

# LAND SOUTH OF GREEN LANE CHESTERTON

ADDENDUM TO LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

Prepared on behalf of  
WATES DEVELOPMENTS

June 2023

## PLANNING

Ref: 2930-APA-RE-02-RP-L-0002-P01



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) (Allen Pyke ref 2930-APA-RE-01-RP-L-0001 Rev. P04) was commissioned by Wates Developments and submitted in September 2022 in relation to their proposals for 147 new homes at their Site at Green Lane, Chesterton (Cherwell District Application ref 23/00173/OUT).
- 1.2 Commentary on the scope and conclusions of the LVA was received from Cherwell District Council's Case Officer and Landscape Officer in April 2023.
- 1.3 The latter concluded overall agreement with the scope and methodology of the LVA and its conclusions in relation to visual effects. However an overarching concern was raised on the scale of the proposals and the anticipated effects on settlement character. An extract of the Commentary is provided below:

### Settlement Character

The inter-relationship between the landscape and newly built form would be seen as a significant change, certainly when receptors approach the village. The land of the proposed development forms the landscape setting for the gateway into the village from the western end. Additional screening is proposed for this development and this in itself suggests that if this is necessary then the development will not fit easily into the landscape. And as is clearly apparent, building on this site invariably pushes development further out into open countryside, whilst adding another relatively busy access point off Green Lane and two further access points for pedestrians.

Being an extension beyond existing boundaries will alter the interpretation and approach from the open landscape and into the village which will have a detrimental impact on the settlement and landscape character, but will also add further pressure onto existing facilities and infrastructure.

The last Census suggests that the population in Chesterton was around 850 in 2011 and since this time there have been two developments, each with 45 homes. Based on the 2.49 average household calculation, this makes an additional 224, so a current population of around 1,074. If another 147 homes are added to the village this pushes the population further by an additional 366 which makes a consequential 34% increase. The proposals include additional recreational facilities and new footpaths to help accommodate this number, however the cumulative effects that the new development would impose on the village may be too significant to counterbalance.

*Extract of Commentary from Cherwell District Council Landscape Officer*

- 1.4 This Addendum provides additional technical evidence to expand on the findings of the LVA in relation to effects on landscape character which read as follows at paras 5.7 to 5.9:

*'The retention and enhancement of field boundaries and the introduction of a robust landscape structure to compliment the new built form will result in an attractive extension to the settlement edge.*

*The only permanent loss, with a residual adverse effect, will be the replacement of open arable farmland with a housing development. However the new landscape features, and a built form which is responsive to context, will outweigh the harm and present an overall benefit to the local landscape associated with the Chesterton settlement edge.*

- 1.5 The Addendum which follows provides more detail to aid the reader in understanding the sensitivity of the existing settlement character to the proposed change. It then explains how the scheme has evolved to ensure a 'landscape-led' approach and the subsequent potential for residual beneficial effects on the character of the settlement.

## 2.0 SETTLEMENT CHARACTER

### Planning Policy

- 2.1 The LVA considers planning policy at a National and Local Level at paras 3.12 and 3.14. In terms of the latter it considers three policies considered most relevant to the LVA, namely:
- Policy ESD 10: Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment;
  - Policy ESD 13: Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement;
  - Policy ESD 15: The Character of the Built and Historic Environment.
- 2.2 Advice from the Case Officer in considering the application refers to potential *'conflict with Policy Villages 2 and the Local Plan spatial strategy alongside the impact of the development on the settlement character'*.
- 2.3 Chesterton is defined at Policy Villages 1 as a 'Category A: Service Village': This is described as a larger village with services and facilities.
- 2.4 Para C.247 of the Cherwell District Local Plan states:  
*'We will cherish, protect and enhance the appearance and character of our villages by protecting conservation areas and by promoting high standards of design for new development. We will protect and enhance the beauty and natural diversity of the countryside for the enjoyment of all.'*
- 2.5 The Plan seeks to direct housing towards Bicester and Banbury but recognises the need for development within the rural areas

to meet the local and Cherwell wide needs. Reference is made to Policy BSC 1: District Wide Housing Distribution with regards to the overall level of housing growth for the villages and rural areas.

