
LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

ON BEHALF OF

RICHBOROUGH

FOR

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

OF

LAND WEST OF FRINGFORD ROAD,

CAVERSFIELD, OXFORDSHIRE

OX27 8TJ

V2 January 2024



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Document History

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V1	Information for Planning Team review	JB		09.01.2024
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ZLA 1	SITE CONTEXT PLAN (ref: ZLA_1403-L-101)
APPENDIX ZLA 2	ILLUSTRATIVE MASTERPLAN (ref: 501-P-07)
APPENDIX ZLA 3	THEORETICAL VISIBILITY (ref: ZLA_1403-L-102)
APPENDIX ZLA 4	LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN (ref: ZLA_1403-L-201)
APPENDIX ZAL 5	REPRESENTATIVE VIEWPOINTS Photoviewpoints 1-10 (ref: ZLA_1403-L-103)
APPENDIX ZLA 6	METHODOLOGY



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Zebra Landscape Architects Limited ('ZLA') was commissioned by Richborough (the 'Applicant') to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal ('LVA') for the development of land west of Fringford Road, Caversfield, Oxfordshire (the 'site'); see Appendix ZLA 1.
- 1.2. The Applicant is seeking an Outline planning approval for the demolition of existing structures and erection of up to 99 dwellings, access, open space and associated works (outline, all matters reserved save for access (the 'proposed development'); see Appendix ZLA 2.
- 1.3. The site is located at OS Grid Reference: SP 58338 25075 (site centre), and is found on the northern edge of Bicester town, within an area subject to current and forthcoming residential, employment and tourism development schemes to be delivered within the period of the currently adopted Local Plan. The site is in the county of Oxfordshire, and found within the administrative authority of Cherwell District Council the ('LPA').
- 1.4. This LVA is part of a suite of documents accompanying a planning application for the proposed development. The site is briefly described in Section 2 of this LVA, with further site details given in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) which accompanies the planning application.
- 1.5. This appraisal details how the proposed development has been designed and planned with consideration to predicted effects on landscape character and visual amenity in the surrounding environment and neighbourhood.
- 1.6. This report has been prepared by a Chartered Landscape Architect and a Professional Member of Landscape Institute with experience in landscape design and planning in the development sector. All drawings referenced within this assessment are in Appendices of the LVA.
- 1.7. All photography work was undertaken during early January 2024, with ZLA being involved with the iterative development of the proposed scheme prior to this, working collectively with the wider planning and technical teams during 2023.

The Purpose of this Landscape Visual Appraisal

- 1.8. The purpose of this LVA is to identify the baseline conditions of the site and surrounding area and to determine those landscape and visual characteristics that might inform the design of the development proposals, including recommendations for mitigation. It then provides an appraisal of the landscape and visual effects predicted to arise from the development of the site as follows:
 - Landscape fabric, when there is physical change to components of the landscape; landform, land use or land cover;
 - Landscape character, caused by changes in the key characteristics and qualities of the landscape; and
 - Visual amenity caused by changes in the appearance of the landscape as a result of Development.
- 1.9. This report is set out in the following sections:
 - Project Description – This describes the elements of the proposed Development with the potential to cause effects on landscape fabric, landscape character and/or visual amenity. The site selection and design reiteration measures incorporated into the final design to help mitigate potential impacts are also outlined, this is contained in Section 2, and an account of landscape mitigation measures, and publish landscape management guidelines at Section 3.
 - A summary of our recent field based assessment is presented at Section 4.



- Assessment Criteria – This section identifies the relevant guidance used to carry out the assessment, consultation to date, viewpoint selection and defines the study area; this is contained in Section 5. The detailed methodology can be found in the final appendix of this report.
 - Relevant Landscape Related Planning Policy - The main planning policies, guidance, and background documents relevant to this appraisal; see Section 6 and 7.
 - Baseline Conditions – The landscape and visual character of the site and its setting is provided, establishing receptors within the study area with theoretical visibility of the proposed Development; see Section 8.
 - Predicted Effects – An assessment of potential effects on the landscape and visual receptors identified in the baseline assessment, drawing upon a combination of representative and specific viewpoints to demonstrate the potential effects as a result of the proposed Development; see Section 9 and 10.
 - Summary of Findings – This section provides an overview of the proposed Development in its landscape and visual context, drawing out the key findings of the assessment and concluding on the acceptability of the proposed Development in landscape and visual terms; see Section 11 with a Conclusion at Section 12.
- 1.10. This application represents a submission of an outline planning application with the proposed Illustrative Masterplan (ref: 501.P07) which has been prepared by the Masterplanners at EDGE Urban Design. This Illustrative Masterplan is contained in Appendix ZLA 2.



2. THE SITE

Site Location

- 2.1. The site is situated at OS Grid Reference: SP 58338 25075 (site centre). The whole quantum of the site is within the control of the Applicant. This will form the basis of the planning application. To prepare this appraisal, ZLA undertook a field-based survey, and an examination of the site's characteristics are provided in Section 6, including Table 6.1.

Appraisal of the Site

Landscape Fabric

- 2.2. The site is defined by native hedgerows. The Site forms a roughly rectangular parcel of land. The site is composed mainly of grassland. A farmhouse and equine buildings occupy part of the site.
- 2.3. The interior of the site has been sub-divided for equestrian pasture fields, albeit this by temporary fencing. There are a number of mature native trees aligning a driveway leading from Aunt Ems Lane to the farmstead dwelling. The farmstead is enclosed by a number of agri-building and storage facilities arranged around an all-weather hardstanding yard area. This is enclosed to the east by a small woodland plantation of native species, and further groups of mature native trees to the south and west of this location.
- 2.4. The south and south western boundary is defined by tree belts bounding Fringford Road, and enclosing the adjoining residential amenity space of dwellings situated on Fringford Road.

Surrounding Land Uses

- 2.5. Equestrian fields are not a typical land use within the context of Caversfield to the north and east of the village – that being larger, wide, rectangular arable crop fields, with the former RAF Bicester site found east of Caversfield. To the north and east, there are small woodland plantations (rectangular) and riparian tree belts, with field hedgerows having a greater scattering of hedgerow trees, with a vegetated, tree'd buffer along Aunt Ems Lane to the west.
- 2.6. Between Caversfield and Bicester, there are small to medium scale fields managed for arable crops and pasture, with fields enclosed by native hedgerows, with extensive tree components (especially along Fringford Road and Bicester Road), which filters views of the Caversfield village, as well as the former RAF Bicester site area.
- 2.7. To the west, beyond Aunt Ems Lane, there is an arable crop field between the site and the Bicester Road, beyond which, the wider urban development of Bicester is found, with long standing residential development found south of the A4095 roadway, and more contemporary residential development west of the Bicester Road (B4100) including Charlotte Avenue. This area has a distinctly urban edge feel, with a number of recently built out occupied dwellings, as well as a number being constructed (as part of the Strategic Development Site at Bicester 1 (North-west Bicester Eco-town development)).

Scenic Quality

- 2.8. The site is situated on the periphery of Caversfield village, and is experienced as open horse fields at a large residential dwelling or farmstead. The site is situated on the edge of Caversfield, and as ZLA observed from our field-based assessment, the site appears to nestle within this mature vegetation along Aunt Ems Lane, where there is a concentration of tree components.
- 2.9. The interior of the site has a working character with equestrian fields and the wider agri-business and open yard area round the farmstead dwelling. The southern site area is overlooked by a small cluster of residential dwellings (predominantly two storey in scale).



- 2.10. The site itself is not considered especially distinctive, nor is it particularly remarkable in terms of scenic quality. However, landform is gently undulating locally with a concentration of tree groups and woodland plantations found around the edge of Caversfield. From within the site, there is a limited appreciation of the wider open countryside, except to the east, due to the extensive boundaries which enclose the site and restrict visibility.

Tranquillity and Built Form

- 2.11. The site has a multiple of land uses, which influence the perception of tranquillity. The site contains built form around the farmstead with multiple agri-business building, storage facilities and all weather surfaced yard. The farmstead and this complex is accessed from the west via an all-weather surfaced route. The site is bounded, and overlooked by existing residential development (predominantly two storey in height) to its southern quarter, with a further vehicle access leading from Fringford Road.
- 2.12. In the background, there is a noticeable traffic noise from users of the Bicester Road (B4100) to the west of the site, which is audible from the site. Overall, ZLA considers this site to have a less than moderate sense of tranquillity.

Topography

- 2.13. Landform at the site is gently undulating at circa 58 to 59m AOD. The site is situated within a landform that generally undulates, with rising landform to the north around the hamlet/small village of Bainton at circa 85m AOD.
- 2.14. Landform within the application site is typical of the landform found on the edge of the Caversfield – that being gently undulating, which is typically found to the north and north east of Bicester, and generally within the host landscape character area.

Recreational Value

- 2.15. At present no public access is available into the site, being wholly within private ownership. The site is situated within an area of wider Public Rights of Way (PRoW), with a moderate number of PRoW passing within the initial 1 km radius of the site – these are found predominantly within open countryside passing through gently undulating landform.
- 2.16. The site is not known to have any notable cultural connection locally for the community of Balsall Common and its outlying settlements; see ZLA's Site Context plan (ref: ZLA_TBC-L-101, Appendix ZLA 1).

Ecology

- 2.17. The site is not subject to any ecological designations. To the south west, within the built up area of Bicester, is the Bure Local Nature Reserve, whilst to the northwest of the site is the Ardley Cutting and Quarry SSSI.
- 2.18. The site's hedgerows and trees, and the pastoral character of this landscape is of varying quality and considered to be common elements within this landscape. The site generally has a low ecological value.

Arboriculture

- 2.19. The interior of the site has a limited number of trees – those that are present are associated with the farmstead, and the access route running east from Aunt Ems Lane to the west. These trees are of native species found locally to the site area, including Ash, Birch Lime, Maple and Oak.
- 2.20. The majority of the trees within the site are found to the south east to southern edge and along the boundary with Aunt Ems Lane. These trees are also native species, including Ash, Hawthorn, Maple, Sycamore and Apple trees.

Cultural Heritage

- 2.21. Within the village of Caversfield, to the east, there are no Listed Buildings/Structures. There are a number of Listed Buildings/Structures (Grade II) situated within the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area



- 2.22. To the north west and west, there is a Grade II Listed building at Home Farmhouse, and the Grade II* listing of the Church of Saint Laurence sited on the B4100. The site is not covered by any Scheduled Monuments, Conservation Areas or Listed Buildings.

