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Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Land at The Beeches, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire

Local Planning Authority: Cherwell District
Council

Client: Mr Adrian Shooter
Architects: Malcolm Payne Group Ltd
Planning Agent: Frampton Town Planning Ltd

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Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Land at The Beeches, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire.

1.0 Introduction and scope of study

Background

- 1.1 The site for the proposed development of eight new dwellings at The Beeches is located on previously developed land just outside the built-up area of Steeple Aston, on the south side of the village settlement. It sits within the domestic curtilage that includes a large dwelling, a number of substantial outbuildings and a narrow gauge railway track. Several of the outbuildings are associated with the operation of the railway. The proposed dwellings will in part occupy the site of the existing outbuildings and then sit within the more open area defined by the track circuit and boundary trees. The site is enclosed and well screened within a framework of mature trees and hedgerow thicket.
- 1.2 This study makes an assessment of the existing landscape and visual resource and then considers the landscape and visual impact of the proposed housing development and the widening of the access driveway. Its purpose is to inform and set landscape design parameters for the location and design of the proposed houses within its landscape setting and any requirements for landscape mitigation. Frampton Town Planning Ltd are the lead Planning Consultants responsible for the Planning Application and reference should be made to the Indicative Site Plan Dwg No. 372A01_101 Rev C prepared by Malcolm Paynes Group Ltd Architects (attached as Annex 4).
- 1.3 The LVIA has been prepared by Jeremy Sacha of Sacha Barnes Ltd. Jeremy is a qualified Landscape Architect and Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute with over 30 years' experience of Landscape Planning and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 The applied methodology used for this landscape and visual impact assessment follows in part the Landscape Institutes Guidelines (Third Edition) but takes a proportionate approach. It has been prepared by the collation of background research material, and a range of desktop studies and mapping exercises that established the key features of the existing landscape. The latest version of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment (GLVIA) places far greater emphasis on a discursive analysis and professional judgement and less reliance on matrices, an approach which has been undertaken in this document.
- 2.2 The local landscape character has then been studied in more detail with a description of the landform and landscape features including the most prominent belts of trees, woodlands and hedgerows. The degree to which the proposed development of eight new houses would be seen from public vantage points / receptors (the visual setting) has then been assessed from the local roads and by walking the public rights of way. A detailed Photographic assessment has been carried out with photographs taken

from each of the main receptors / vantage points to which the public has access (see Annex 2– Photoviewpoint location plan and descriptions).

- 2.3 The landscape and visual impact assessment considers the sensitivity of the local landscape to change and the extent to which the proposed development would have an impact on the landscape and views from the main public vantage points / receptors. Using the Landscape Institute Guidelines the baseline visibility is considered from each of the representative viewpoints and has regard to the sensitivity of the receptor and the susceptibility to change, the magnitude of change and the degree of harm that would be caused. The sensitivity and magnitude of change is then assessed as being either High, Medium, Low, or Insignificant. The distance from the edge of the site to the receptor has also been measured. Because of the intervening layers of trees and hedgerows, the landform and the form of the village settlement the site cannot be seen from any great distance. All the views to the site are from receptors within a distance of 703.0 metres and the majority are much closer.
- 2.4 The visual assessment was carried out in January and February 2019 with the trees and hedgerows in their winter dormant state. An assessment has also been made of potential views during the summer months when the trees and hedgerows will be in full leaf and the hedgerows have gained some annual growth. In all cases these views are found to be limited to a localised area.
- 2.5 The assessment then considers the degree to which any visual impact caused by the development can be mitigated by the most appropriate siting, use of landform and tree and hedgerow planting in keeping with the character of the local landscape (see section 10 Design parameters and landscape strategy).

3.0 Landscape character

- 3.1 The Natural England / Countryside Agency's National Character Areas (NCA) places the landscape around Steeple Aston within the National Character Area Profile 107 – Cotswolds. At a Regional and County scale the landscape and countryside around Steeple Aston is described in the Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS) as the Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides landscape character type. This landscape type covers a very large area that includes the steep valley sides of the Upper River Cherwell. At a District level the descriptions of landscape character rely almost entirely on the OWLS assessment and descriptions. The area in the immediate vicinity of the site has no specific landscape quality designation (not an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or an Area of Great Landscape Value) and it lies just outside the Rousham Conservation Area boundary. Summary descriptions of the Landscape Character Area (LCA) and Landscape Type (LT) are set out in Annex 1.

There are variations in landscape character but the key characteristics of the Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides are described in the OWLS study as:

- *Prominent slopes and valley sides interrupted by a number of small narrow v-shaped valleys,*
- *Large arable fields on the gentler slopes and small pasture fields on the steeper slopes and steep-sided valleys,*
- *A well-defined pattern of tall hedges and hedgerow trees*
- *Small woodland copses and belts on steep slopes and along watercourses in the minor valleys,*
- *Small unspoilt villages with rural character.*

The more specific reference to Steeple Aston (CW/48) describes the landscape character as:

- *This is a diverse landscape with small streams and minor valleys that cut across the broader slopes. The area is characterised by medium to large-sized fields with a mix of arable farming and semi-improved grassland. Some calcareous grassland can be found on the valley slopes and patches of marshy grassland are associated with watercourses. Fields are enclosed by a mix of woodland copses and hedges are generally in good condition and with species such as hawthorn, field maple and elder. - Overall, the landscape is characterised by semi-natural woodland as well as mixed and deciduous plantations on the slopes and valley sides. Ash, oak, beech and sycamore are the main tree species found in these woods. There are dense corridors of wet woodland bordering water courses and, combined with the mature ash and oak hedgerow trees, they add to the woodland cover.*

3.2 I largely agree with this broad description of landscape character and the summary of key features. However, the landscape setting of the site at The Beeches is also exceptional with the large number of mature broadleaved and conifer trees that include beech, ash, sycamore, yew, holly, pine and larch. The landform falls gently to the east towards the Heyford Road and then more steeply into the valley of the River Cherwell. The steeper slope of the valley side immediately to the east of the site is quite heavily wooded and then across the field to the south of the site is a large area of mature woodland known as Dean Plantation. The fields immediately to the south and west of the site are made up of medium to large field units mainly in arable cultivation but also of semi improved pasture. Some fields are bound by hedgerows but other field units have been combined to give a more open aspect over the gently rolling landform. The garden boundary of The Beeches joins the garden of Orchard House to the southeast and the garden of number 29a Heyford Road just to the north of the main driveway. The Beeches and Orchard House form the southern extent of the built settlement when viewed from the Heyford Road but then appear to sit just outside the built-up area of the village when seen from across the fields to the west.

