longer view where breaks in tree cover allow. The long-term magnitude of change would be medium, giving rise to a moderate/minor, adverse and permanent effect.

- 3.46 The LVA provided an assessment of the effects of the appeal proposals upon a number of receptor groups, including PRoW users and road users. Given the enclosure of the appeal site, I am not surprised that it identified that the greatest effects were predicted for road users of Ploughley Road, concluding that:

“the proposed development would introduce residential built form into a greenfield site. In the wider landscape it would read as an extension to Ambrosden. On the site level, this would result in noticeable changes in landscape and visual terms. Particularly for views from the west on the approach to Ambrosden. The proposed landscape strategy incorporates extensive tree and hedgerow planting along the boundaries to reinstate historic hedgerows and to filter views from the west.”

- 3.47 The LVA went on to conclude that *“The scale, form and appearance of the development would reflect and enhance the positive characteristics of the surrounding area, and raise the overall standard of development expected.”*

- 3.48 Following my own review of local character and visual amenity, I have not identified any locations from which the appeal site, or development upon it, would be considered to form a ‘prominent’ feature in local views. From locations where the development would be visible, I do not consider it would fundamentally alter the general character of views from that context (generally, I concur with the LVA that this is limited to Ploughley Road at the appeal site boundary), where the character is already characterised to some degree by urban form. In addition, beyond the immediate context of Ploughley Road, I do not consider that the appeal proposals would extend the perceived built extents of Ambrosden in local views.

- 3.49 In visual terms, as a consequence of intervening vegetation, mature woodland cover and local topography, the LVA found that only very limited intervisibility between the appeal site and publicly accessible areas (visual receptors) was available.

The Effects of the Proposals on the Character of the Approach to Ambrosden

- 3.50 The question of whether the proposed development will adversely affect the character of the approach to Ambrosden is a matter of judgement and, to my knowledge, the character of the approach is not expressly defined or protected within planning policy or supporting guidance. Given the enclosure of the appeal site in the wider context, views of the appeal proposals would be limited to a short section of Ploughley Road, with the most apparent views only being experienced at existing field gateways and at the proposed appeal site access.

- 3.51 In addition to my review of the character of Ploughley Road, I have provided wirelines to illustrate the parameters of the appeal proposals, as seen in typical views from this road corridor (refer to my **Appendix EDP 1**). As above, for the most part, views from Ploughley Road are curtailed by a mature hedgerow, currently with only views from field access points being the most open. This results in views of the appeal proposals being extremely limited

and would largely be experienced by receptors immediately adjacent to the appeal site where urban elements are already apparent.

3.52 Following my own review of the predicted effects on visual amenity (as illustrated at **Proof Plan BC 2**):

- Visual effects arising from the appeal proposals are highly localised;
- Beyond a short section of Ploughley Road and a PRow, which runs along the southern boundary of the appeal site, there are no views from publicly accessible locations where the appeal proposals would be considered a ‘prominent’ element of the view;
- At the point of the proposed access to the appeal proposals, a combination of road signage, well-maintained amenity grass, intervisibility with the existing settlement edge and numerous vehicle movements all contribute to a peri-urban character; and
- Further north along Ploughley Road, a mature hedgerow on the eastern side of the road serves to prevent clear views into the neighbouring field parcels, though views during winter months may remain, particularly if/when the hedgerow has recently been cut. The result is that the edge of Ambrosden can be seen on slightly elevated ground, though this occurs only at breaks in field boundary vegetation. Notably, where breaks in roadside vegetation on the western side of Ploughley Road occur, the settlement edge to the south can also be seen. As I have set out above, views experienced by receptors travelling along Ploughley Road are largely contained to the immediate setting, with the appeal site only being appreciable in the view at the point where urban elements are already apparent.

3.53 Private views of the appeal proposals are likely to be limited to views from properties within the appeal site's immediate context, at the southern and south-western boundaries, with reduced effects during the summer months. Given the context of the appeal site, aided by mature tree cover, I have not identified any locations where the appeal proposals would form an obvious or prominent element of a designed view from a property. As such, I do not consider that the appeal proposals would materially harm the residential visual amenity of properties within the local context.

3.54 I provide at **Table EDP 3.2** a summary of my assessment of the effects arising from the appeal proposals. It can be seen that any long-term effects that are moderate or above are only experienced from Photoviewpoints 3, 4 and 5 – Notably, as I illustrate at my **Proof Plan BC 2**, these locations are either immediate adjacent to, or in very close proximity to the appeal site boundary on Ploughley Road.