Landscape Condition

- 2.23. When assessing the condition of the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Area (within which the site falls), the Cherwell District Council Bicester Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2010) judged that the landscape condition to be of 'medium quality' and one which was 'typically representative of the landscape to the north west of Bicester beyond the site area'.
- 2.24. The site's pastoral fields and the surrounding landscape show no significant signs of degradation or dereliction, although development in the landscape around the site (i.e., Elmsbrook) together with various agricultural practices, has inevitably resulted in some disruption in landscape character and some fragmentation in habitats. In general, it is considered that the landscape fabric of the site and local area is in a reasonable and moderate condition which accords with the position reached by the Bicester Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Assessment.



3. THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

3.1. The Applicant is seeking an Outline planning approval for the demolition of existing structures and erection of up to 99 dwellings, access, open space and associated works (outline, all matters reserved save for access (the 'proposed development');

3.2. The planning application is accompanied by an Illustrative Masterplan and a Design and Access Statement (DAS). The following summarises the development proposal; see Appendix ZLA 2:

- The proposal allows for up to 99 no. dwellings;
- Dwellings will be a mixture of predominantly two storey dwellings and up to one and a half store. This is similar, if not less in height than the overall height of existing dwellings within the site's setting i.e., Fringford Road, RAF Bicester Conservation Area along Skimmingdish Lane, and also along the existing town edge of Bicester to south west and west;
- A new vehicle and pedestrian access will be created off Fringford Road to the south east with a further pedestrian and cycle access points created nearby to this which feeds into the primary tree lined street linking with secondary streets and village mews;
- The retention of the existing greenfield to the northern and western quarter of the site affording grassland enhancement and new native tree and fruit tree planting. Planting will be native species of local importance, and where practicable, of local provenance;
- The planting and establishment of a community orchard planted with locally found fruit tree species, reflecting the previously abundant fruit orchards found around this region of Oxfordshire i.e., The Mid-Shires.
- Create a network of green spaces with green corridors running through the scheme linking formal and informal landscape areas, and directing pedestrian movements way from sensitive ecological habitat creation areas;
- Green corridors affording pedestrian and cycle movement around then scheme and good connectivity between formal play (Locally Equipped Area of Play Area/LEAP) and informal play facilities ('play-on-the-way');
- Stepping new built development well into the site with an extensive offset from Aunt Ems Lane to the west to retain an undeveloped and open view corridor along this lane. This will provide new tree planting to enhance the existing field boundary planting, and establish grassland and habitat, field edges and trees where retained. The grassland will be retained and enhanced;
- Informal open space to afford new structural landscaping with a mix of native trees, shrubs and meadow grassland for diversity of ecosystems and habitat creation as well as strengthening of screening and protection of visual amenity;
- Blue infrastructure including planted Swales along the primary roadway, with attenuating lagoons to the south eastern site quarter and along the Green Corridor to the south western quarter of the site and running through the wider public open space the west.



4. MITIGATION MEASURES

- 4.1. In siting the proposed development, the physical constraints of the site and its topography have been taken into consideration to minimise the potential for the proposed development to not break skylines or represent a series of prominent new structures in views towards the site, and around the village of Caversfield, or the local area including RAF Bicester Conservation Area.
- 4.2. The landscape and visual sensitivities of the site have been influential in the development of the Illustrative Masterplan contained in Appendix ZLA 2. This site layout was developed iteratively with the Site Masterplanner through the findings of ZLA's field-based assessment, and ongoing advice since the undertaking of the initial review of the site in early 2023. This work has involved discussions and collaborative workshops with the wider planning and technical team members.
- 4.3. The prescription of the building heights for each proposed dwelling, and the relative finished floor level ('FFL') for each proposed unit have been tested through on-site assessment, so that the proposal is not substantially greater, and is reflective of built context of the site.
- 4.4. Building heights have been restrained to being predominantly 2 storey, which is similar, or less in overall height than the existing dwellings within the site's setting including Fringford Road to the south east and south, with RAF Bicester Conservation Area along Skimmingdish Lane, and also along the existing town edge of Bicester to south west and west.

Landscape Mitigation Measures

- 4.5. Landscape mitigation measures have been developed through consideration of the host landscape character within which the site is located, as well as reviewing the arboriculture and ecological assessments (which support this planning application).
- 4.6. Furthermore, the landscape and visual sensitivities of the site have influenced the masterplanning process through an iterative process. The retention of existing landscape fabric, and new landscaping (as shown on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan) has been devised to avoid, offset, or reduce landscape and visual effects. Additionally, these proposals aim to restore and improve the local landscape fabric, and enhance the village edge setting to Caversfield.
- 4.7. In their published landscape character assessment, the County Council identifies an appropriate landscape strategy for the host landscape character area within which, the site is located. Furthermore, this strategy identifies a number of management measures, including the following (see Section 8 for further detail):
 - *'Conserve and maintain semi-natural and ancient semi-natural woodland. Where appropriate, replace non-native conifer species with native species such as oak and ash. Promote the establishment and management of medium to large-scale deciduous and mixed plantations in areas where the landscape structure is particularly weak;*
 - *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash;*
 - *Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type;*
 - *Conserve and sympathetically maintain species-rich hedgerows and, where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle;*
 - *Conserve parklands and their associated landscape features such as stone walls, lakes, mature trees and woods;*



- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly within parklands;*
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows;*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses such as quarries, landfill sites, airfields and large-scale development, such as new barns and industrial units, with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.'*

Landscape Strategy

- 4.8. The built development as proposed has been deliberately arranged so as to ensure the following:
- The proposed new residential dwellings have been deliberately arranged within the body of the site area, enabling broad green buffers, and setting development back from the adjoining woodland block (around Caversfield House);
 - Stepping new built development well into the site with an extensive offset from Aunt Ems Lane to the west to retain an undeveloped and open view corridor along this lane reinforcing the perception of openness along its route from Caversfield to the town edge of Bicester (beyond the A4095 and B4100);
 - To establish new built form well within the physical features enclosing the site including the woodland block between the site and Caversfield House, and within the wider concentration of tree cover to the east and south east (smaller woodland plantations) and extensive tree lined routes of Fringford Road and Aunt Ems Lane to the south and west;
 - The provision of extensive public open space affords opportunities for green infrastructure, ecological / habitat enhancement as well as amenity for residents throughout the scheme, developing new public open spaces, which enhances the gateway into the village;
 - To utilise the existing field boundaries and/or definable features within the western part of the site so that there is a logical, clear, and robust edge for the proposed development; and
 - To provide an extensive and enduring area of green space and planting that provides an appropriate and sympathetic design response to address the transition between built development and the surrounding landscape, and to maintain and strengthen the visual separation that exists between the site (within Caversfield) and the town edge of Bicester including the North West Bicester sustainable extension area beyond the beyond the A4095 and B4100).
- 4.9. The site's westernmost boundary, which is defined by retained established tree belt and native hedgerow to Aunt Ems Lane, with the provision of an extensive green buffer (ranging from 25 metres width at its narrowest point, and up to 110 metres at its widest point) and strengthened with swathes of new broadleaved planting and areas of green space to form a substantial area of structural landscape that wraps around the western and northern part of the new built form which has been arranged within the central to south eastern part of the site area.



- 4.10. This is part of the landscape led masterplanning approach, which retains and expands upon the existing landscape features of the site, delivers a scheme that is sensitive, responsive, and appropriate to its setting and its landscape features, and one in which new built development is located with an extensive green setting.
- 4.11. This green infrastructure is an integral part of the proposed site layout, which in turn, will deliver the enhancement of the local landscape and betterment of ecological habitat value, as well as affording amenity space which has a pedestrian and cycle focus for substantial links between existing and new neighbourhoods.
- 4.12. The introduction and establishment of a community orchard within the central public open space enables the restoration of a fruit orchard of locally found species. This initiative reflects the once abundant, but now mainly lost fruit orchards found around Bicester, and detailed landscape design proposals would involve consultation with the Mid-Shires Orchard Group, an independent group of enthusiasts of orchards, apples and heritage top fruit in Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire. Further fruit tree planting would be established within the wider green corridors, informal landscaped areas and new hedgerow planting for habitat creation and ecological diversity.
- 4.13. In collaboration with the consulting Arboriculturist and Ecologist for this proposal, several green and blue infrastructure initiatives, and ecological enhancements have been integrated into the proposed development. The focus of these measures is less about screening and filtering views, rather, the enhancement of the local landscape and habitat value, as well as the better integration of development at the site through new landscaping and the conservation and enhancement of existing trees and hedgerows within the site.
- 4.14. The combination of these factors has iteratively guided the site layout, as well as the landscape proposals for the development (see Landscape Strategy (ref: ZLA_TBC-L-201) in Appendix ZLA 5, which formed the concept for developing the illustrative landscape enhancement and mitigation proposals contained in Appendix ZLA 6. Furthermore, these principles will be instrumental in developing the detailed design for the discharge of planning conditions post approval.
- 4.15. The landscape proposal for the development is shown in the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (ref: ZLA_TBC- L-201), Appendix ZLA 6. Drawing on this LVA, and the forgoing technical information, these proposals respond to the development to offset and reduce the effect of the proposal, as well as the enhancement of the landscape and ecology of the site.
- 4.16. Further to this, ZLA recommends the following three points:
 - To endeavour that existing and new landscape elements are appropriately managed to ensure establishment and long-term management for effective mitigation of the proposal in the long term;
 - This management strategy will ensure a long-term landscape and ecological management plan for retained landscape fabric and new planting within the scheme, including the eastern site area which will be managed as a community orchard re-established rare and endangered local fruit tree species (of local importance to this part of Oxfordshire through consultation with the Mid Shires Orchard Group);
 - To develop appropriate landscape proposals for individual plots within the development, including planting of native hedgerows, shrubs and tree species of local importance, and where practicable, allow for fruit trees (species of local importance), and where practicable, and of local provenance. This will ensure continuity of the overall scheme, preservation of landscape mitigation measures as well as habitat enhancement.



- 4.17. Accordingly, the development of the proposal, will ensure the long-term management of the site's landscape fabric, affording betterment for visual amenity, and wildlife of the area, whilst ensuring the integrity of the existing greenfield area to the site's northern and western quarter, will be retained and enhanced as part of the proposed scheme, enhancing the southern gateway into the village, and also the wider setting to RAF Bicester Conservation Area.