- 2.6 Policy BSC 1 focusses on housing numbers - this is not considered relevant to the LVA or Addendum and is addressed in the Planning Statement. Policy Villages 2 is extracted below. The 3rd and 5th bullets are considered most relevant to the LVA and Addendum. The sensitivity of the built environment to change is considered alongside the potential for any significant adverse landscape impacts.

### Policy Villages 2: Distributing Growth across the Rural Areas

**A total of 750 homes will be delivered at Category A villages. This will be in addition to the rural allowance for small site 'windfalls' and planning permissions for 10 or more dwellings as at 31 March 2014.**

**Sites will be identified through the preparation of the Local Plan Part 2, through the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans where applicable, and through the determination of applications for planning permission.**

**In identifying and considering sites, particular regard will be given to the following criteria:**

- **Whether the land has been previously developed land or is of lesser environmental value**
- **Whether significant adverse impact on heritage or wildlife assets could be avoided**
- **Whether development would contribute in enhancing the built environment**
- **Whether best and most versatile agricultural land could be avoided**
- **Whether significant adverse landscape and impacts could be avoided**
- **Whether satisfactory vehicular and pedestrian access/egress could be provided**
- **Whether the site is well located to services and facilities**
- **Whether necessary infrastructure could be provided**
- **Whether land considered for allocation is deliverable now or whether there is a reasonable prospect that it could be developed within the plan period**
- **Whether land the subject of an application for planning permission could be delivered within the next five years**
- **Whether the development would have an adverse impact on flood risk.**

## The Built Environment of Chesterton

- 2.9 The submitted Design and Access Statement (ACG Architects ref 353-ACG-XX-XX-RP-A-8500-D&A, Nov 2022) provides, at pages 15 to 20, an assessment of the village. It explores the historical context and local character and provides a useful analysis of the village's built form.
- 2.10 The LVA considers the sensitivity of the landscape from a National to Local Scale. Landscape is defined by GLVIA (The LI's Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) as being '*inclusive and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas.*'
- 2.11 The LVA considers published assessments where available and confirms that the Site does not lie within any designated landscape. Paras 3.25 to 3.30 of the submitted LVA provide a review of the landscape assessments published by Natural England and the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS).
- 2.12 In order to consider landscape (and the settlement) character at a local scale Allen Pyke Associates carried out an assessment of the site and its immediate setting by defining four landscape character zones (LCZs) at paras 3.31 to 3.35 of the submitted LVA. The LCZs are illustrated on Figure 8 of the LVA which zooms into the south western village edge and focusses on the Site.
- 2.13 Allen Pyke's assessment considers not only the arable and recreational landscape which forms the village setting along its south western edge (LCZ 1 and LCZ 3) but also the built up area of the village which is mostly distinguished by the residential areas adjacent to the Site (LCZ 2) and the Conservation Area (LCZ 4).
- 2.14 Figure 8 of the submitted LVA is misleading in its scale when considering the village as a whole. It should be read alongside Figure 2 of the LVA which shows the whole village and its setting. This has been extracted with commentary added (plan adjacent) and is discussed at the following page.