3.3 The proposed development of eight new houses at The Beeches has regard to the description of landscape character and no features of particular character or local distinctiveness will be lost or harmed. It also has regard to its location on the southern edge of the village settlement where the site is largely contained within the existing framework of mature trees and hedgerow thicket. By retaining the majority of existing trees and hedgerow thicket and keeping the profile of the built form below that of the surrounding tree cover, the proposed development will have a very low visual impact on the rural landscape. New planting will be introduced to reinforce and add to the tree and hedgerow screen, particularly along the western boundary where the site can be seen from more open views in the rural landscape. The well treed boundary of the site contains a number of tall conifer trees and in winter they form a distinctive feature that serves as a point of reference in the landscape and identifies the site on the edge of the village settlement.

4.0 Landscape designations and site constraints.

4.1 There are no landscape designations or particular constraints that apply to land at The Beeches. The belt of mature trees and hedgerow thicket around the site boundary is of value to local amenity and wildlife but is not the subject of a Tree Preservation Order and the site is not within a Conservation Area. The Rousham Conservation Area that extends up the valley slope to the Heyford Road has been designated to protect the

landscape setting and outlook from Rousham House and Gardens but the site is very well screened by the mature woodland on the valley slope and the proposed development will have no visual impact on the Conservation Area. There are no Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) on or within the immediate vicinity of the site.

5.0 Landscape planning context

5.1 The planning context is covered in greater detail in the report by Frampton Town Planning Ltd. It's important to consider landscape and visual impact within the context of Local Planning Policy and Cherwell District Council Local Plan 2011-2031 sets out the following policies that refer to landscape character and heritage.

- Policy ESD 13 Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement seeks to protect, conserve and enhance the local landscape character of Cherwell District by considering the type, scale and design of development, and requires adverse impacts to be mitigated as far as possible through design and landscape measures. It expects development proposals to have regard to the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS).
- Policy ESD 15 The Character of the Built and Historic Environment seeks to ensure the conservation of the built and historic environment, requiring development proposals to protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment and the setting of assets, and to "contribute positively" to character and identity by creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness, and respecting local topography and landscape features, including skylines, valley floors, significant trees, historic boundaries, landmarks, features or views in particular within designated landscapes, within the Cherwell Valley and within conservation areas and their setting.

5.2 The landscape and visual impact assessment that follows therefore looks at whether the proposed development will have any harmful impact on landscape character and visual amenity and sets out design parameters and a landscape strategy to ensure that the development does not conflict with Local Plan Policies ESD 13 and ESD 15 or cause any harm to the rural landscape setting, the Cherwell Valley or the proximity of the Rousham Conservation Area.

6.0 Site description and landscape context.

6.1 The set of photographs in the Photographic assessment at Annex 2 illustrate and help to describe the landscape setting of the application site on the south side of the village settlement (also see section on visual assessment in section 7 below). Photographs 1 to 5 have been taken to show the character of the parts of the site most effected by the proposed development.

6.2 The site is a rectangular shaped area of land that then narrows to the east between the adjoining properties at 29a Heyford Road to the north and Orchard House to the south. Although the topography of the western half of the site appears quite flat there is a slight slope across from west to east that becomes steeper where the access driveway drops down to meet the Heyford Road. The main house and several outbuildings occupy the middle portion of the site. By contrast the western half of the site is a broad open area of grassland within an enclosure of mature trees and hedgerow thicket. There is a moon shaped grassy mound in the southwest corner. The site boundaries are clearly defined by a tall screen of tree and hedgerow thicket of mainly deciduous native species but there are also a number of tall, mature pine and larch trees, with occasional thickets of evergreen laurel and yew. The hedgerows along the southern and western boundaries have been allowed to grow into tall thickets,

although they reduce in height along parts of the western boundary. Tall pine and larch trees form a distinctive feature on both sides of the driveway as you enter the site from the Heyford Road and the tall thicket of mature trees wraps around the main house to the north and west and continues as a belt of trees along the length of the northern boundary. A full description of the tree cover is set out in the Tree Report Ref: SB/JS/635. The garden area immediately to the northeast of the main house and then spreading to the south and south east is more domestic in character with areas of lawn and ornamental shrubbery. One of the sites more unusual features is the figure of eight shaped narrow gauge railway track that forms a circuit around the greater part of the site and traverses through the northern tree belt. There are a number of shallow banks and mounds formed to level the track gradient and several of the large outbuildings including the more ornate station pavilion are connected to the function of the narrow gauge railway.

- 6.3 Immediately opposite the site on the east side of the Heyford Road the land falls away more steeply into the valley of the River Cherwell. The steeper slope supports a thick belt of mature woodland that follows the line of the road to its junction with the B4030. To the south of the site is an open field presently down to grass and to the west of the site the fields open out with more extensive views across to the west. To the south the open views are then cut short where the field meets the edge of Dean Plantation, an area of mature woodland that occupies a minor valley in the landform. Adjoining the tree belt along the northern boundary of the site is a small area of grass paddock enclosed by trees and hedgerows and to the northeast and north the fields join the edge of the built settlement of Steeple Aston.
- 6.4 There is a network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) through the rural landscape to the west of the site and across the valley to the east of the village. The majority of footpaths and bridleways provide links between roads, neighbouring settlements and the outlying farmsteads. The more strategic route of the Oxford Canal Walk passes through the Cherwell Valley at some distance to the east, where it wraps around the edge of Lower Heyford. The PRoW are in the main local routes for the village and dog walkers and for the most part they appear to be well maintained, easily accessible and well used.
- 6.5 There are a large number of trees throughout the village and particularly in the vicinity of the site with tree belts and tall hedgerows to the east and the larger woodland of Dean Plantation to the south. Small copses and thick hedgerow tree belts also form a distinctive feature to the north and northeast of the village. More distantly to the east the land rises above the valley of the River Cherwell forming an elevated plateau occupied by the former air base above Upper Heyford. Looking from the footpath to the west of the site (at a distance of 389.0m) the site itself is seen as a small block of woodland and in winter the tall evergreen Pine trees make the site location on the edge of the village quite easy to identify. The general pattern and distribution of tree cover and field boundary hedgerows can be seen on the aerial photograph at Annex 2 – Photoviewpoint Locations Plan.