Construction Phase

- 4.18. It is envisaged that the development proposal would be delivered in an individual phase. Consequently, given the foregoing, the following activities and elements have the potential to cause a temporary direct effect on the landscape fabric of the application site, and an indirect effect, on the landscape and visual amenity of the study area:
- Erection of, and visual effect, of temporary site hoarding / fencing to enclose the site, and tree protection fencing (to accord to BS 5837: 2012) within the site, and along its boundaries;
 - Temporary portacabin structures for site welfare and office, and vehicle parking area;
 - Earthwork excavation for the formation of construction levels, and the protection of the existing brook and ditches during the construction phase through protective fencing along its route;
 - Utility of existing site access for the construction stage, and the proposed access / egress for the proposed development;
 - Construction of new access route from the south east from Fringford Road to optimise the retention of the existing native hedgerow and trees along the site's boundaries with the existing road system, optimising the retention of the extensively tree'd edge along Aunt Ems Lane, and through the designed route within the site's interior;
 - Construction of external storage area surfacing; and
 - HGV deliveries to site and movement of vehicles on site.



5. SUMMARY OF THE FIELD BASED ASSESSMENT

Defining the Appraisal Area

- 5.1. To establish the baseline context of the site and its surroundings, and to assess the potential limit of material effects, the study area has been considered at two geographical scales; see Appendix ZLA 1:
- Initially, a broad 'study area' was adopted, the extent of which is illustrated on Plan ZLA_TBC - L-101, which is formed mainly on a desk-based study. This broad study area enabled the geographical scope of the appraisal to be defined based on the site's environmental planning context and the extent of views to and from the site; and
 - After undertaking our field-based assessment, this broad study area was redefined to the land area most likely to experience landscape and visual effects. The extent of this detailed study area is 1km as illustrated on plan ZLA_TBC-L-103.
- 5.2. Through on-site observations, we have observed the geographical area by which the site can be primarily seen from. This area has been identified through visiting publicly accessible locations, walking PRow and driving the local road network. This is a geographical zone by which the site is discernible, and which would normally be close-ranging in distance from the site.
- 5.3. This primary zone of visibility is where representative viewpoints are assessed, and whilst there may be views from the wider area beyond the primary zone, views are less open, and likely to be filtered, or to an extent screened by existing landscape features, built development or landform.
- 5.4. During our field-based assessment during winter-time conditions (January 2024), and with consideration of the plotted Zone of Theoretical Visibility (Appendix ZLA 3), ZLA notes the following:

North:

- 5.5. To the north to north east, the following is noted:
- The discernibility of the application site from the north is influenced by the concentration of tree groups and woodland around the location of St Laurence Church. Further to this, there are extensive tree components and hedgerows associated with Caversfield House to the north, situated off the B4100 Bicester Road;
 - Further to this, the woodland and tree groups around St Laurence Church extend to the north east and north west, with further riparian tree belts, with a number of woodland plantations including Bainton Copse and Cotmore Covert;
 - Beyond this, there is open countryside beyond these woodland plantation. Whilst the field pattern is medium to large in scale, with fields defined by robust hedgerows with scattered hedgerow trees, which further influence the sight of the application site. The combination of landform, with intervening mature tree components is sufficient to substantially filter, if not screen the site from view across the wider open countryside.
 - Given the foregoing, there is limited discernibility of the application site when viewed from the on the immediate outskirts of Caversfield village, and the combination of the wider woodland plantations, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and tree belts is sufficient to screen direct views of the application site from the wider open countryside beyond 0.5km to the north. Within this area, there are a very limited number of PRow, and it is these routes from which the site may be seen from; see ZLA's Site Context plan (Appendix ZLA 1).



- 5.6. **Zone of Primary Visibility to the North to North East – Summary:** The Zone of Primary Visibility is predominantly from within immediate setting of the village, where the site is seen in combination with the village environment of built form and urban type features. Consequently, in these situations the site has a perceived village edge location.
- 5.7. Generally, in these situations, the settlement of Caversfield can be seen from the PRoW passing north of the site; albeit extensively filtered by mature tree component, field and roadside hedgerows and tree groups. There is limited sight of the wider north eastern edge of Bicester, although the more recent residential built forms are glimpsed through trees during our winter-time field assessment (January 2024). There is very limited sight of the wider former RAF Bicester with its built form, structures and features.

North East to East:

- 5.8. To the north east to east, the following is noted:
- From our field based assessment, the site is not seen wholesale from the area surrounding the site’s location. The discernibility of the application site from the open countryside is limited to within the immediate field area adjoining the site’s north east and eastern edge. Beyond this, the field hedgerow and scattered hedgerow trees along the Fringford Road, is sufficient to substantially filter, if not screen the application site from view, especially during spring and summer time.
 - Beyond the Fringford Road, whilst the field pattern is medium to large, and fields have lost hedgerows, there is no elevated landform by which there would be wider, broad views across to the application site. This situation prevails between Fringford Road and the A4421 roadway, which runs beyond Caversfield and the Former RAF Bicester. Within this area, there is extensive tree groups, plantations and riparian tree belts within the wider open countryside, which further restricts the discernibility of the site.
- 5.9. **Zone of Primary Visibility to the North East to East – Summary:** The Zone of Primary Visibility is predominantly from within immediate fields adjoining the application site, which is within 0.5km distance from the site. Within this area, there are a limited number of PRoW, and it is these routes from which the site may be seen from; see ZLA’s Site Context plan (Appendix ZLA 1).
- 5.10. In these situations, the location of the application site is experienced in combination with the village environment of built form and urban type features i.e., those two storey dwellings situated along Fringford Road overlooking the open fields neighbouring the site. Consequently, in these situations the site has a perceived village edge location.
- 5.11. ZLA observed during our field-based assessment, the settlement of Caversfield can be seen from the PRoW passing north and north east of the site; albeit extensively filtered by mature tree component, field and roadside hedgerows and tree groups. There is limited sight of the wider north eastern edge of Bicester, although the more recent residential built forms are glimpsed through trees during our winter-time field assessment (January 2024). There is very limited sight of the wider former RAF Bicester with its built form, structures and features.



East to South East:

- 5.12. To the east to south east, the following is noted:
- Fringford Road, and roads thereof, are an extensive number of residential dwellings (predominantly two storey). These dwellings are long-established, and form the village of Caversfield.
 - The dwellings have a mixed orientation, some looking across Fringford Road to the approximate location of the site. Direct views of the site are very limited, from which the site would not be seen wholesale. However, in these situations, the extent of the village and its built form screens direct views of the site from east, whilst the wider area of RAF Bicester further screens through its built form, structures and features.
 - Further to this, there is no elevated landform by which there would be wider, broad views across to the application site.
 - As demonstrated by ZLA’s Site Context plan (Appendix ZLA 1), there is a very limited number of PRoW, and a small number of vehicles, whereby route pass through the village area, and the PRoW around its immediate context. However, in these situations, there is very limited, if no discernibility of the site passed the immediate two storey dwellings along Fringford Road.
 - Beyond the Former RAF Bicester, there is a modest number of PRoW, whereby sight of the site is restricted by intervening built form.
 - Along Fringford Road, views of the site are substantially filtered by the extensive tree group along Fringford Road, which in spring and summer is likely to screen the site from view when passing along this route.
 - Between Fringford Road and the A4421 there is extensive built form associated with the former RAF Bicester site. The combination of this built form and mature landscape fabric, substantially filters, if not screens direct views to the application site. This is the location for the Former DLO Caversfield (Approved Housing Scheme).
- 5.13. **Zone of Primary Visibility to the East to South East – Summary:** Given the foregoing, the Zone of Primary Visibility is limited to a very minor geographical area along the eastern to south eastern edge of the site, where Fringford passes the site. Beyond this, there is scope to see filtered views of the site from the upper floor of the immediate dwellings along this route, and beyond the site is likely to be screened.
- 5.14. Consequently, the Zone of Primary Visibility is predominantly from within the village, or on its immediate approach passing the site, or within the immediate field area through which a PRoW passes from Fringford Road.
- 5.15. Where the site is seen in combination with the village environment of built form, urban type features, as well as the existing rail line and agriculture built form which reduces the perception of the wider open countryside. Overall the Zone of Primary Visibility is well within 0.5km distance of the site to the east to south east.
- 5.16. In these situations, there is scope to see, or be situated within the wider urban settlement of Bicester with occasional glimpsed views of residential dwellings situated within Caversfield, and occasional glimpsed views of the former RAF Bicester with built form and structures situated between Fringford Road and the A4421.
- 5.17. However, discernibility of the site is restricted to the immediate setting along Fringford Road, and glimpsed between existing residential buildings. In these situations, there is limited, if no discernible of the wider Bicester North East.



South:

- 5.18. To the south, a similar situation as above is experienced. From our field-based assessment, the following was noted:
- Residential built form encloses the site's southern edge with Fringford Road, with further residential development situated thereof with Caversfield. These dwellings are long-established, with a mixed orientation. Direct views of the site are very limited, from which the site would not be seen wholesale. However, in these situations, the extent of the village and its built form screens direct views of the site from south beyond the immediate village setting.
 - The field pattern beyond Caversfield is small to medium, and enclosed by field hedgerows with scattered hedgerow trees, with an extensive tree line along the edge of the former RAF Bicester site. The route of Fringford Road running south to the edge of Bicester meets the A4095 roadway which is lined with extensive hedgerows and tree groups. The combination of these features, plus the extensive tree line along the site's south western edge, restricts sight of the site. In many situations, the site is not discernible in winter-time conditions.
 - The landform between Caversfield and the northern urban edge of Bicester is typically very gently undulating, affording no elevated landform for broad, open views of the site at Caversfield village. Within this area, there are a limited number of PRoW, and it is these routes from which the site may be seen from; see ZLA's Site Context plan (Appendix ZLA 1).
- 5.19. **Zone of Primary Visibility to the South - Summary:** Given the foregoing, the Zone of Primary Visibility is limited to a very minor geographical area along Fringford Road, whereby the site may be glimpsed between the existing dwellings bounding the site and their mature landscape features with the private amenity gardens. In many situations to the south, there is very little, if any sight of the site, with very limited discernibility around Bicester North East and the wider settlement edge along the A4421 to the south.

South West to North West:

- 5.20. The following is noted from our field-based assessment:
- From our field based assessment, the site is generally not seen wholesale to the south west and west. The tree components and hedgerow along Aunt Ems Lane is sufficient to substantially filter views of the site, especially when combined with the wider field hedgerows and scattered hedgerow trees situated between with the field system between Caversfield and Bicester.
 - Recent newly built dwellings are situated within Bicester North East are situated west of the Bicester Road, and there is limited scope to see the site from this urban setting due to intervening built form, structures and urban features.
 - As demonstrated by ZLA's Site Context plan (Appendix ZLA 1), there is a very limited number of PRoW west the dwelling situated off the Bicester Road. In many situations, the recently built out new residential areas are sufficient screen direct view to the site. The landform is typically undulating, and does not afford broad, open views across to the site. Between this location and Bucknell village (circa 2km west of the site), there are no public roadways by which one would pass along within the open countryside. Consequently, the discernibility of the site from the wider local road network is not possible either.