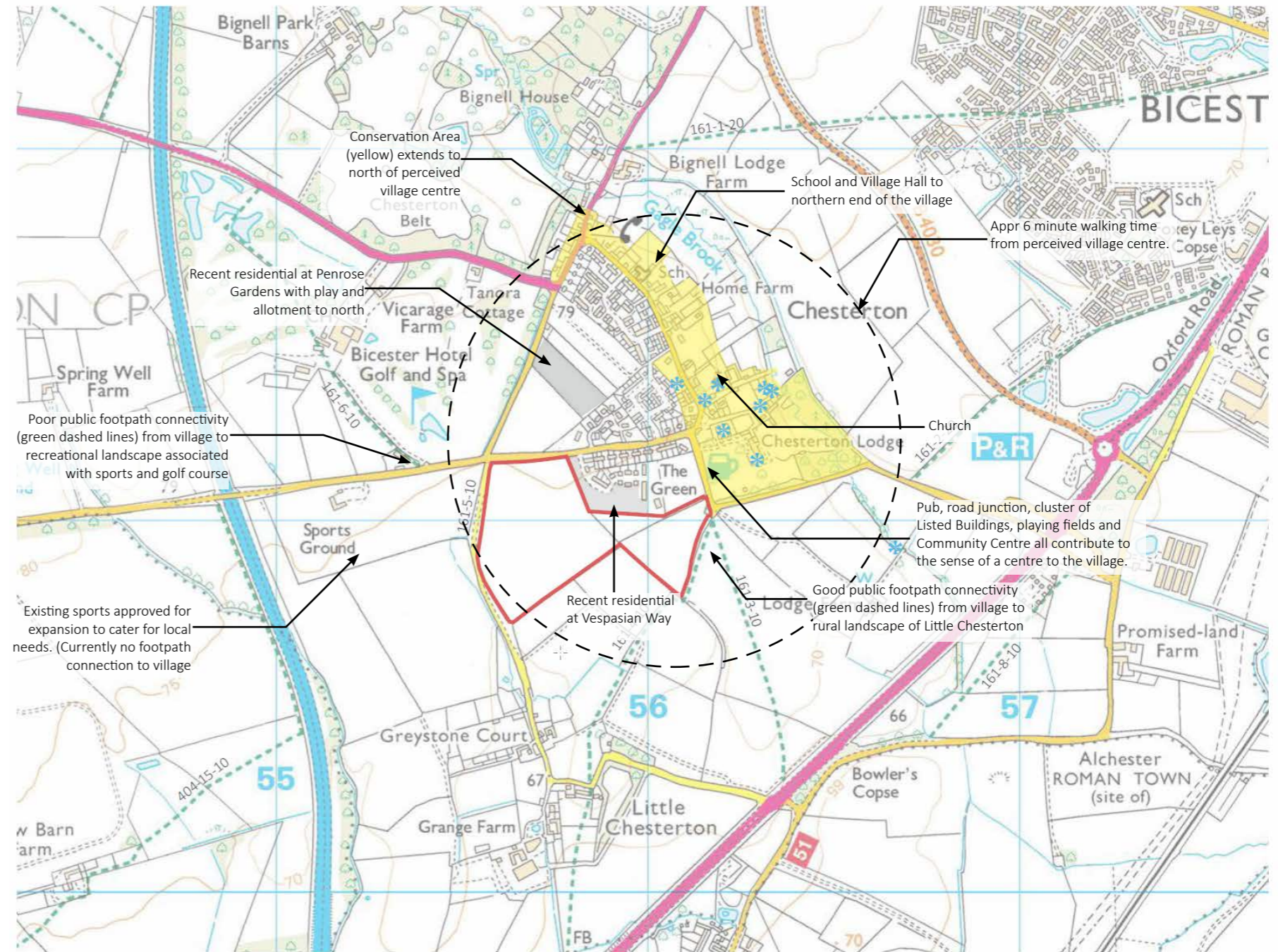


Figure 2 of submitted LVA with annotations added in relation to the built environment of Chesterton

- 2.15 In terms of Settlement Character the Conservation Area (hatched yellow on the plan) is most valued in terms of historic built form and its landscape features.
- 2.16 It forms the eastern half of the village. It extends north to include the junction of Alchester Road and the B4095 and south to include the grounds of Bruern Abbey School respectively.
- 2.17 A cluster of listed buildings are focussed to its centre near the junction of Green Lane and Alchester Road.
- 2.18 The pub and community centre (with its adjacent public realm) are close to this junction and all contribute to the sense of a centre to the village when driving through or walking on foot.
- 2.19 Recent residential developments at Penrose Gardens and Vespasian Way have successfully integrated new homes within walking distance of the village centre and sports facilities (including the sports grounds at Bicester Sports Association which is approved for expansion to meet local needs).
- 2.20 Figure 2 (at previous page) demonstrates that (on plan) there is an opportunity for further expansion of the village towards the south west. An appropriate expansion could be seen to complement the village identity by reinforcing its centre and improving walk-able connections for the community.
- 2.21 The rural landscape which forms the site's setting to the south is locally valued mostly for residents overlooking it from the settlement edge and for walkers enjoying the use of public rights of way towards Little Chesterton. The landscape to the west is dominated by the golf course and the sports pitches. Public footpaths west of the village are disjointed and footpath connectivity is reliant on the narrow grass verge adjacent to Green Lane.