7.0 Visual assessment and sensitivity of visual receptors.

- 7.1 As considered in Section 6 above the landscape and visual setting of the site is strongly determined by the local topography, the pattern of agricultural fields with hedgerows, trees and small woodlands and the structure of the village settlement. A thorough visual assessment has been carried out to identify vantage points in the local landscape where there may be views of the site (see the Photoviewpoint Locations Plan at Annex 2 and the extract of the OS map with the public rights of way at Annex 3). The photographs included in this report at Annex 2 do not replace the need to visit the area in person but are intended to give a true representation of the visual influence

of the site as seen from each of the main viewpoints. The visual assessment found the site to be visually well contained within its boundary of trees and hedgerow thicket and apart from a fleeting view into the entrance from the Heyford Road and a more distant view from the footpath to the west, the proposed development will be well screened from all other views in the surrounding landscape.

- 7.2 **Residential receptors** – Open views from primary living spaces are particularly susceptible to change and have a rating of High sensitivity. The two houses that adjoin the site to the north and south of the driveway will have a limited view into the site, although partly obscured by the belt of mature trees. Orchard House to the south is more directly affected with certain ground and first floor windows that face the site. The aspect from part of Orchard House will change as two of the outbuildings on the site will be demolished and replaced by two dwellings, however, the view is already partly obscured by the mature belt of trees. Further planting will be carried out to close the view across the site. There are other possible views towards the site from certain houses at The Crescent off Heyford Road and more distantly from Jubilee Close off South Side, but these angled views must be largely screened by the trees and hedgerow thicket along the northern boundary. Although the visual assessment is not representative of all possible views from other dwellings (as they were not visited) the study of the wider landscape setting suggests that any views from other dwellings must be very limited. In the context of this assessment the magnitude of change and visual intrusion caused by the proposed development will be Low and the overall level of effect upon residential amenity will be Negligible.
- 7.3 **Recreational receptors** - The sensitivity to change for users of public rights of way can be High particularly if the PRoW is part of a strategic long distance or historic / cultural route. The sensitivity reduces for public footpaths that have a more localised recreational value but their popularity, frequency of use and destination can give them a higher value. The Oxford Canal Walk is the only strategic route in the vicinity and the site of the proposed development at The Beeches is completely screened by the topography of the valley side and the dense belt of woodland. However, to the west of the site there are a number of more localised views looking east from the footpaths that cross between the B4034 and South Side on the south side of the village. The nearest footpath to the site is approximately 380.0m to the west and when looking due east from the footpath the trees that surround most of the site are clearly in view. The hedgerow along the western boundary of the site provides a less effective screen in the winter months so that part of the site interior and the station pavilion building can be seen. As you progress north and south along the footpath the tree belt along the northern and southern boundaries of the site and the extended length of field hedgerow provide a complete screen. This partial view into the site will be addressed as part of the landscape strategy for the development with further tree and shrub planting along the western boundary. The set of photographs at Photoviewpoints 11, 12, 13 and 14 in Annex 2 show the extent of the views towards the site during the winter months. From all other PRoW the proposed development will be very largely screened and contained within its own boundary of trees and hedgerow thicket. The overall level of visual impact upon these two footpaths will be Low and the impact upon all other recreational receptors will Negligible.
- 7.4 **Transport / Highway receptors** - The sensitivity to change for users of transport routes is normally classified between Low and Medium depending on their speed, location and use. However minor routes and the journey experienced by the user can be considered to have a greater function towards the appreciation of the landscape. Heyford Road that passes the eastern boundary of the site has a primary function as a vehicular route from the village to the B4043 road, the Heyfords and south to Oxford. A raised footpath runs alongside the north side of the road to allow walkers access to

the Cherwell Valley and at a greater distance the Rousham Estate and Gardens. With the length of footway along one side this section of the Heyford Road can also be considered as a minor recreational receptor for walkers and cyclists. The sensitivity to change for users of this road could potentially be elevated to Medium / High but the site is very well screened by woodland and tall hedgerow thickets along much of its length (see Photoviewpoints 6 and 8 in Annex 2). The development will be served by the existing access driveway into the site and the tree belts on both sides are to be retained and in parts reinforced with new planting. The view up the driveway when passing the site along the Heyford Road is fleeting and the proposed widening of the driveway /access will have a very minor impact on the view. The Heyford Road is the only transport / highway receptor with an aspect towards the site. The magnitude of change perceived would be minor and the overall level of visual impact from the highway and footway will be Negligible.

7.5 The key points arising from the visual assessment are:

- The visual assessment found the site to be very well contained within its boundary screen of tall trees and hedgerow thicket.
- The occupants of the adjoining dwellings at 29a Heyford Road and Orchard House will be concerned to maintain their privacy and separation from the new development. New planting within and adjacent to the existing tree belts will protect their privacy and in time should screen the proposed development from view.
- Although the site can be clearly identified in the landscape when looking from footpaths to the west, by retaining and reinforcing the boundary screen of trees and hedgerows the built development within the site will be hidden from all viewpoints / receptors in the rural landscape to the south and west of the village settlement. At night there will be a low level of light emanating from the new development above the boundary vegetation but the footpaths will receive a very low level of use after daylight hours.
- Passage along the Heyford Road presents a fleeting view into the site but as the built development is set well back, the visual intrusion will be negligible.
- By removing the existing outbuildings and then building new dwellings on the site the use and internal character of the site will change. However, by retaining and reinforcing the trees and tall thicket of vegetation within the site and around the site boundary, this change of character will hardly be noticeable from public vantage points / receptors.