- There are glimpsed views of the site across a minor geographical area along Aunt Emna Lane where the existing field hedgerow is gappy and in poor condition with fewer tree components.

Views from the north west are screened by the extensive tree groups and woodland block associated with Laurence’s Church, as well as the extensive tree components within the private gardens of Caversfield House. These same features influence sight of the site from along the Bicester Road

- 5.21. Zone of Primary Visibility to the South West to North West – Summary: Given the foregoing, the Zone of Primary Visibility is limited to the immediate setting of the site. Whilst the site is not seen wholesale, it can be glimpsed along Aunt Ems Lane through areas of degraded hedgerow and tree planting. Beyond this, the site is substantially filtered, if not screened even during winter time conditions.
- 5.22. Generally, the Zone of Primary Visibility does not extend beyond the Bicester Road (B4100), and where there are views across to the site’s location is substantially filtered by the concentration of tree features around this western edge of Caversfield, or screened by the tree groups and woodland north and north west of the application site.
- 5.23. In these situations, the application site is not experienced in combination with the wider setting of Bicester to the south and south west, and not with the wider village area of Caversfield, and the former RAF Bicester area screened from view by existing dwellings at Caversfield, or the wider concentration of tree components along the western edge of the village.

Overall Summary

- 5.24. The combination of these physical features, landform, built form and landscape fabric determines the Zone of Primary Visibility for the application site. This ‘ZPV’ is located largely to the local setting of the application site within Caversfield, or across a small geographical areas of the village.
- 5.25. In a limited number of cases, the site is experienced on route into, or out of the village itself by road users and walkers, with wholesale views of the site generally not seen being substantially filtered, if not screened by the existing concentration of tree cover and associated hedgerow and vegetation, and wider built form of Caversfield.
- 5.26. Consequently, the application site represents land that is nestled within its village edge location, and given the foregoing physical elements, constrains the site’s overall discernibility across the wider open countryside setting of Caversfield, resulting a Zone of Primary Visibility predominantly to that within the western edge of village, or approaching the village along Aunt Ems Lane to the west. Given this, the site is experienced as having a stronger relationship with its village setting, rather than the wider open countryside, from which it is enclosed through extensive tree components, tree groups and woodland plantations.
- 5.27. This analysis has determined the selection of representative viewpoints for the undertaking of this appraisal. Viewpoints have been selected to demonstrate then discernibility of the applications site, as well as from those locations, where the site is substantially filtered, if not screened – so demonstrating this influence on the ZPV also.



6. SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- 6.1. This LVA has involved desk study, field work, data processing and analysis as well as interpretation using professional judgement undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect based on best practice guidance¹. All representative photography and field-based assessment works for this Landscape Visual Appraisal were undertaken during winter-time conditions in early January 2024.
- 6.2. Typically, a 15-year time horizon is used as the basis for conclusions about the residual levels of effect. Fifteen years is a well-established and accepted compromise between assessing the shorter-term effects (which may often be rather 'raw' before any proposed mitigation has had time to take effect) and an excessively long time period.

Viewpoint Selection

- 6.3. Given the foregoing analysis in Section 5, paragraph 5.5 to 5.27 above, ZLA has selected a number of representative viewpoints for examination as part of this LVA. These viewpoints have been selected to reflect the principle that this appraisal is to examine the 'worst case' scenario. In selecting these viewpoints, ZLA has been conscious of appraising the site from all points of the compass, as well as within a range of distances to the site, as well as testing the development proposals from a range of receptor types.
- 6.4. A list of the selected viewpoints and their reasons for selection is provided in Table 6.1 overleaf. The location of representative viewpoints is illustrated on plan ZLA_TBC-L-103 (Appendix ZLA 3).

¹ *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2013)*



Table 6.1: Summary of Representative Viewpoints (winter-time, January 2024)

View	Location	OS Grid Ref	Approx. Distance from Site's Centre	Reason for Selection (Site Topography: range 86 to 87m AOD)
1.	View from PRow (LPA ref:153/1/10) situated on the north western edge of Caversfield passing through open countryside	458274 , 225562	0.35km, N/0 degrees looking S/ 180 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on a Public Footpath. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site from a public footpath passing through open countryside outside of Caversfield village. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and PRow users would have a high susceptibility to change and high visual sensitivity. Topography: 89m AOD
2.	View from PRow (LPA ref:367/16/40) situated on the north to north east of Caversfield with open countryside	458458, 226592	1.45 km, N-NE-E/20 degrees looking S-SW/200 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, but situated on a locally elevated area of open countryside beyond Caversfield. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site from a local vantage point. Users would have a very high susceptibility to change and very high visual sensitivity. Topography: 98m AOD
3.	View from PRow (LPA ref:218/6/10) situated outside of Caversfield with open countryside	459363, 226751	1.9 km, NE/40 degrees Looking SW/220 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, but situated on a locally elevated area of open countryside beyond Caversfield. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site from a local vantage point. Users would have a very high susceptibility to change and very high visual sensitivity. Topography: 94m AOD
4.	View from the junction of PRow (LPA ref: 218/8/10) and the local minor roadway, Fringford Road, to the north east of Caversfield passing through open countryside	459040, 226389	1.4 km, NE/40 degrees looking SW/220 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated with open countryside beyond the village to the north east. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site from PRow from the open countryside. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and PRow users would have a high susceptibility to change and high visual sensitivity. Topography: 92m AOD
5.	View from local minor roadway, Fringford Road, to the north east of Caversfield passing through open countryside	458744, 225770	0.7 km, NE/40 degrees looking SW/220 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and passes along a local minor roadway approach the edge of Caversfield. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site as one approaches the village. The roadway is situated within a medium value landscape, and users would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography: 90m AOD



View	Location	OS Grid Ref	Approx. Distance from Site's Centre	Reason for Selection (Site Topography: range 86 to 87m AOD)
6.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:153/1/10) passing through open countryside on the village edge of Caversfield	458575 , 225380	0.3 km, E-NE/60 degrees looking W-SW/240 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on a PRoW passing along the outskirts of Caversfield. This viewpoints was selected to demonstrate the overall discernibility of the site from the village setting. This PRoW is located within a medium value landscape, and PRoW users would have a high susceptibility to change and high visual sensitivity. Topography: 89m AOD
7.	View from local roadway, Fringford Road, as it passes through the village of Caversfield (passed the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area)	458622 , 225063	Within 0.1km E/90 degrees looking W/270 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and passes the application site along a minor roadway. This viewpoint is selected to demonstrate the effect of the proposed scheme as one passes through the village. The roadway s situated within a medium value landscape, and users would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography: 87m AOD
8.	View from local roadway, Skimmingdish Road, as it passes through the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area	458640, 224859	Within 0.15km SE/135 degrees looking NW/315 degrees	This viewpoint is situated within a Conservation Area within the area of residential development surrounding the application site at RAF Bicester and also neighbouring Caversfield. This viewpoint is selected to demonstrate the effect of the proposed scheme as one passes through this built up area of the Conservation Area. The roadway is situated within a medium value landscape, and users would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography: 84m AOD
9.	View from local roadway, Fringford Road, as it passes through the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area on the edge of Caversfield	458493 , 224830	Within 0.1km S/180 degrees looking N/360 degrees	This viewpoint is situated within a Conservation Area within the area of residential development surrounding the application site at RAF Bicester and also neighbouring Caversfield. This viewpoint is selected to demonstrate the effect of the proposed scheme as one passes through this built up area of the Conservation Area. The roadway is situated within a medium value landscape, and users would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography: 85m AOD



View	Location	OS Grid Ref	Approx. Distance from Site's Centre	Reason for Selection (Site Topography: range 86 to 87m AOD)
10.	View from the junction of PRoW (LPA ref: 153/1/10) and the local minor roadway, Fringford Road, to the south west of Caversfield passing through open countryside between the village and the existing urban edge of Bicester town	458317 , 224629	0.30km, S-SW/220 degrees looking E/NE 40 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated with open countryside beyond Caversfield and Bicester. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and PRoW users would have a medium susceptibility to change and high visual sensitivity. Topography 87m AOD
11.	View from the pedestrian route along the A4095 main roadway situated on the existing urban edge of Bicester town	458144, 224470	0.55km, SW/240 degrees looking NE 30 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on the existing urban edge of Bicester. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and road users would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography 88m AOD
12.	View from the junction of Charlotte Avenue and the B4100 Bicester Roadway on the urban edge of Bicester town	458109 , 224728	0.3km, W/260 degrees looking E 80 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on the existing urban edge of Bicester. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and road users would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography 88m AOD
13.	View from Charlotte Avenue overlooking public open space within the existing residential development	457772 , 224968	0.5km W/270 degrees looking E/90 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated within the existing residential area of Bicester. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography 84m AOD
14.	View from Charlotte Avenue overlooking public open space within the existing residential development	457804 , 225183	0.4km NW/300 degrees looking SE/120 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated within the existing residential area of Bicester. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography 84m AOD



View	Location	OS Grid Ref	Approx. Distance from Site's Centre	Reason for Selection (Site Topography: range 86 to 87m AOD)
15.	View from the junction of B4100 Bicester Road and the local minor roadway, Aunt Ems Lane, to the north west of Caversfield	458110, 225091	Within 0.1km NW/330 degrees looking SE/150 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and passes along a local roadway approaching Caversfield and the edge of Bicester town. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site as one approaches the town. The roadway is situated within a medium value landscape, and users would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography: 86m AOD
16.	View from the junction of Charlotte Avenue and the B4100 Bicester Roadway on the urban edge of Bicester town	457766, 225473	0.6km, NW/330 degrees looking SE/150 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on the existing urban edge of Bicester. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and road users would have a medium susceptibility to change and medium visual sensitivity. Topography 91m AOD
17.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:148/7/20) situated on the north western edge of Bicester progressing west toward the open countryside	457511, 225683	1.0km, NW/340 degrees looking SE/160 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on a Public Footpath. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site from a public footpath passing along the settlement edge of Bicester. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and PRoW users would have a high susceptibility to change and high visual sensitivity. Topography: 92m AOD
18.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:153/3/10) passing through open countryside on the village edge of Caversfield	457420, 226414	1.55km, NW/340 degrees looking SE/160 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on a PRoW passing through open countryside towards the outlying village of Bainton. This viewpoints was selected to demonstrate the overall discernibility of the site from the wider open countryside on elevated landform. This PRoW is located within a medium value landscape, and PRoW users would have a high susceptibility to change and high visual sensitivity. Topography: 98m AOD
19.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:153/1/10) situated on the north western edge of Caversfield passing through open countryside	458274, 225562	0.55km, N/350 degrees looking S/170 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on a Public Footpath. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site from a public footpath passing through open countryside. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and PRoW users would have a high susceptibility to change and high visual sensitivity. Topography: 89m AOD