Table EDP 3.2: BC Summary of the Visual Effects of the Appeal Proposals

| Photoviewpoint | Sensitivity (Represent Receptor Groups with Highest Sensitivity) | Magnitude of Change | Effect |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------|--------------|
| Photoviewpoint 1: Year 1 | Medium (PRow Users) | High | Moderate Adv |

| Photoviewpoint | Sensitivity (Represent Receptor Groups with Highest Sensitivity) | Magnitude of Change | Effect |
|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Photoviewpoint 1: Year 15 | Medium (PRoW Users) | Medium | Moderate/minor Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 2: Year 1 | Medium (PRoW Users) | High | Major/Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 2: Year 15 | Medium (PRoW Users) | Medium | Moderate/minor Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 3: Year 1 | Medium (Pedestrians) | High | Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 3: Year 15 | Medium (Pedestrians) | High | Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 4: Year 1 | Medium (Pedestrians) | High | Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint4: Year 15 | Medium (Pedestrians) | High | Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 5: Year 1 | Medium (Pedestrians) | High | Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 5: Year 15 | Medium (Pedestrians) | High | Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 6: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | Medium | Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint6: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | Low | Moderate/minor Adv |
| Photoviewpoint 7: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint7: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 8: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 8: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 9: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 9: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 10: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 10: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 11: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |

| Photoviewpoint | Sensitivity (Represent Receptor Groups with Highest Sensitivity) | Magnitude of Change | Effect |
|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Photoviewpoint 11: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 12: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint 12: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint A: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint A: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint B: Year 1 | Low (Road Users) | High | Moderate Adv |
| Photoviewpoint B: Year 15 | Low (Road Users) | Medium | Moderate/minor Adv |
| Photoviewpoint C: Year 1 | Low (Road Users) | Medium | Minor Adv |
| Photoviewpoint C: Year 15 | Low (Road Users) | Medium | Minor Adv |
| Photoviewpoint D: Year 1 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |
| Photoviewpoint D: Year 15 | High (PRoW Users) | None | No Effect |

Conclusions in Respect of Issue 3: Would the Appeal Proposals ‘Have a Poor and Incongruous Relationship with the Existing Settlement Appearing Prominent in the Open Countryside’?

- 3.55 In summary, I accept that the appeal proposals would be visible. However, I find that for any views in which the appeal proposals would be considered an identifiable component, this would be limited to a short section of a relatively busy road corridor, namely Ploughley Road. Within these views, the appeal proposals would be most regularly experienced by road users, being low sensitivity receptors due to their focus of the view being the road, rather than an enjoyment of a wider view. However, some pedestrians with a medium sensitivity may also experience views of the proposals over or through a mature hedgerow, albeit with the most open views being experienced from within an existing peri-urban context, being influenced by urban form within Ambrosden.
- 3.56 I do not consider that any specific views valued highly by the general public or essential to the appreciation of the area (in terms of openness or otherwise), would be unduly harmed by the appeal proposals.
- 3.57 I do not consider that the appeal proposals are inappropriate in a spatial sense. Landscape and visual effects arising from the appeal proposals are extremely limited, while the

northward extension of Ambrosden, owing to the delivery of a suitable Green Infrastructure provision and mitigation measures within the northern areas of the appeal site, seems to me entirely appropriate in scale in terms of the evolution of the settlement, retaining the separation between the A41 and commercial uses to the north, yet defining an organic edge to the settlement that is now reflected on the southern and western sides of the village.

- 3.58 With regards to scale and settlement pattern, the settlement pattern of Ambrosden has moved north-east from its origins, with the current settlement edge moving beyond hard, linear boundaries (as referenced by the Inspector for Land at Merton Road, Ambrosden) (**CD: M6**), to one that is now more organic. This matter was addressed by the Inspector for development on Land at Merton Road, where he concluded that (paragraph 54):

“Overall, I conclude that whilst inevitably rendering localised change the proposal, subject to subsequent careful attention to layout, design, external appearance and landscaping, would not have any significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of its surroundings. Opportunity would exist to provide an acceptable, fitting and suitably mitigated development that could contribute positively to this entrance to the village.”

- 3.59 I consider that the same conclusion should apply here. I also consider the predicted growth of the village, in landscape terms, to be an appropriate extension to the village, and that the scale, form and appearance of the development would be appropriate in this context.

Section 4

Policy Compliance and Conclusions

- 4.1 This PoE addresses the matters raised in RfR1 of the Decision Notice together with CBC's Statement of Case.
- 4.2 It is clear from the Illustrative Landscape Strategy and Design and Access Statement (DAS) accompanying the application that, overall, with consideration of the mitigation measures proposed on land that is under the Appellant's control, this is a well-designed proposal that is commensurate with its size and location in this part of Ambrosden. The Appellant has put forward an illustrative masterplan option to consider how development could come forward within this site, reducing the effects of the proposals on the landscape resource and positively contributing to the character of the local context through new woodland planting.