8.0 Landscape assessment and sensitivity of landscape features.

8.1 The greater part of the site is enclosed and screened from external view by its boundary of trees and hedgerow thicket and this will be retained and reinforced with new planting particularly along the western boundary. The existing buildings and narrow gauge railway will be removed and a few trees of moderate and low amenity value within the site will have to be felled. The potential loss of trees will be minor and the landscape impact / loss of landscape features will be negligible. An Arboricultural study has been carried out to assess the potential risk to trees and detailed method statements have been prepared to protect the trees in accordance with the requirements of British Standard 5837:2012 – Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations (Tree Report reference SB/JS/635 refers).

8.2 There are no other landscape features of particular sensitivity on the site.

9.0 Evaluation of the baseline studies.

9.1 The purpose of the landscape assessment and evaluation is to inform and guide an appropriate form of massing, scale and design character for the proposed development at The Beeches. This will allow the proposals to be tested against the established criteria as the design develops and ensure that the final form is suitable and sympathetic to its landscape setting and local landscape character. The first stage of landscape mitigation can therefore be achieved through this process, whilst specific mitigation measures are only required to deal with any residual effects that cannot otherwise be fully addressed. The development criteria therefore need to address issues of landscape character and visual impact as follows:

Impact on landscape character.

- Whether the new development affects the rural character of the landscape and in what way;
- How locally typical species and styles of planting can be used to mitigate potential adverse impact;
- Which materials would blend best with the local rural vernacular and landscape and reinforce local character.

Impact on the landscape resource.

- The extent to which the existing resource of mature trees and hedgerow thicket around the site boundaries can be retained and protected and then managed in the future.

Visual impact.

- The change in visibility from the key viewpoints which would result from the proposed development;
- The relationship of the proposed buildings to the site boundaries and views from outside the site;
- The siting, scale and height of the proposed buildings and how this relates to the landform and important viewpoints (see also impact on landscape character above and use of vernacular materials);
- How planting could be used to mitigate potential adverse impacts.

10.0 Design parameters and landscape strategy.

- The built form will take advantage of the location within the well treed surround of the site at The Beeches and will be set back so that new buildings are not visible from the site entrance onto the Heyford Road. The screening effect of the framework of trees and hedgerow thicket will mitigate its visual impact on the landscape setting.
- Built development will be set back from the site boundaries to allow for new reinforcement planting to enhance the screen of vegetation, particularly along the western boundary.
- The visibility from vantage points along local footpaths to the west of the site has been carefully considered and mitigation measures will be designed to protect the views and the rural character of the landscape. This is particularly important for views from the west where the mature trees and boundary hedgerows are clearly identified as a feature in the rural landscape.
- The mature trees within the site and around the site boundary are important assets and the designed layout will ensure that adequate space is given for

their proper protection and long term health. Root protection areas and the pattern of shade cast by the trees have been carefully considered as possible design constraints.

- Ensure that the development builds on the positive aspects of local landscape character and that the landscape strategy and the landscape structure is appropriate to its rural setting. This should include new native tree and hedgerow planting and a plan to ensure that the boundary trees and hedgerow thickets continue to maintain a high level of mitigation.

11.0 Conclusion

- 11.1 The National, County and District descriptions of landscape character have been reviewed and the immediate landscape setting of the site has been described and considered in greater detail. There are no statutory designations or protection measures that apply to the site. The site is entirely outside the Rousham Conservation Area and the development of the site will have no visual impact upon it. Cherwell District Council's Local Plan and Core Strategy policies have been reviewed to identify those most relevant to landscape assessment and the possible landscape impact of the proposed development. The position, design and clustered arrangement of the proposed dwellings is considered the most appropriate response to the landscape assessment and the Local Plan Policies that support sustainable development.
- 11.2 In order to gain a good understanding of the site, the character of the local landscape and its sensitivity to change, a detailed assessment has been made travelling by road and walking the public rights of way. Using the recommended methodology the publicly accessible viewpoints / visual receptors have been identified and a detailed visual impact assessment has been carried out.
- 11.3 The visual assessment has shown that there is a high degree of visual screening provided by the local topography, the structure of the village settlement and the layers of mature trees, woodlands and hedgerows in the local landscape. New planting along the western boundary of the site will add to the existing high level of screening and will be in keeping with the rural character of the native trees and hedgerows in the wider landscape. By setting the development back from the site boundaries and by carrying out a detailed assessment of construction in the vicinity of trees, appropriate measures will be put in place to ensure their protection.
- 11.4 The landscape and visual impact assessment clearly demonstrates that the proposed development of the site at The Beeches will have a low visual impact and no features of landscape sensitivity will be lost. By identifying important design parameters and adopting a landscape led strategy the proposed buildings and domestic curtilage can be visually contained and the sensitive landscape treatment of the greater part of the site will protect the character of the rural setting.

Annex 1 - Extracts from:

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OWLS (CW/48) - Steeple Aston.

Rousham Conservation Area – Plan.

National Character Area profile: 107. Cotswolds

Supporting documents

- Introduction & Summary
- Description
- Opportunities
- Key facts and data
- Landscape change
- Analysis


Summary

The Cotswolds form the best-known section of the predominantly oolitic Jurassic Limestone belt that stretches from the Dorset coast to Lincolnshire. The dominant pattern of the Cotswold landscape is of a steep scarp crowned by a high, open wold; the beginning of a long and rolling dip slope cut by a series of increasingly wooded valleys. The scarp provides a backdrop to the major settlements of Cheltenham, Gloucester, Stroud and Bath and provides expansive views across the Severn and Avon Vales to the west. Smaller towns and villages nestle at the scarp foot, in the valley bottoms and on the gentler valley sides at springlines. Scattered hamlets and isolated farmsteads are found on the higher ground. The limestone creates a strong sense of place and unity which carries through to the buildings and walls which have been built using local limestone for centuries. The distinctive character of the area is reflected in its designation as the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with sixty five percent of the NCA being covered by this designation.