View	Location	OS Grid Ref	Approx. Distance from Site's Centre	Reason for Selection (Site Topography: range 86 to 87m AOD)
20.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:153/1/10) passing through open countryside north west of Caversfield	458178 , 225978	0.85km, N/350 degrees looking S/ 170 degrees	This viewpoint is outside of a National or local landscape designation, and is situated on a Public Footpath. This viewpoint demonstrates the discernibility of the application site from a public footpath passing through open countryside outside of Caversfield village. This viewpoint is situated within a medium value landscape, and PRoW users would have a high susceptibility to change and high visual sensitivity. Topography: 91m AOD

Public Rights of Way

- 6.5. As demonstrated within ZLA's field-based observations reported in Section 5, paragraph 5.5 to 5.27, the discernibility of the site from PRoW are very limited, and where views occur, these routes are generally passing within close range of the site to the north and north east-east. In these situations, PRoW users would be approaching/leaving the northern and western village edge of Caversfield, whereby, the application site is not seen wholesale, and there is limited recognition of the wider former RAF Bicester area, or the wider settlement of Bicester to the south, and new developments around Bicester North East. This reflects the limited Zone of Primary Visibility as detailed in Section 5.
- 6.6. Additionally, we note, there is limited scope to see the site to the east, south and west of the site outside of the immediate village setting as one passes along Fringford Road, none the less, ZLA has appraised the predicted effects of the scheme on the wider PRoW network across these locations.
- 6.7. However, given the wider built form of the former RAF Bicester, Bicester to the south and Bicester North East to the west, the quantum of the assessment area is limited to within 0.5km, and less than 1km distance.
- 6.8. Generally, the combination of gently undulating landform, as well as the typical strong field hedgerows, hedgerow trees, small woodland plantations and riparian tree belts is sufficient to substantially filter, if not screen the site from then wider open countryside to east and south east and west beyond Caversfield and the wider townscape.

Vehicle Routes

- 6.9. With consideration of our field based assessment, and our analysis at Section 5, the combination of physical features, landform, built form and landscape fabric determines the Zone of Primary Visibility for the application site. This 'ZPV' is located largely to local setting of the application site within Caversfield, or small geographical areas of the village, or on approaching Caversfield generally to the north and west. In these cases, the site is substantially filtered, and not seen wholesale being experienced on route into, or out of the village itself by local roadway users.
- 6.10. Our analysis with Section 5, identified the Zone of Primary Visibility around the local road network, and has identified the following routes for appraisal:
- Fringford Road approaching the site from the north (within close range of the site less than 0.5km distance);
 - Fringford Road passing the site as the routes progresses through Caversfield;



- Skimmingdish Road (within the RAF Bicester Conservation Area) within close range of the site less than 0.3km distance);
- Aunt Ems Lane passing the site along its western edge (running between Fringford Road and Bicester Road (B4100); and
- Fringford Road travelling north and south passing the junction of Aunt Ems Lane.

Residential Receptors

- 6.11. Views from private residential properties, although likely to be of high to very high sensitivity to changes in the view, are not protected by national planning guidance or local planning policy. Accordingly, changes to the character, 'quality' and nature of private views are not a material planning consideration in the determination of a planning application. However, they remain relevant to this review of the predicted extent and nature of visual change, so are reviewed briefly below.
- 6.12. Our field-based assessment identified a significant number of residential dwellings or residential groups across the local area, including a number of outlying settlements. However, given the foregoing analysis at Section 5, paragraph 5.6 onwards, ZLA has scoped out a substantial number of these due to the influence of local circumstances on the ability to see the site. Consequently, this LVA will appraise the effects of the proposed scheme on the following locations:
- Fringford Road with residential dwellings bounding the application site;
 - Fringford Road with residential dwellings neighbouring the application site;
 - Skimmingdish Road (RAF Bicester Conservation Area) long-established residential dwellings south east of the application site; and
 - Charlotte Road with new residential development associated with Bicester North East to circa 0.5km distance to the south west, west and north west of the application site.



7. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

7.1. The findings of the relevant environmental and planning designations are illustrated on Plan ZLA_TBC-L-101 (Appendix ZLA 1) and summarised in this section. The following documents are relevant and will be discussed as appropriate later in this LVA:

- National Planning Policy Framework Revision (revised December 2023); and
- Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031 (Adopted 2015).

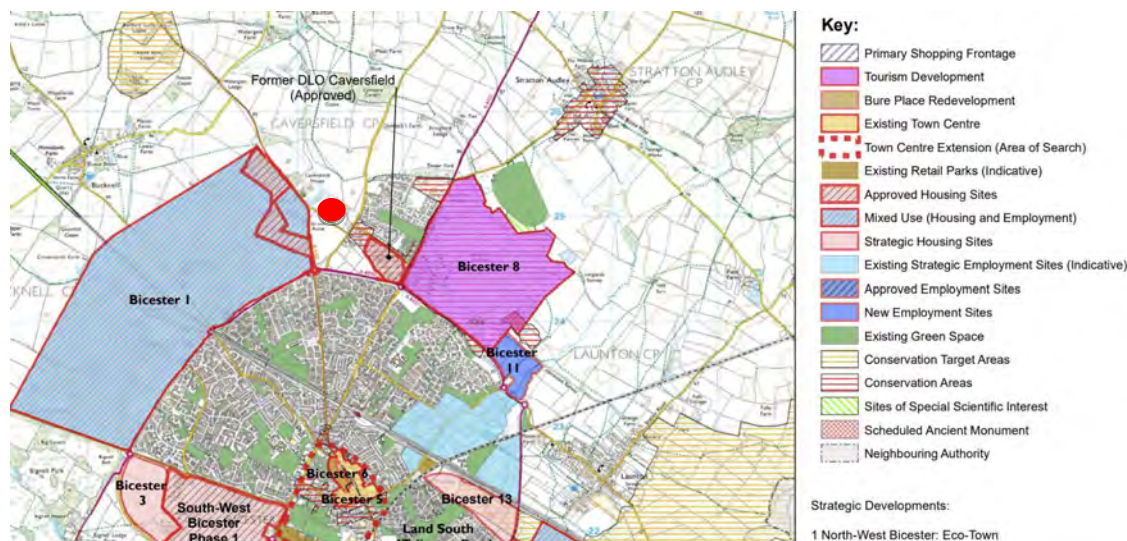
7.2. With regard to Neighbourhood Planning, the Caversfield Parish Council has yet to prepare such a document. Consequently, no information can be considered as part of this appraisal.

Landscape-related Designations and Other Considerations

7.3. Landscape-related designations and policy considerations are shown on plan ZLA TBC-L-101 (Appendix ZLA 1). Additionally, with consideration of the Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031 (Adopted 2015) Plan 5.2 Key Policies Map: Bicester, ZLA finds the following:

- National landscape designations: The site does not lie within, adjoin, or is close to a Nationally designated landscape such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Park, or within a designated Green Belt location; and
- Local landscape designations: The site does not lie within, adjoin, or is close to a locally designated landscape, such as a Significant Gap, Green Space or similar local designation; see Image ZLA 7.1. Additionally, as demonstrated below, the application site is found outside of, and not adjoining the RAF Bicester Conservation Area.

Image ZLA 7.1: Extract from Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031 (Adopted 2015) Plan 5.2 Key Policies Map. N.B. The approximate location of the application site is indicated by ZLAS with a solid red circle



7.4. Consequently, given the foregoing, the site is not afforded elevated protection under National and local planning policy (in landscape terms).



Current and Future Development

- 7.5. Contextually, it is also pertinent to reflect on the current and future development initiatives which are taking place within the context of the application site. As demonstrated by Image ZLA 7.1, the northern edge of Bicester is subject to current and future development initiatives, with which the application site is situated.
- 7.6. These current and future developments are for Approved Housing Schemes, Allocated Mixed Use Sites for Housing and Employment, and also a Tourism Development Site; including:
- Former DLO Caversfield (Approved Housing Scheme) -change of use and conversion of buildings to form 160 new dwellings, construction of 27 new dwellings, change of use of lodge building (building 19) to a shop/cafe, change of use to B8 storage (building 50 only), two new access to Skimmingdish Lane, car parking, landscaping and all ancillary development;
 - Bicester 1 (Mixed Use (Allocated Strategic Housing and Employment Site) – the development of the ‘North West Bicester Eco-Town’ of up to 6,000 homes, zero carbon development with green infrastructure and biodiversity - 40% of the total gross site area will be provided as green space of which at least half will be public open space. A minimum of at least 3,293 new homes are to be delivered within the current Local Plan period. A minimum of at least 10 Hectares of business/employment development for the creation of at least 3,000 jobs (approximately 1,000 jobs on B use class land on the site) within the current Local Plan period. The allocation allows for services, health and education facilities, as well as a burial ground; and
 - Bicester 8 (Allocated Tourism Development Site) – conservation led development of the former RAF site, including heritage tourism uses, leisure, recreation, employment and community uses. The development of hotel and conference facilities will also be supported as part of a wider package of employment uses.
- 7.7. These approved and strategic allocated developments will neighbour the site and planned for delivery primarily over the lifetime of the Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031 (Adopted 2015); see Image ZLA 7.1 above. In due course the site would be sandwiched between existing and new residential, mixed use and employment built form, as well as an extensive Tourism Development scheme at the former RAF Bicester.
- 7.8. Consequently, in the current day, the location of the site can be interpreted as beyond land that may be reasonably considered to be urban and part of the town. However, this situation is fluid and is currently altering with the delivery of new housing and employment built form, tourism facilities and the associated road and engineering infrastructure to support this expansion of Bicester town.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 7.9. Most recently, on the 20th December 2023, the Government published a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a presumption in favour of sustainable development; this being the golden thread running throughout the document.
- 7.10. For landscape, this means recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside (para. 180 (b)) and balancing any ‘harm’ to the landscape resource with the benefits of the scheme in other respects. Para 180 (b) states the following:
- ‘.....recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.’*



- 7.11. Furthermore, Section 12 of the NPPF addresses the issue of good design and recommends that planning decisions should aim to ensure that developments respond to the local character and history. Specifically, in paragraph 131 it is stated that development should seek to create ‘high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.’
- 7.12. Paragraph 131 continues and emphasises that ‘good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities’ and paragraph 135 stating that high quality development will function ‘well and add to the overall quality of the area’ and are to be ‘visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping’ and ‘sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.’
- 7.13. This balancing exercise is to be undertaken by the decision taker (in this case the LPA) and falls outside the remit of this appraisal. The benefits of the scheme are to be weighed against the effects on the landscape character and visual amenity as set out in this report, as detailed in the Planning Statement accompanying this application. The policy framework is supported by the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) where relevant.