- 2.22 In considering the landscape and settlement character and sensitivity to change, Allen Pyke's methodology places great weight on the value of landscape - ie the importance that is attached to it by individuals, communities and public bodies.
- 2.23 The Landscape Institute published a Technical Guidance Note (TGN) in 2021 entitled 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations'. It places great weight on considering the local value placed on the landscape - To elaborate on our assessment of the value of the local character zones we have taken Table 1 of the TGN and provided commentary (see next page) on each factor / criteria and provided narrative on indicators and evidence relevant to the LCZs.
- 2.24 This reinforces the LVA's conclusion that the Conservation Area is most sensitive to any change. It recognises that there is some local value placed on the landscape where it has matured to provide a strong sense of place, especially where it is accessible.

This TGN uses the following definitions:

**Landscape qualities = characteristics/ features of a landscape that are valued**

*This term is being used to distinguish landscape qualities from landscape characteristics which are elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to landscape character. Landscape qualities (in the sense meant in this TGN) are usually referred to as 'special qualities' or 'special landscape qualities' in relation to nationally designated landscapes. For example, 'special qualities' is a statutory expression used in relation to National Parks, in policy for Scotland's local landscape designations, and is a term used informally to describe components of natural beauty set out in AONB Management Plans<sup>3</sup>.*

**Landscape value = the relative value or importance attached to different landscapes by society on account of their landscape qualities (see Table 1).**

*The definition of landscape value used in this TGN draws on, and is compatible with, the [GLVIA3](#) definition of landscape value as well as Natural England's [definition](#) (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, 2013; Tudor, 2014). The definition makes it clear that it is 'society' that assigns value to landscapes. However, landscape value means more than popularity and the Landscape Institute suggests that value assessments should be undertaken by a landscape professional, drawing on evidence from stakeholders where available.*

Definition of Landscape Qualities and Landscape Value (Landscape Institute TGN 02/21)

2.25 The only value the Site holds is in the contribution it makes to views from overlooking residences and the associated perception of a countryside edge to the village. This is currently enjoyed by the few residents overlooking the Site and the users of the narrow lanes along two of its boundaries. The sensitivity of these receptors to change in their views has been assessed in the submitted LVA (at pages 13, 14, 15 and 21).

2.26 When considering the Site's landscape qualities and landscape value, using the Factors listed in TGN 02/21 it can be concluded that the LVA is sound in its assessment that the Site has the ability to accommodate the proposed change and that it has the potential to offer increased benefits to the community in the long term.