Nationally important beech woods feature in the landscape and are a notable feature on the scarp edge and in a number of the incised valleys. Mixed oak woodlands are concentrated on the upper slopes of valleys and on the flat high wold tops. Woodlands can contain a wide and notable range of calcicole shrubs and ground flora. Parkland and estates are characteristic of the area. Farming is mixed, with much of the high wold dominated by arable on thin, brashy soils prone to erosion. Pasture is predominant in the valleys, and in particular on steeper slopes and on more clayey soils. Meadows and tree-lined watercourses are found along the valley bottoms.

Important habitats include unimproved limestone grassland along the scarp, for example Rodborough Common Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and wet meadows with alder and willow and springline flushes. Two further SAC are also designated: Cotswold Beechwoods SAC and Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats SAC. Steeply-incised stream and river valleys cut through the north-west-facing scarp, flowing westwards towards the Severn. The watercourses of the dip slope provide the headwaters of the Thames and flow eastwards within broad shallow valleys, and these rivers and underlying aquifer are an important supply of high-quality water for populations within and around the area.

The area has a rich history, with nationally and internationally important evidence of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and later settlement in the form of archaeological sites, historic buildings and the wider historic landscape. Roman roads are prominent, including the Fosse Way which extends from north to south through the whole area. It is a notable visitor destination and has a longstanding reputation as the 'quintessential English landscape'.



7. FARMLAND SLOPES & VALLEY SIDES

Regional Character Areas

Northamptonshire Uplands, Cotswolds, Chilterns.

Location

This landscape type covers the steep valley sides of the Upper River Cherwell and its tributaries, the valley sides of the Rivers Evenlode, Windrush and the Thames Valley to the south of Shiplake.

Overview

A landscape type with prominent slopes within broader valleys. It is occupied by a mixed pattern of pasture and arable land. Long-distant views across the valleys are characteristic.

Key characteristics

- Prominent slopes and valley sides interrupted by a number of small, narrow v-shaped valleys.
- Large arable fields on the gentler slopes and small pasture fields on the steeper slopes and steep-sided valleys.
- A well-defined pattern of tall hedges and hedgerow trees.
- Small woodland copses and belts on steep slopes and along watercourses in the minor valleys.
- Small unspoilt villages with rural character.

Geology and landform

The Middle and Upper Lias beds, which are composed of soft clays, siltstones and shales, underlie the steep valley slopes. These soft rocks are heavily folded and drained by small streams to form an area of complex topography with narrow v-shaped valleys. Further to the north, the river Cherwell cuts through the Marlstone rock bed, which is an iron bearing limestone, to the underlying Lias siltstones and clays. In the Chilterns, the dip slope of the chalk escarpment descends towards the Thames valley and it is particularly steep to the south of Lower Shiplake.

Land use and vegetation

Underlying geology and landform both influence patterns of vegetation and land use. The fertile clay over the valley sides favours intensive arable cultivation, particularly on the gentler upper slopes around Lower and Upper Heyford, and Shipton-under-Wychwood. In contrast, steeper slopes that are less easily worked have a more mixed and intimate pattern of pasture and arable farmland. In particular, semi-improved and calcareous grassland, frequently interspersed with dense hawthorn and blackthorn scrub, is associated with a series of steep-sided valleys.

In places characterised by very steep slopes and steep-sided minor valleys there is a strong pattern of dense hedges, hedgerow trees, small copses and scattered woodland belts. Ash, oak, beech and conifers are the main tree species associated with the mixed plantations. This pattern is more noticeable along slopes in the Cotswolds, particularly around Swerford, Great Tew, Steeple Aston, Chipping Norton and Charlbury. There is also some wet woodland, and mature ash and willow fringing watercourses along the valley bottoms creating a sense of intimacy and enclosure.

Cultural pattern

The field pattern is characterised by geometrically-shaped, large-size arable fields, and smaller more irregularly-shaped grass fields on the steeper slopes and valley sides. They are largely enclosed by a network of tall, thick hawthorn and elm hedges, although they are much lower in areas dominated by intensive arable farming. Mature hedgerow trees of ash, sycamore and oak are prominent throughout the landscape. Many of the hedgerows have matured into dense corridors of trees, which emphasise the slope and dip of the valley sides. They are much denser in pastoral areas and where the landscape structure is stronger. This combined patchwork of field hedges, woodland and small valleys contribute towards a visually diverse landscape. Sometimes stone walls form the field boundaries, particularly around Shipton-under-Wychwood, Charlbury and Fulbrook.

The settlement pattern is largely characterised by small, rural, unspoilt nucleated villages. There are also a few larger settlements such as Burford and Shipton-under-Wychwood. Scattered farmsteads and old barns are sparsely scattered throughout, and the slopes are crossed by straight roads. Around Fulbrook and Burford the roads are sunken and more sinuous. The vernacular character is strong in almost all the villages. In places such as Chastleton, Sarsden, Great Tew, Over Worton and Middle Aston, there is the appearance of well-managed estates associated with the distinctive manor houses and small parklands. The dominant building materials are oolitic limestone and stone tiles. In the northern part of the landscape type, the warm orange-brown ironstone and thatched roofs are very characteristic in villages such as Great Tew and Lower Heyford. In the Chilterns, around Playhatch near Reading, the houses are mainly built of red bricks and clay tiles.

BIODIVERSITY

Overview

This landscape type consists mainly of valley sides and slopes, which support a wide range of locally important habitats including small woods, plantations and tree-lined watercourses. Other notable habitats include ancient semi-natural woodland, species-rich hedgerows, parklands, calcareous and marshy grassland.

Key Characteristics

- Predominantly low-medium bioscores, but reaching medium-high in some of the Cotswold river valleys including the Cherwell, Evenlode and Windrush.
- Important habitats include ancient semi-natural woodland, parkland, species-rich hedgerows and calcareous grassland.

General Description

The landscape type supports a wide range of locally important habitats including deciduous woods, plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses in the valleys. There is also a range of other important habitats including ancient semi-natural woodland, parkland and priority habitats such as species-rich hedgerows with trees, and calcareous and marshy grassland particularly in the valleys of the Rivers Cherwell, Evenlode and Windrush.