Local Planning Policy – Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031 (Adopted 2015)

- 7.14. Policies considered relevant to landscape matters, to varying degrees, comprise: 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; and Policy ESD 17 Green Infrastructure:

Policy ESD 13

- 7.15. Policy ESD13 is entitled ‘Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement’, and states the following:

‘Opportunities will be sought to secure the enhancement of the character and appearance of the landscape, particularly in urban fringe locations, through the restoration, management or enhancement of existing landscapes, features or habitats and where appropriate the creation of new ones, including the planting of woodlands, trees and hedgerows. Development will be expected to respect and enhance local landscape character, securing appropriate mitigation where damage to local landscape character cannot be avoided. Proposals will not be permitted if they would:

- *Cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside;*
- *Cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography;*
- *Be inconsistent with local character;*
- *Impact on areas judged to have a high level of tranquillity;*
- *Harm the setting of settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features, or*
- *Harm the historic value of the landscape.*

Development proposals should have regard to the information and advice contained in the Council's Countryside Design Summary Supplementary Planning Guidance, and the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) and be accompanied by a landscape assessment where appropriate.’

- 7.16. The foregoing policy is the main ‘Landscape’ derived policies which are to be considered as part of this appraisal. Wider policies, which are worthwhile in consideration, include the following:



Policy ESD 10

- 7.17. Policy ESD 10 is entitled ‘Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment’, and details the need for new development to ensure the ‘protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the natural environment’ through a number of requirements including: ‘the protection of trees (which) will be encouraged, with an aim to increase the number of trees in the District’.
- 7.18. Development proposals will be expected to incorporate features to ‘encourage biodiversity, and retain and where possible enhance existing features of nature conservation value within the site’, and ‘ecological corridors should form an essential component of green infrastructure provision in association with new development to ensure habitat connectivity.’

Policy ESD 15

- 7.19. Policy ESD 15 is entitled ‘The Character of the Built and Historic Environment’. Whilst, ZLA is not going to reproduce all the wording of this policy, we note the following is pertinent for the undertaking of this appraisal:

‘Successful design is founded upon an understanding and respect for an area’s unique built, natural and cultural context. 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.’

- 7.20. The policy continues:

‘Contribute positively to an area’s 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.’

Policy ESD 17

- 7.21. Policy ESD 17 is entitled ‘Green Infrastructure’, and states that ‘the District’s green infrastructure network will be maintained and enhanced, and list a number of measures which can be undertaken, and should be accorded to for new development. Whilst, ZLA is not going to reproduce all the wording of this policy, we note the following is pertinent for the undertaking of this appraisal:

‘Pursuing opportunities for joint working to maintain and improve the green infrastructure network, whilst protecting sites of importance for nature conservation Protecting and enhancing existing sites and features forming part of the green infrastructure network and improving sustainable connectivity between sites.....’

Interim Summary

- 7.22. ZLA summaries the planning policy background for this site as follows:
- The latest revision of the NPPF, continues to show a clear presumption in favour of sustainable development.
 - In Landscape terms, the site does not fall within, or adjoin, any National or local landscape designation, and consequently, is not afforded elevated protection under national or local planning policy;
 - There are no heritage assets within the application, but they do form part of the site’s setting on the edge of the village; and
 - There are arboriculture and ecological features within the site, and these are considered in this LVA only in so far as, they contribute to the landscape character of the site context.



- 7.23. In summary, the Local Planning Policies contain a number of overarching policies of relevance to this study. The main themes of these policies, against which the proposed development could be tested, have been summarised here for convenience:
- Development proposals should consider the latest Landscape Character Assessment (published by the Local Planning Authority) and its guidelines to retain and manage landscape features that contribute to wider landscape character and the setting of development;
 - New development should seek to protect and restore the primary characteristics defined in character assessments and important features of the host landscape character area;
 - The location, materials, scale and use of any proposed development should be sympathetic to and complement local landscape character; and
 - An assessment of landscape and visual effects is required to support a planning application where there is possibly a detrimental effect on landscape as a resource.
- 7.24. Finally, the application site is situated on the edge of Caversfield, and is within the northern edge of Bicester town, which is subject to the delivery of significant housing, employment and tourism development including over 6,000 new homes and up to 10 Hectares of new employment building and the associated infrastructure. In due course, the site would be sandwiched between existing and new residential, mixed use and employment built form, as well as an extensive Tourism Development scheme at the former RAF Bicester.



8. BASELINE CONDITIONS

Existing Landscape Character Assessment

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

Background Published Evidence Base Documents

- 8.5. The following documents are relevant and will be discussed as appropriate later in this LVA:
 - Natural England National Character Assessment;
 - Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study (2004);
 - Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment (1995);
 - Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment (2010);
 - Cherwell District Council Bicester Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2010)
 - Bicester Green Buffers Report (2013); and
 - Countryside Design Summary (1998)

National Character Assessment

- 8.6. Natural England has described and classified landscape character areas across large, broad regional area. These are published in the National Character Area (NCA) profiles. Natural England finds the site mainly to be situated within NCA 108: Upper Clay Thames, with a small section of the site’s north western edge to be within the neighbouring NCA 107: Cotswolds; see Image 8.1.
- 8.7. Natural England notes the Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area is a ‘broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays. Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site falls within the NCA, along with around 5,000 ha of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and smaller areas of the Chilterns AONB and the Cotswolds AONB. There are contrasting landscapes, including enclosed pastures of the claylands with wet valleys, mixed farming, hedges, hedge trees and field trees and more settled, open, arable lands. Mature field oaks give a parkland feel in many places.’



Image ZLA 8.1: Extract from Natural England’s National Character Area NCA 108: Upper Clay Thames. N.B. ZLA has marked the approximate location of the site with a red circle



- 8.8. It is worthwhile noting that NCA 108: Upper Clay Thames extends across a total area of 189,000 Hectares, and NCA 107: Cotswolds in excess of 288,000 Hectares. With consideration of ZLA’s field-based assessment, while NCA 108 is broadly representative of the site’s landscape, and its context, the description is far too generic to robustly inform an assessment of the suitability of the development proposals at the site.
- 8.9. Additionally, the site is situated on the periphery of this NCA 108, which adjoins the NCA 107: Cotswolds. Consequently, the site is situated within a transitional area, or hinterland, within these two national Character Areas.
- 8.10. The national level assessment gives a broad brush impression of a region and provides a useful contextual overview of the character of the wider landscape. However, the proposed development is not considered to have the potential to result in any perceptible effects on landscape character at this national scale and - to remain proportionate to the small scale of the Site in relation to the NCA - focus is placed upon the local landscape character.
- 8.11. Therefore, ZLA will refer to the published Landscape Character Assessment developed regionally, and at a local level in its focus.

Regional Landscape Character Assessment - Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study (2004)

- 8.12. Landscape Character is assessed at County level by the Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study (2004). Whilst now of some age, it continues to provide a background on landscape character, and is explicitly referred to within the Local Plan (Policy ESD13, Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement).
- 8.13. The site is located within the large Woodlands Estatelands Landscape Type and the sub area of the Middleton Stoney Local Landscape Character Area. The Study, when examining landscape character, comes to the following conclusions (N.B. ZLA has underlined those landscape features common to the site and its surrounding context):

‘The area is dominated by large arable fields and localised improved grassland. There are smaller grass fields around villages, particularly Bletchington and Kirtlington. Woodland is a strong landscape element, and large woodland blocks are associated with the parklands and estates. It is mainly ancient semi-natural woodland, with species such as ash, oak, hazel, and field maple, as well as mixed plantations. Throughout the landscape, there are belts of young mixed and coniferous plantations next to roadside hedges and they often function as field boundaries.’



8.14. The study continues, and states (N.B. ZLA has underlined those landscape features common to the site and its surrounding context):

'Hedgerow trees such as ash, sycamore and occasionally oak are found in some roadside hedges, but they are sparser to the north where there is more intensive arable cropping. In parts there are dense corridors of willow and ash, belts of semi-natural woodland and poplar plantations bordering watercourses. Hedgerows vary from tall, thick species-rich hedges with shrubs such as wayfaring tree, dogwood, hazel, field maple, spindle and wild privet through to low, gappy internal field hedges. Parklands are a prominent feature throughout and they include Middleton, Bignell and Tusmore Parks in the north and Kirtlington and Bletchington Parks in the south.'

8.15. The Study goes on to provide a Landscape Strategy and a series of guidelines, which are set out below:

'Safeguard and enhance the characteristic landscape of parklands, estates, woodlands, hedgerows and unspoilt villages.'

8.16. The published management guidelines for this landscape type states the following:

- *'Conserve and maintain semi-natural and ancient semi-natural woodland. Where appropriate, replace non-native conifer species with native species such as oak and ash. Promote the establishment and management of medium to large-scale deciduous and mixed plantations in areas where the landscape structure is particularly weak;*
- *Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash;*
- *Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type;*
- *Conserve and sympathetically maintain species-rich hedgerows and, where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle;*
- *Conserve parklands and their associated landscape features such as stone walls, lakes, mature trees and woods;*
- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly within parklands;*
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows;*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses such as quarries, landfill sites, airfields and large-scale development, such as new barns and industrial units, with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.'*

District Landscape Character Assessment – Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment (1995)

8.17. At a District level, the Cherwell District Landscape Assessment (1995) identifies the site as within the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands Character Area. This is broadly consistent with the characteristics of the Wooded Estatelands Landscape Character Type within which the site is located, as defined by the more recent Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (2004).



District Landscape Character Assessment – Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment (2010)

8.18. The most up to date guidance on the local landscape character of the area can be found in the Cherwell District Council Landscape Assessment, which was published in 2010. This assessment provides supplementary planning guidance, and is referred to directly within the pertinent Local Plan policy (see Section 7 above).