SUMMARY OF EFFECTS

- 4.3 I consider that the appeal site is technically unconstrained and undesignated in landscape terms and is not special enough to preclude development in principle.
- 4.4 Some harm to openness and rural character is unavoidable wherever a settlement extends onto open (agricultural) land. This harm needs to be weighed against benefits of the proposals in other respects. With respect to the impacts on visual openness and landscape harm, I do not consider that any specific views valued highly by the general public or essential to the appreciation of the area (in terms of openness or otherwise), would be unduly harmed by the appeal proposals. Whilst the development would evidently impact openness at the site level, when the proposals are viewed in the context of the wider landscape, including viewing experiences from Ploughley Road, there remains an open character to the north of Ambrosden, with built development (including the appeal proposals) appearing spatially appropriate in scale and form given current development patterns and the existing character of the settlement.
- 4.5 Given that such harm is unavoidable and accrues wherever new development replaces open fields, it is imperative to understand the extent of any wider landscape effects. In this regard my evidence demonstrates - as does the LVA - that the appeal site does not affect the landscape setting of Ambrosden, or the ability to understand and appreciate the form and fabric of the wider settlement. The settlement itself is part of the landscape, and development of the appeal site is a quite logical extension of the landscape in this context.

POLICY MATTERS

- 4.6 Neither the Appeal Site or the surrounding area is a 'designated landscape' or even a 'Valued Landscape' for the purposes of paragraph 174(a) of the NPPF, a matter agreed between the parties (**CD: G6**). Therefore, as above, the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside within which the appeal site is located should be 'recognised' rather than 'protected and enhanced';

- 4.7 Some harm to openness and rural character is unavoidable wherever a settlement extends onto more open land. The weight attached to this harm to open character on the appeal site is directly linked to its status in planning terms – there is no imperative to ‘protect and enhance’ the landscape in this location, only to ‘recognise’ it. All the work done leading up to the application, and the design itself, demonstrates that the landscape qualities have been fully recognised (e.g. the creation of new POS/views, etc.), and the retention of landscape features has been considered from the outset. The proposals have been designed to accord, where possible, with the published LCT guidelines.
- 4.8 The predicted harm to existing visual character and openness needs also to be weighed against the positive changes to other dimensions of the landscape resource on site, it's not about only ‘what we see’, but also about what is created within the ‘new landscape’ created. This harm needs to be weighed against benefits of the proposals in other respects, and that balance is undertaken in the evidence of Mr Bainbridge.
- 4.9 The development of the appeal site brings opportunities to deliver new Green Infrastructure within the existing site for ecological and landscape character enhancement. During the course of maturation, this would bring a beneficial effect in terms of their function in the broader, coherent vegetation framework. In that regard, the proposed development with a coordinated landscape strategy embedded into the wider design proposals would remain compliant with the relevant sections of the NPPF, in particular paragraphs 8, 124, 130 and 174b. The appeal proposals would be appropriate in landscape terms, would include effective landscaping and would be sympathetic to local character.

Local Landscape Policy

- 4.10 Having undertaken a full and detailed review of the baseline landscape and visual resource and made my own assessment of the potential levels of effect, I accept that there is limited level of (inevitable) harm to the landscape character and visual amenity of the appeal site. The limitation of this harm, and the fact that from a locational and contextual perspective, leads me to consider any policy conflict very limited.

Policy ESD 13

- 4.11 Policy ESD 13 deals with local landscape protection and enhancement, requiring new development to respect and enhance local landscape character. I do not consider there to be a conflict with the aspirations of the policy. As I have demonstrated above, and in response to policy text:
- The appeal proposals cause limited visual intrusion into the open countryside, with any landscape and visual harm being extremely localised;
 - The appeal proposals retain and enhance the landscape fabric of the appeal site, providing a contribution to the fabric of the open landscape to the north;
 - I do not consider that the appeal proposals are inappropriate in a spatial sense. The delivery of a suitable Green Infrastructure provision and mitigation measures within the northern areas of the appeal site serve to retain the separation between Ambrosden and the A41, yet defining an organic edge to the settlement that reflects the recent growth pattern of the village;

- I do not consider the appeal site to be located in an area of high tranquillity as noise from road corridors, the MOD site at Graven Hill and commercial uses to the north all adversely affect tranquillity and wildness, such that the appeal site is not devoid of urban influence;
- I have demonstrated that the developed edges of Ambrosden have evolved over time, moving beyond hard linear boundaries, to become more of an organic edge. I consider the growth of the village at the northern edge, in landscape terms, to be an appropriate extension to the village, and that the scale, form and appearance of the development as designed would be appropriate in this context; and
- I do not consider the appeal site to harm the historic value of the appeal site.