E. Steeple Aston (CW/48)

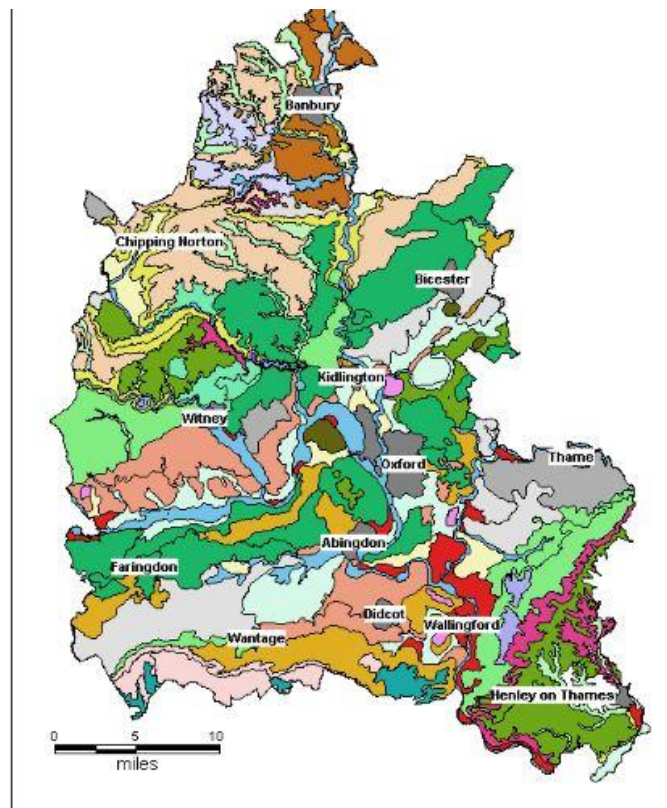
Landscape Character

This is a diverse landscape with small streams and minor valleys that cut across the broader slopes. The area is characterised by medium to large-sized fields with a mix of arable farming and semi-improved grassland. Some calcareous grassland can be found on the very steep slopes and patches of marshy grassland are associated with watercourses. Fields are enclosed by a mix of woodland copses and hedges that are generally in good condition and with species such as hawthorn, field maple and elder. The areas of parkland at Great Tew, Over-Worton and Middle Aston create small-scale, intimate pastoral landscapes. Overall, the landscape is characterised by semi-natural woodland as well as mixed and deciduous plantations on the slopes and valleys sides. Ash, oak, beech and sycamore are the main tree species found in these woods. There are dense corridors of wet woodland bordering watercourses and, combined with the mature ash and oak hedgerow trees, they add to the woodland cover.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 109/MH

There is a range of locally important habitats including plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and tree-lined watercourses. In the valleys to the west of Great Tew there are a number of important and priority habitats including calcareous and marshy grassland and wet woodland. There is also some calcareous grassland in an area close to Tackley. The different parklands also support several valuable habitats including mature trees and lakes.



Landscape Types

- Alluvial Lowlands
- Chalk Downland and Slopes
- Clay Vale
- Estate Farmlands
- Farmland Hills
- Farmland Plateau
- Farmland Slopes and Valley Sides
- Lowland Village Farmlands
- Pasture Hills
- River Meadowlands