8.19. The assessment by the Local Planning Authority finds the site to be located wholly within the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Area. The Local Planning Authority describes this Landscape Character Area as follows:

'This area is characterised primarily by the extensive remains of eighteenth century parklands and estate farmland which I Estate lie in a band across Oxfordshire and continues into Northamptonshire, which was favoured by the gentry since it was J Farmlands within easy travelling distance from London.'

8.20. The Local Planning Authority continues to note the following typical characteristics of this landscape character area. (N.B. ZLA has underlined those landscape features common to the site and its surrounding context):

- 'This area is noticeably better wooded than the rest of Cherwell District, with considerable plantations which are associated with extensive areas of parkland. Much of the land is in arable cultivation, with woodlands which divide and enclose the landscape on a large scale, there are also long views across rolling open fields where there are substantial breaks in tree cover;
- Particularly towards the north of the area, woodland cover decreases, and the countryside opens out. A typical rolling hill landscape with a patchwork of fields punctuated by hedgerow trees and copses. In some areas this is disappearing, resulting in a more open landscape where only lines of trees remain to mark a previous field boundary.
- Areas of 18th century parklands, are the most notable features of interest within this character. Many of which are still surrounded by their original limestone walls, contain a pastoral scene with scattered trees and small woods, with beech oak and horse chestnut.
- Large scale arable farmland enclosed by woods and copses are found across this area, where the landscape is structured on a large scale by woodland belts. The fields tend to be large and open without any boundary. Plantations are located along watercourses, roads or other natural boundaries.
- To the north of Bicester the landscape opens out into a rolling arable landscape with strong field pattern copses and trees. The patchwork of arable and pasture is given definition by well-maintained hedges. Many of the hedges contain regularly spaced mature hedgerow Oaks.

Further Consideration: Countryside Design Summary (1998)

8.21. The Countryside Design Summary is referenced within the Local Plan (Policy ESD13, Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement). The report subdivides the district into four areas, with the site and the wider landscape lying within the Ploughley Limestone Plateau Countryside Character Area.

8.22. When considering 'implication for new development' it states that 'development should avoid exposed and prominent locations. The protection given by a valley location, existing buildings or woodland, should be used where this does not undermine the character of these existing landscape features'.



Further Consideration: Cherwell District Council Bicester Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2010)

- 8.23. Further, and more recent analysis has been provided through the Bicester Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Assessment (2010). This explores the capacity for land within, and around, Bicester to accommodate development and sets out principles for mitigation.
- 8.24. Within this assessment, the application site falls within ‘Site K’; see Image ZLA 8.2:

Image ZLA 8.2: Extract from the Cherwell District Council Bicester Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2010)



- 8.25. Site K lies north of Bicester between Caversfield and the edge of Bicester. It extends from the ring road in the south to the B4100 in the east, to the edge of the grounds at Caversfield House.
- 8.26. The report appraises landscape sensitivity of this area, and states:
‘The landscape sensitivity of the site has been judged to be moderate as it forms part of the setting of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area and divides the hamlet of Caversfield from the modern housing estate west of Fringford Road.’
- 8.27. The matter of visual sensitivity is appraised, and considered to be low as ‘views are limited’. Overall, the Local Planning Authority consider this area to have a moderate sensitivity to accommodating new development, and states:
‘The site has a moderate capacity to accept residential development in the two triangles to the south of the site provided this did not adversely affect the setting of the Conservation Area and stopped short of the corner at Home Farm to maintain a buffer around the hamlet of Caversfield. It also has a moderate capacity to accept playing fields, and a high capacity to accept informal recreation or woodland.’
- 8.28. The application site is situated outside of the aforementioned triangle areas. In terms of mitigation measures, the Local Planning Authority affords the following guidance:
‘Mitigation would be necessary to protect the setting of Caversfield hamlet with its listed church and barn, and the setting of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area.’



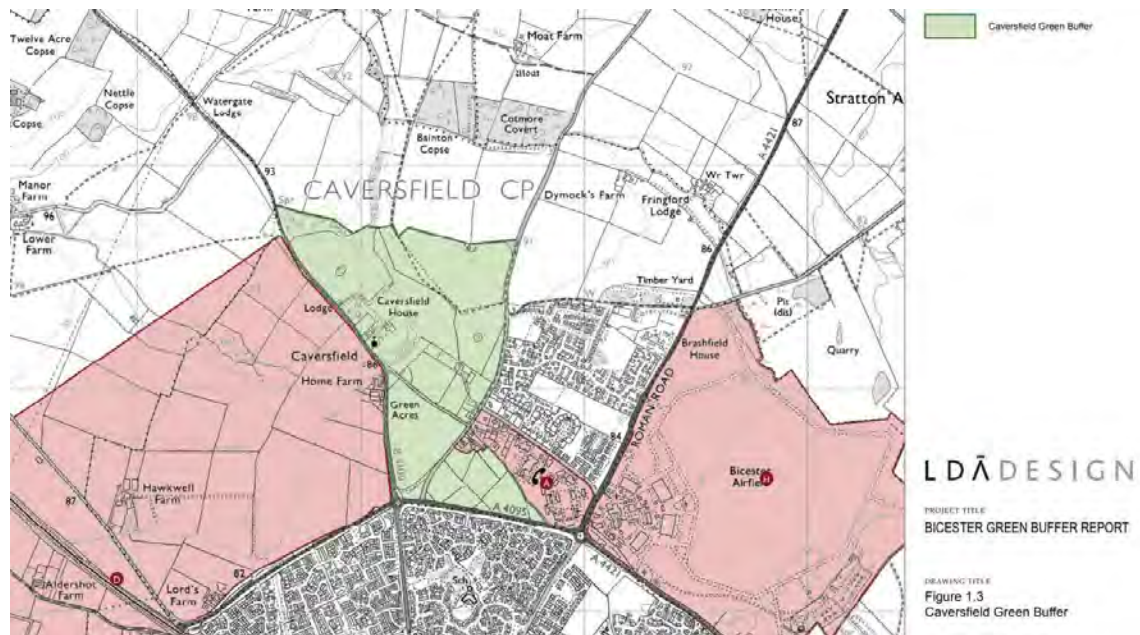
8.29. In terms of landscape value, the Local Planning Authority states the following:

'The site lacks tranquillity due to traffic on the ring road, and its scenic value is ordinary. There is no public access other than along roads although a footpath follows the northern boundary. The value of the site has therefore been judged to be low.'

Further Consideration: Bicester Green Buffers Report (2013)

8.30. The Bicester Green Buffers Report identifies potential 'green buffers' between the edge of Bicester and new development areas. The report identifies the application site to be situated within the 'Caversfield Green Buffer'; see Image ZLA 8.3:

Image ZLA 8.3: Extract taken from the Bicester Green Buffers Report (2013), Figure 1.3 Caversfield Green Buffer



8.31. The Caversfield Green Buffer is located on the northern edge of Bicester, between the former DLO Caversfield site, now being partially redeveloped as 'The Garden Quarter', and Bicester 1, the proposed North-west Bicester Eco-town. The northern boundary of the Green Buffer follows a tree belt and hedgerow associated with the historic extent of parkland at Caversfield House.

8.32. The eastern boundary is defined by a minor road and the former DLO Caversfield site. To the south the A4095 along the northern edge of Bicester defines the boundary and the B4100 defines the western boundary.

8.33. The main purposes of the Caversfield Green Buffer are to:

- *'Prevent coalescence and maintain a gap between development at the former DLO Caversfield site, Caversfield and the planned future edge of Bicester in the form of the proposed North-west Bicester Eco-town development;*
- *Protect the setting of the historic hamlet of Caversfield and its associated area of parkland; and*
- *To assist with the protection of the setting of the residential area associated with the former Bicester Airfield as an historic feature and designated Conservation Area.'*



- 8.34. The Local Planning Authority continues and state the following:

'At its narrowest, the existing gap between the development at the former DLO Caversfield site and the edge of the Strategic Development Site at Bicester 1 (the proposed North-west Bicester Eco-town development) is approximately 300m. The southern edge of the former DLO Caversfield site is a maximum of approximately 300m from the existing edge of Bicester. The area of land extending between the former DLO Caversfield site and the edge of the Strategic Development Site at Bicester 1, and from the northern edge of Bicester to the northern extent of parkland historically associated with Caversfield House, has been defined as Green Buffer to maintain the gap between these existing and proposed areas of settlement. This will prevent their coalescence and maintain their separate identities.'

- 8.35. ZLA notes, that no specific provision was included in the adopted Local Plan regarding a landscape buffer or strategic gap.

Site Specific Appraisal

- 8.36. To independently assess the likely level of landscape and visual effects which the development proposals might incur will require an appropriately detailed assessment of the site itself and its immediate surroundings.

- 8.37. A qualified Landscape Architect from ZLA undertook a site-based assessment. This assessment was undertaken in clear, dry weather conditions, and the site is described as follows.

- 8.38. Recognising that 'landscape' is a multi-dimensional concept embracing 'what we see', its time-depth and physical attributes, this LVA reviews and assesses change to landscape character in terms of the physical landscape, the site's visual and sensory character, landscape fabric and habitats and cultural connections, scenic quality, rarity, representativeness, conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects; see Table ZLA 8.1 overleaf:



Table ZLA 8.1: Site Specific Landscape and Visual Qualities appraisal by ZLA (winter-time, January 2024)

Landscape Character and Visual Qualities Observations	
Landscape Quality:	The quality of the site is considered to be medium due to its intact and well-established vegetated boundaries; albeit are relatively low and open in nature – this is typical of the plain landscape south of the village.
Landscape Fabric and Representativeness:	Open, gently undulating landform with agricultural fields managed for arable and some pastoral grassland is typical of the host landscape character area. The representativeness of particular landscape features: as noted above, is seen within the site and its immediate setting.
Rarity:	This landscape is found common to the location of the application site.
Topography:	Landform within the application site is typical of the landform found on the edge of the Caversfield – that being gently undulating, which is typically found to the north and north east of Bicester, and generally within the host landscape character area.
Conservation Interests:	There is no known archaeological or historical and cultural conservation interest on the site. There are no heritage assets within the application site. There are arboriculture and ecological features within the site which contribute to the landscape character of the site context.
Built Form:	The site contains built form around the farmstead with multiple agri-business building, storage facilities and all weather surfaced yard. The farmstead and this complex is accessed from the west via an all-weather surfaced route. The site is bounded, and overlooked by existing residential development (predominantly two storey in height).
Recreational Interest:	No public access is available into the site, being wholly within private ownership. The site is situated within an area of wider Public Rights of Way (PRoW), with a moderate number of PRoW passing within the initial 1 km radius of the site – these are found predominantly within open countryside passing through gently undulating landform.
Sensory, Perceptual & Tranquillity:	<p>The site has a multiple of land uses, which influence the perception of tranquillity. The site contains built form around the farmstead with multiple agri-business building, storage facilities and all weather surfaced yard. The farmstead and this complex is accessed from the west via an all-weather surfaced route. The site is bounded, and overlooked by existing residential development (predominantly two storey in height) to its southern quarter, with a further vehicle access leading from Fringford Road.</p> <p>In the background, there is a noticeable traffic noise from users of the Bicester Road (B4100) to the west of the site, which is audible from the site. Overall, ZLA considers this site to have a less than moderate sense of tranquillity.</p>



Skyline:	There are no views where the application site breaks the skyline. The site is not seen wholesale generally across the landscape. The site is located on the western edge of Caversfield within gently undulating landform
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- 8.39. Having assessed the site above, there is no reason to conclude that the site has any elevated landscape value or importance above the rest of the open countryside between Caversfield and Bicester. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the local community place special weight on the site, meaning overall the site is considered to be of no more than local value.