Factor	Definition	Indicators for the Site	Evidence
<b>Natural heritage</b>	Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape	No notable indicators for LCZs 1 to LCZ4	
<b>Cultural heritage</b>	Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape	The Conservation Area (LCZ 4) is designated and contains various Listed Buildings and features. There is no evidence of cultural heritage value within LCZs 1 to 3.	Conservation Area Appraisal and Historic England Listed Buildings map
<b>Landscape condition</b>	Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure	Overall the landscape is in a moderate to good condition across the LCZs. Individual elements of particular good condition include the mature vegetation which forms the setting to the Golf Course and the Bruern Abbey School. Hedgerows and hedgerow trees are of better condition beyond the site in the immediate context of Little Chesterton. Within the Site itself the adjacent settlement edge detracts from any sense of tranquillity.	Site Surveys
<b>Associations</b>	Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts	No notable indicators for LCZs 1 to LCZ4	None
<b>Distinctiveness</b>	Landscape that has a strong sense of identity	Overall there is a moderate level of distinctiveness across the LCZs. The mature landscape which forms the setting to the Golf Course and the Bruern Abbey School enhances the sense of place within these areas. Hedgerows and hedgerow trees beyond the site in the immediate context of Little Chesterton enhance the rural sense of place. Within the Site itself the adjacent settlement edge detracts from any sense of tranquillity. As a medium scale arable landscape it is not rare or distinctive in its setting.	Visual Assessment Site Surveys Published Character Assessments
<b>Recreational</b>	Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important	The golf course presents a mature landscape setting within which users enjoy recreational opportunities. Other recreational facilities across the LCZs also benefit from their setting within or adjacent to the village. Public rights of way to and from the village are also valued. The Site itself is not accessible and does not offer any recreational value at present.	Definitive public rights of way mapping/ OS map data Observations about recreational use/ enjoyment made in the field by the assessor
<b>Perceptual (Scenic)</b>	Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense	All LCZs are pleasant places enjoyed by the community and private residents and contribute to the scenic qualities of the village. The site itself may be valued by residents who currently overlook it in terms of the contribution it makes to their views towards the countryside.	Visual Assessment Site Surveys Published Character Assessments
<b>Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquillity)</b>	Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies	None of the LCZs have a notable high perceptual value in terms of wildness or tranquillity. Their night time character is affected by the existing built up areas.	None (Dark Skies Mapping checked to confirm no dark skies)
<b>Functional</b>	Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape	The public realm (including sports, community centre and play) provides an additional level of function within the relevant LCZs. The site itself offers no other functional value in the landscape other than as privately owned agricultural land. It does, however offer potential to improve the connection between the existing facilities within the village and at the sports centre.	Character Assessments Observations about recreational use/ enjoyment made in the field by the assessor

Factors considered when identifying landscape value (as listed in Table 1 of Landscape Institute TGN 02/21)

### 3.0 SCHEME EVOLUTION

#### Design Guidance

3.1 The LVA and Design and Access Statement make reference to the National Design Guide and Adopted Cherwell Residential Design Guide which provide guidance at a National and Local level respectively. The Site is submitted in outline form and, as such, much of the detailed design elements will be subject to approval at the reserved matters stage.

#### 'Landscape-led' approach

3.2 All published guidance and policy places importance on selecting appropriate sites for development and ensuring that development is responsive to its context. This, alongside ensuring that proposals benefit the environment and their local community in the long term forms the basis of ensuring a 'landscape-led approach' to masterplanning. Various definitions exist for this term in the field as follows:

*'Leading with the landscape means starting with people and how they live; then moving onto the spaces and places that support this; and only then sorting out the buildings. It is about making a place where people belong, which is the Old English meaning of landscape. Landscape-led masterplanning is about much more than good public realm with more trees. It is about changing the order of our thinking. It's about understanding what makes a successful place where lives can overlap. A place is not a static thing. It is about memory, history, chance encounters and experiences with the outside world, things beyond the site, a glimpsed view or seasonal change.'* (LDA Design, 1st March 2018).'

*'Design, which is strongly informed by understanding the essential character of the site and its context (the landscape), creates development which speaks of its location, responds to local character and fits well into its environment. It needs to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and create sustainable and successful places for people.'*(South Downs National Park Authority Design Guide, July 2022).



Initial Landscape Concept (Allen Pyke Associates, January 2022)

3.3 The design team have been proactive from early on in an iterative process which has led to establishing the outline parameters for the development and the Illustrative proposals which accompany the submission.

3.4 The Design and Access Statement, at page 18, sums up the limited constraints to the development of the Site. At pages 19 and 20 it lists the opportunities it offers.

3.5 Allen Pyke Associates were involved on the project since day 1 to guide the 'landscape-led' approach and to maximise the opportunities for place-making. The above shows an 'Initial Landscape Concept' which was developed to inform the layout once all site opportunities and constraints had been explored with the design team.