Policy ESD 15

- 4.12 The proposed development principals are also considered to respond to the aspirations of Policy ESD 15, which requires development to “*Contribute positively to an area's character and identity by creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness and respecting local topography and landscape features*”.
- 4.13 As above, while I accept that there is limited level of (inevitable) harm to the landscape character and visual amenity of the appeal site, through the addition of landscape fabric enhancement and the provision of new tree planting, being aligned with the guidelines for the host LCT, the appeal proposals provide mitigation that is appropriate within this context. The enhancement of the existing landscape fabric, provision of new tree and shrub planting and the maintenance and improvement of the PRow network in this area through development of the site also contribute towards the maximisation of Green Infrastructure opportunities and links and as such, the requirements of Policy Villages 2.

Policy Villages 2

- 4.14 I find that for any views in which the appeal proposals would be considered an identifiable component of the view, this would be limited to a short section of a busy road corridor, the character of which is already informed by a number of urban elements in local views. Furthermore, I do not consider that any specific views valued highly by the general public or essential to the appreciation of the area (in terms of openness or otherwise), would be unduly harmed by the appeal proposals. In summary, landscape and visual effects arising from the appeal proposals are extremely limited.
- 4.15 Overall, I consider that the appeal proposals represent a small-scale and visually discrete feature which, although representing a change in character to the appeal site itself, is in keeping with local landscape character, including the character of the settlement edge of Ambrosden, and would not therefore result in any significant landscape impacts (as is required by Policy Villages 2).

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- 4.16 The application has been accompanied by a suite of environmental reports and a landscape strategy. Read as a whole, this work demonstrates convincingly that the appeal proposals

will not result in material harm to the natural environment. There is no objection to the proposals on either ecological or arboricultural grounds.

- 4.17 My PoE has addressed the effects of the proposal on the landscape resource, with consideration of the parameters of the appeal proposals and the Landscape Strategy. I have also examined the effects of the proposal on local landscape character and visual amenity. My overall conclusion is that there is no breach of any landscape-related policy, of landscape justification for the refusal of planning permission at this outline stage.
- 4.18 The proposed change from open agricultural land to residential uses will inevitably (and unavoidably) alter the character of the appeal site. Both the LVIA and my evidence concur that such change is inevitable, and importantly, acceptable in landscape and visual terms. This is the case for all green field development sites and is an inevitable consequence of provision of new housing beyond settlement boundaries.
- 4.19 The LVA concludes that the appeal site is not an inappropriate location for housing, and I agree. GLVIA3 reminds us that landscape is not 'unchanging', so the benefits and appropriateness of the 'new landscape' created by the appeal proposals must also be factored into the overall judgement. The proposal is not inappropriate in this context.
- 4.20 Successful development proposals are those which look to retain the most sensitive parts of the landscape and enhance others where it is possible to do so. If that can be done in line with the published landscape character assessments and the development guidelines therein - as is the case for the appeal site and proposals - then this in many ways brings benefits to overall landscape character.
- 4.21 It is further clear from my evidence that I do not accept that the change of open land to built form in this location is, by definition, harmful to the landscape resource as a whole (as opposed to the appeal site in isolation). 'Harm' to landscape arises from either: (a) being in an inappropriate place; or (b) through inappropriate design and appearance. I consider that neither of these criteria apply to the appeal proposals, which sit within a landscape which is physically and perceptually well-related to Ambrosden. There will be change, but this change will be acceptable contextually, and not result in extensive wider landscape or visual change that would make it otherwise unacceptable.
- 4.22 Overall, I do not consider that the appeal proposals are inappropriate in a spatial sense. Landscape and visual effects arising from the appeal proposals are extremely limited, while the northward extension of Ambrosden, owing to the delivery of a suitable green infrastructure provision and mitigation measures within the northern areas of the appeal site, seems to me entirely appropriate in scale in terms of the evolution of the settlement. The scale, form and appearance of the development would reflect and enhance the positive characteristics of the surrounding area, within the perceived limits of Ambrosden, and raise the overall standard of development expected. Being well-integrated with the surrounding areas, the development would appear as a natural and logical addition to Ambrosden.
- 4.23 For all the reasons above, my overall conclusion is that the matters raised in the RfR are unfounded, there is no basis on which to refuse planning permission on landscape-related grounds at this stage.