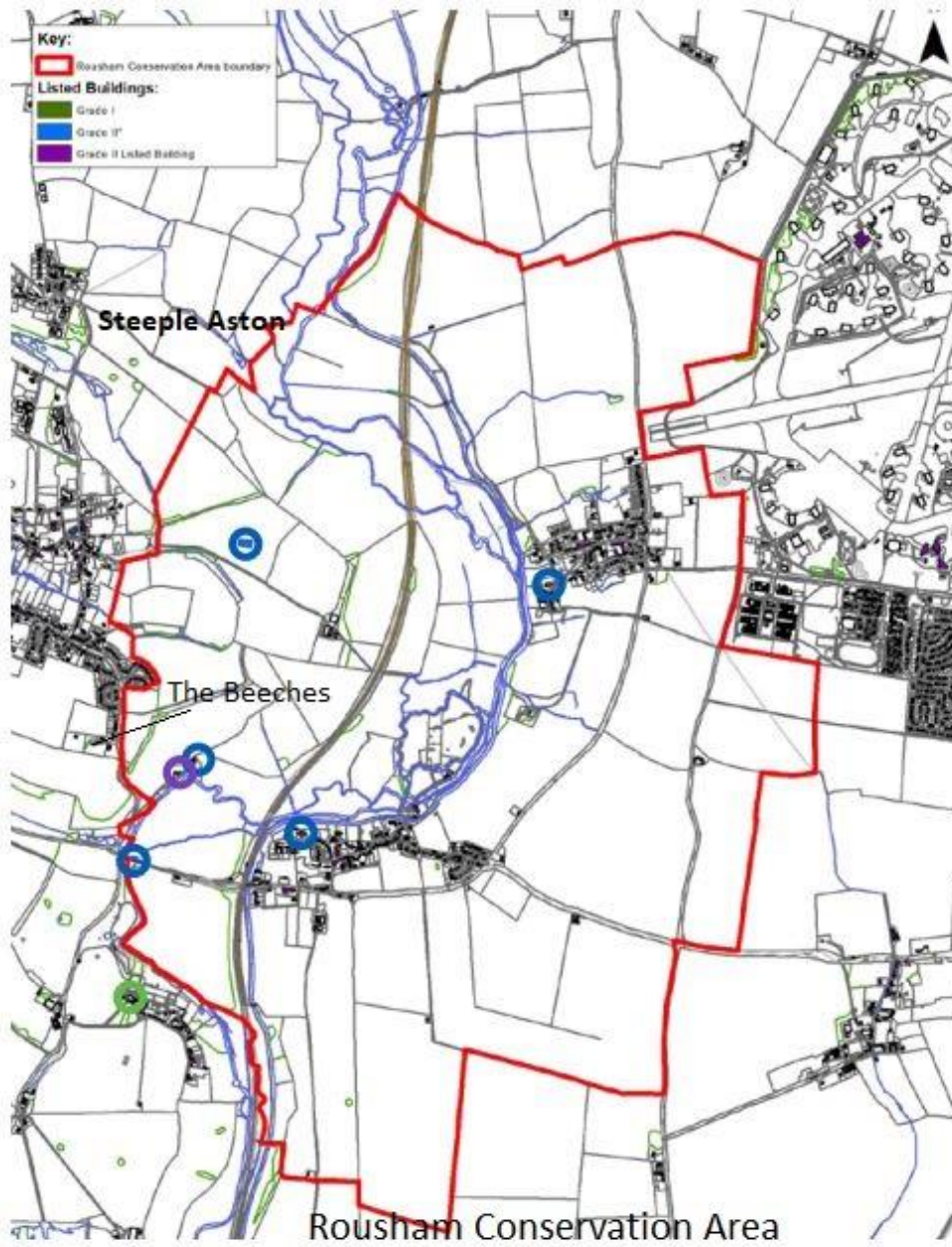


Figure 3. Key Heritage Assets

Annex 2 – Photoviewpoint Locations Plan.



Photoviewpoint assessment (refer to Photoviewpoint location plan).

With the exception of photographs 4 and 5 the following set of photographs are presented as an accurate record of the visual assessment carried out on the 9th January and 27th February 2019. Photographs 4 and 5 have been selected from a set of photographs commissioned by the client. Photographs 2 to 5 have been taken within the site area to show the character of the site, the existing buildings, mature trees and the tree and hedgerow cover along the site boundaries. These views are not accessible to the public. With the exception of photographs 2 to 5 and 7 all other photoviewpoints are accessible to the public and photographs 10 to 15 have been taken from the public footpaths (PRoW) that cross fields to the west of the site.

Photoviewpoint 1 – Looking west along the entrance driveway of The Beeches from the Heyford Road. The profile of Orchard House can just be seen behind the trees to the left of picture. Apart from a minor widening of the driveway the proposed development will have very little impact on this view. The magnitude of change will be Low and the visual impact will be Negligible.



Photoviewpoints 2 – Looking west, further along the approach to The Beeches. The outbuilding to the right will be demolished and replaced with a new dwelling. This is not a publicly accessible viewpoint but it does represent part of the aspect from the rear elevation of the neighbouring Orchard House. The magnitude of change for Orchard House will be Moderate and the visual impact Medium, but this will diminish in time when new planting has been established within the existing belt of mature trees.



Photoviewpoint 3 – Looking west to where the tracks for the existing narrow gauge railway pass through the belt of trees. The proposed access road will follow a similar alignment before it emerges out into the broader site area. Appropriate measures will be taken to protect the trees. This is not a publicly accessible view.



Photoviewpoint 4 – Looking west across the site from the platform of the narrow gauge station pavilion to the western boundary. This is not a publicly accessible view.



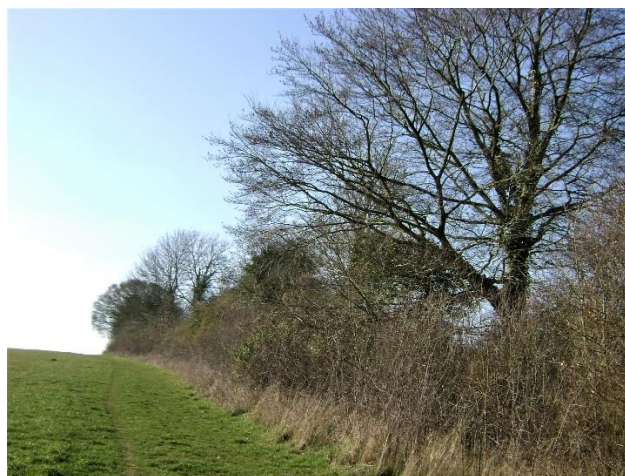
Photoviewpoint 5 – Looking across the site from the western boundary towards the southern boundary and the station pavilion building, to the left of picture. This is not a publicly accessible view.



Photoviewpoint 6 – Looking east from the side of the Heyford Road to the tree and hedgerow thicket that forms the southern boundary of Orchard House and The Beeches. There will be no change to this view.



Photoviewpoint 7 – Looking west along the same hedgerow, to the trees and hedgerow thicket that forms the southern boundary of the site at The Beeches. Although it's not a public right of way locals do walk their dogs along the edge of this field. There will be no change to this view.



Photoviewpoint 8 – Further along the Heyford Road towards its junction with the B4030. Looking northwest towards the site. The road is in a shallow cutting and the trees on both sides of the road provide an effective screen.



Photoviewpoint 9 - Looking west along the B4030 with Dean Plantation to the right of picture. The wide plantations of mature trees on both sides of the road provide a complete screen.



Photoviewpoint 10 – Looking east along the northern edge of Dean Plantation from the public footpath, as you leave the woodland and come out into the open fields.



Photoviewpoint 11 – Looking northeast towards the site from the same point on the public footpath. At a distance of 378.0m the field hedgerow and the tree and hedgerow thicket around the site effectively screens the site interior. The proposed development will have no impact upon this view apart from some minor light glow at night. As the footpath is unlikely to be used after dark the visual impact will be Negligible.



Photoviewpoint 12 – From further along the same footpath looking east directly towards the site at a distance of 378.0m. This is a winter view and there are gaps in the hedgerow along the western boundary so the existing railway station pavilion can be seen. It's likely therefore that the proposed development will be seen from this viewpoint although at some distance and the visual impact is assessed as Medium. When new mitigation planting is established along the western boundary the level of visual impact will reduce to Low and will eventually become Negligible. See comments on minor light glow intrusion for viewpoint 11 above.