## 4.0 LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

- 4.1 The LVA acknowledges that the change from an open arable landscape to a new housing development will result in effects on the landscape. This is as would be expected for any development on a green field site. How these effects will be perceived in the landscape is the main area of concern raised by the CDC Landscape Officer. When we talk about how something is perceived we are referring to how people experience it and react to it and what impression it leaves on them - whether fleeting or lasting.
- 4.2 The baseline assessment demonstrates that the Site is not accessible to the public. It is only visible to people driving (or occasionally walking) past it or residents currently enjoying views across it from their south facing upper floor windows. There is an overlap here on visual effects (as it is predominantly the people viewing the Site that will perceive any change). It must be noted that the CDC Landscape Officer has agreed to the conclusions drawn on visual effects, ie the only notable residual visual effects will be on people overlooking the site from Vespasian Way and Green Lane.
- 4.3 In terms of landscape effects (which consider landscape value as a key component) the Site has the potential to offer considerable benefit to the community in the long term and the Parameter Plans and Illustrative Proposals present a range of enhancements / benefits to the environment and community.
- 4.4 Allen Pyke use a tried and tested Methodology to assess the landscape and visual effects of scheme proposals. This is included at Appendix A of the submitted LVA. At section 2c (page 29 of the LVA) it describes how effects can either be beneficial (positive) or adverse (negative). The scheme presents a range of benefits which will contribute to the landscape effects experienced and an improved appreciation of the village. A summary of these is provided below.
- 4.5 The only harm identified is the loss of arable land and the associated effects on views from residents at the recently constructed Vespasian Way. The reader is reminded that the residents do not own the land and that they do not have a right to a view

across it. They do, however have the right to have any proposed changes to their views assessed and the Officers have confirmed in their commentary that this has been suitably addressed in the submitted LVA.

- 4.6 The benefits listed below focus on the potential effects on the landscape and settlement character.
- 4.7 **Retention and enhancement of boundary planting** - this will maintain a moderate sense of enclosure to the Site and will reinforce the existing landscape pattern and wildlife corridors which are valued close to the settlement edge.
- 4.8 **New housing fronting onto Green Lane** - this will allow for natural surveillance over the lane with its retained trees and improved footpath and cycleway connectivity from the existing village to the sports facilities and countryside to the west. There will be an enhanced sense of arrival into the village when approaching from the west through the introduction of a gateway feature in close proximity to the sports pitches. The new housing set behind the retained trees will be a positive element in the transient views and will add to the sense of arrival when approaching the village centre.
- 4.9 A considerable **provision of public open space** is offered along the southern edge and within the eastern field. The range of experiences offered will cater for all users and instil a permanent, active and valued green edge to the village.
- 4.10 A **diverse mosaic of wildlife habitats and landscape types** will be integrated into the southern edge. This will improve the community's connection with nature and offer long term mental health and well-being benefits to all, whilst also meeting targets for biodiversity enhancements to a previously cultivated field.
- 4.11 The **internal Green Links** will act as movement corridors for people and wildlife with doorstep play and informal public open space offered to the new community.
- 4.12 **SuDS features** have been designed to be integral to the public realm - allowing enhanced appreciation of the seasonal changes and natural systems.

- 4.13 New housing will be designed in accordance with the Cherwell Design Guidance with **positive frontages and active, legible and safe streets** responding to and reinforcing the new settlement pattern. Adequate space has been allowed for new street trees and planted front gardens so as to further enhance the settlement character.

- 4.14 The Landscape Strategy Document (Allen Pyke Associates 2930-RE-02-rev A, dated August 2022) demonstrates the key design principles within a range of landscape character zones.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Should the scheme be refused and taken to appeal, an Inspector would most likely (as part of their decision) explore whether the benefits of the scheme could potentially outweigh the adverse effects and any conflict with Policy Villages 2 and the Local Plan spatial strategy.
- 5.2 The LVA concludes that the Site presents an opportunity to extend the village with no significant residual adverse effects on landscape and settlement character. The overall benefits of the scheme will significantly outweigh the limited harm caused by replacing the arable land with new housing.
- 5.3 The Site presents an opportunity for a truly 'Landscape-led masterplan' which focusses on creating memorable places and experiences which will hold value for existing and new residents of all ages and abilities in perpetuity. This will be a significant improvement to the current conditions which present an intensively farmed, species poor, arable landscape which is not accessible to the public and mostly holds value by a select few residents who overlook it.
- 5.4 The parameters set by the outline submission and the details approved through future clearance of Reserved Matters and Conditions later down the line will ensure a significant long term benefit to the settlement character of the Village of Chesterton, whilst maintaining and reinforcing its overall scale and geometry in plan form.