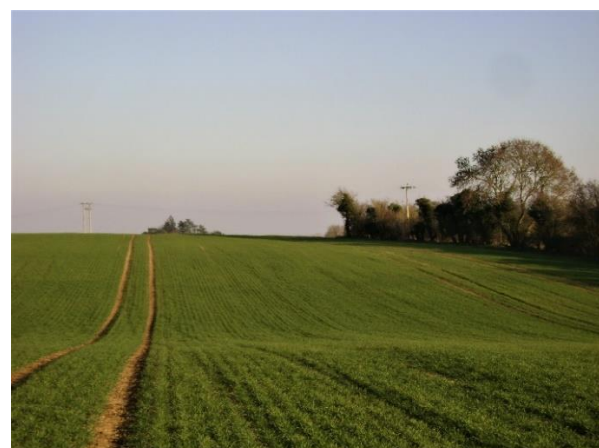
Photoviewpoint 13 – From further north along the same footpath looking southeast towards the site at a distance of 383.0m. From this angle the site is very largely screened by the boundary of trees and hedgerow thicket, although the southwestern corner of the proposed development may be seen. The visual intrusion will be Low and when new planting is established along the western boundary this will diminish to Negligible. See comments on minor light glow intrusion for viewpoint 11 above.



Photoviewpoint 14 – Looking south east from the footpath to the west of viewpoints 12 and 13 at a distance of 659.0m from the site. At this distance the proposed development will have a Negligible visual impact and with new mitigation planting along the western boundary it will be completely hidden from view.



Photoviewpoint 15 – From the same public footpath looking east towards the site at a distance of 703.0m. The landform dips and only the tops of the trees on the horizon identify the site location. The land form will screen the proposed development from view and there will be no visual impact.



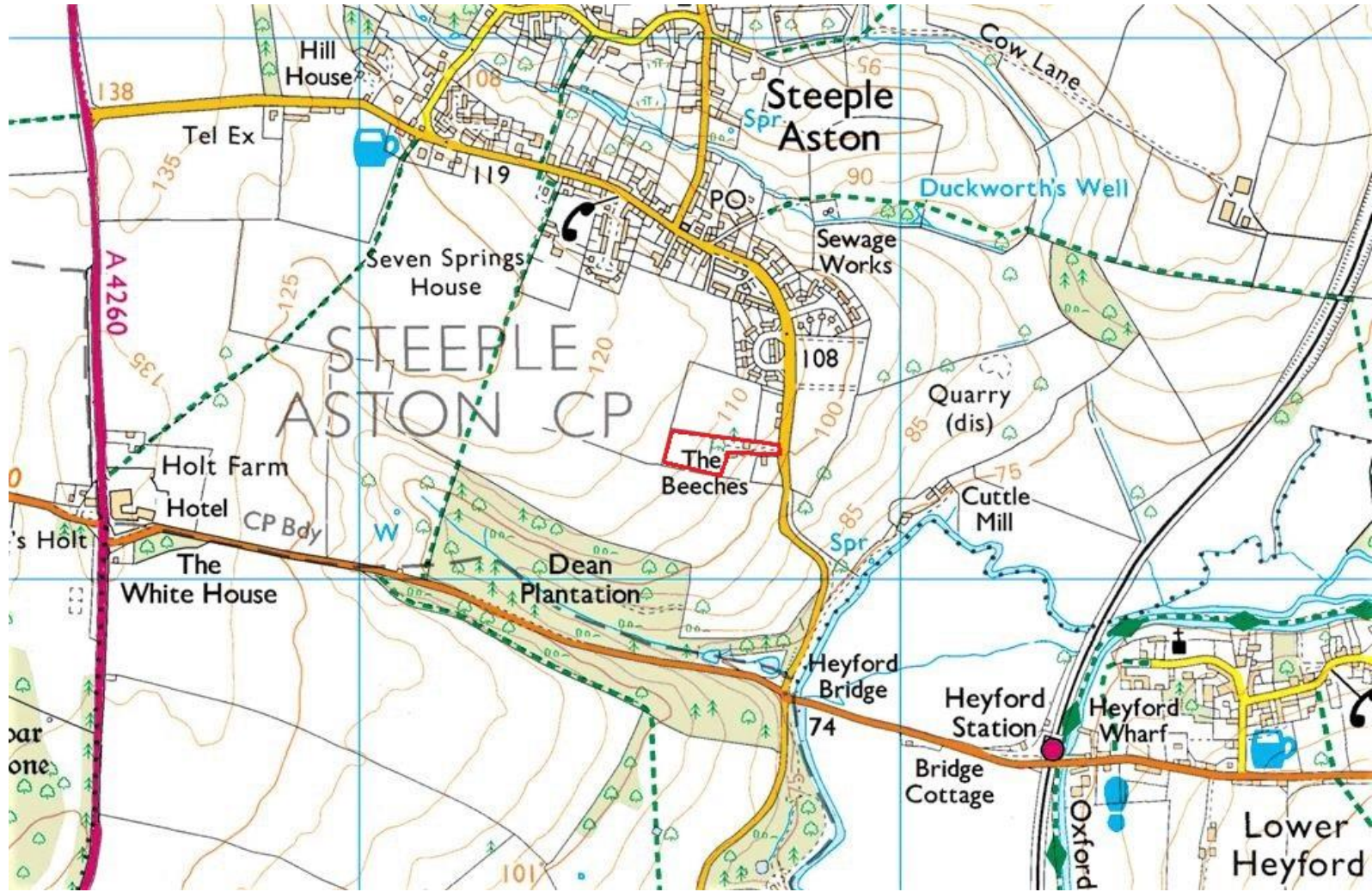
Photoviewpoint 16 – Within the enclosure of houses at The Crescent (off Heyford Road). Between the houses there are glimpsed views of trees on the northern boundary of the site. It's assumed that six of the houses will have some rear aspect towards the northern boundary of the site, but the proposed development should be largely screened by the tree and hedgerow thicket.



Photoviewpoint 17 – Looking south across the frontage of numbers 29 and 29a Heyford Road to the trees along the northern boundary of the site and the driveway approach to The Beeches. From this viewpoint the proposed development will be screened by the boundary trees and hedgerow thicket but the aspect from the rear of number 29a may have a partial view to the rear of plots 1 and 2. As there are already a number of outbuildings in this location (to be demolished) the visual intrusion should be no greater and further planting can be carried out along the boundary to achieve further screening.



Annex 3 - Extract from Ordnance Survey Plan with the site at The Beeches, Steeple Aston.



Annex 4 – Site Layout.