Landscape Sensitivity of the Application Site

- 8.40. Landscape sensitivity, the susceptibility of the landscape to change, 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.
- 8.41. In the Cherwell District Council Bicester Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2010), the LPA does determine the landscape sensitivity for this landscape character area as moderate. With consideration of the detailed provided in Section 2 of this Landscape Visual Appraisal, as well as Table 8.1 above, the main character and valuable fabric of the site is found to be at its peripheries. Notably the existing native hedgerows, drainage ditches, tree components, as well as the open, gently undulating landform.
- 8.42. From a sensory perspective, the site is influenced by existing built form within the site, and the wider residential development neighbouring the site. The site is made up of open fields, enclosed by hedgerows and trees, with an existing built farmstead with a complex of agri-business buildings, storage facilities and an all-weather surfaced yard. The site is accessed by an internal roadway running through the site from Aunt Ems Lane. The site is overlooked in part by existing residential development, and neighbours extensive residential development situated along, and off Fringford Road, and along Skimmingdish Road, giving it a peri-settled character.
- 8.43. Overall, it is judged that the site and immediate surrounds are of medium value, and medium susceptibility to change.

Landscape Value

- 8.44. Landscape value can apply to a landscape area, or to the individual elements, features and aesthetic or perceptual dimensions which contribute to the character of the landscape. In all landscapes, there will be variances in the level of landscape value depending on several factors.
- 8.45. When looking at value, GLVIA3 advises that in the first instance: ‘A review of existing landscape designations is usually the starting point in understanding value...’
- 8.46. The site and the surrounding landscape is not subject to any landscape quality designation at a national or local level. Whilst landscape designations are not an exclusive indicator of value and that the lack of a designation does not render a landscape as having no value, designated landscapes are widely acknowledged as being of particular importance and generally of high susceptibility to change.
- 8.47. When considering the wider issues of designations, the conclusions from the Bicester Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Assessment was that the site ‘lacks tranquillity due to traffic on the ring road, and its scenic value is ordinary. There is no public access other than along roads although a footpath follows the northern boundary. The value of the site has therefore been judged to be low.’



- 8.48. Although there are cultural and ecological designations associated with the area, these are only of local importance and the site area does not contain any landscape designations. As a result of this, the site is considered to have a low value for designations, and would not be considered as Valued Landscape.



9. EVALUATION OF THE PREDICTED LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

- 9.1. In this section, the predicted effects on landscape character are summarised. The assessment uses the thresholds for magnitude, sensitivity and significance defined at Appendix ZLA 8 as a guide, but moderated where appropriate with professional judgement.
- 9.2. Professional judgement is an important part of the assessment process; it is neither ‘pro’ nor ‘anti’ development but acknowledges that development may result in beneficial change as well as landscape harm. The assessment also takes account of the likely effectiveness of any proposed mitigation.

Predicted effects on the Character of the Site

- 9.3. It is a consequence of the nature of the development proposed that effects on the site would change it completely when compared to existing land use for equestrian pasture as open fields. The changes predicted to occur on the elements that form the character of the site are described below and evaluated overall.
- 9.4. The site would be changed from an open field used for pasture field to become part of the built settlement of Caversfield, adopting similar characteristics of built form within the site’s local context to the east and south of its location.
- 9.5. The development would retain the general landform trend through the application site, and so would still enable the perception of a very gently rolling landform along the western periphery of the Caversfield, within which the scheme would be located.
- 9.6. The scheme would create new soft landscape edges to the site, including an extensive set back from the west with Aunt Ems Lane. These landscape areas would set development within the site boundary, and establish new hedgerow planting, grassland and extensive native tree planting. The landscape treatment of this edges would reflect the western edge of Caversfield, maintaining and enhancing the concentration of tree cover locally to the site area.
- 9.7. The masterplan of the site has been developed to optimise the retention of the existing hedgerows, retaining and bolster the typical concentration of tree cover found at the western approach to Caversfield, and along the western site quarter which neighbours Aunt Ems Lane.
- 9.8. The scheme also maintains the existing openness of the fields along the western and south western quarter of the site, stepping well within an open area for public open space and ecological enhancement, as well as re-established a fruit orchard and scattered groups pf fruit trees (found locally within North Oxfordshire). This measure would re-establish a declining key landscape feature, as well positively contribute to landscape fabric and habitat creation.
- 9.9. The change in land use would result in a high magnitude of change on the sensory and perceptual dimensions of the landscape character. This is not surprising; the development of any greenfield site would yield such an outcome. It is important to remember, this is not a reflection on the quality of the design for the new neighbourhood, but of the process that requires an assumption to be made that most people would see the visual and sensory change, from greenfield to development, as adverse.
- 9.10. It should be noted that some such adverse effects would be necessary; indeed, it cannot be avoided if new residential developments are to be appropriately serviced with the necessary facilities. However, the magnitude of change across the site would be tempered by the following considerations:
- The development optimises the retention of the existing landform, with the site nestled in the village edge between existing residential development and the woodland plantation to the north of the site at Caversfield House;
 - The scheme would retain and enhance the concentration of trees which forms part of the gateway into/out of Caversfield’s western edge, setting development back into the site away from Aunt Ems Lane to retain an undeveloped and open view corridor along this lane reinforcing the perception of openness along its route;



- Rather than necessitate the removal of existing field boundaries and the amalgamation of field areas, the proposals would optimise the retention of existing vegetative boundaries, which would be further enhanced, planted with native species of local importance;
- The combination of the retained greenfield (western and northern site quarter), retained field boundaries and new soft landscape edge to the scheme would emphasise a smaller, more intimate field pattern than the current situation. This smaller field pattern is typically found locally along the south and western periphery of Caversfield to the site area i.e., between Fringford Road and Southwold Lane; and
- The proposed development would be consistent – in land use terms – with the neighbouring residential development along Fringford Road, and within RAF Bicester Conservation Area along Skimmingdish Lane. This would not constitute a land use that is either un-neighbourly or incongruous in the settlement context. This is demonstrated by our field-based assessment (Section 5), whereby, ZLA determined that the site have a minor Zone of Primary, seen on the approach into/out of the village.

- 9.11. This existing and new landscape fabric would be appropriately maintained for longevity to conserve and enhance the local landscape character and facilitate bio-diversity improvements, as well as contribute to maintaining the character of Caversfield ‘nestled’ within an extensive concentration of tree planting.
- 9.12. The focus of these measures is less about screening and filtering views, rather, the enhancement of the local landscape and habitat value, as well as the better integration of development at the site through new landscaping and the conservation and enhancement of existing trees and hedgerows within the site.

Construction Effects

- 9.13. Construction activities, movement of site traffic, lighting, noise, and sound would be present during the construction process. This would be carefully controlled by a conditioned construction method statement. Recommendations for protection of the retained trees and hedgerows, in accordance with relevant British Standards such as BS 5837: 2012, would ensure the rooting areas of the trees and hedgerows are not adversely affected by the construction process.
- 9.14. The magnitude of change would however be substantial through a considerable alteration to the landscape fabric within the site, resulting in a substantial change to the baseline condition. When combined with the medium landscape sensitivity of the site, would result in a major/moderate adverse level of effect. However, this level of effect would be experienced only for the duration of the construction process in the worst-case scenario, and therefore not permanent.

Year 1 (‘Initial Occupation’) and Year 15 (‘Residual Effect’)

- 9.15. Following construction, existing hedgerows will be bolstered, and new landscaping will become established and mature. The proposed scheme will be integrated within the existing and new landscape fabric at the site and new landscaping will be managed in accordance with an appropriate landscape management plan (or similar agreed as planning condition). This ensures the continuity of the existing fabric and the longevity of the green infrastructure as part of the development, and integrate the new development into the village edge of Caversfield.
- 9.16. To facilitate the proposed development, the site’s landform would require some localised land regrading to facilitate the development, including the incorporation of Swales along the primary routes, and an attenuation basins within the Green Corridor and along the site’s southern edge.
- 9.17. However, as the general landform trend would remain similar, the change is expected to be very low, leading to a very minor adverse level of effect on the geological and hydrological character of the site at Year 1 and Year 15 when combined with the site’s overall medium sensitivity.



- 9.18. The proposed scheme would result in a wholesale change to the landscape character of the site to that of a new residential development, resulting in a loss of grassland pasture area. However, this would be offset through the retention of the existing greenfield to the north and western quarter of the land area which bounds the neighbouring woodland and Aunt Ems Lane. These fields areas are currently managed for pasture, and the scheme would be enhanced, and retained as open in nature as part of the wider green infrastructure strategy.
- 9.19. A new community orchard would be established within the central space of the site with further fruit tree planting. This enables the establishment of a fruit orchard of locally found species, reflecting the now lost abundant fruit orchards found around North Oxfordshire.
- 9.20. On maturation of the proposed landscaping, including native trees shrubs and hedgerows (species found locally to the site), the landscape fabric of the site will continue the softened, vegetated edge that characterises the western edge to Caversfield, and retain and enhance the characteristics noted in the Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment (2010) as ‘this area is noticeably the better wooded than the rest of Cherwell District, with considerable plantations’, and ‘typical rolling hill landscape with a patchwork of fields punctuated by hedgerow trees and copses’, which leads a concentration of tree cover along the western edge of the village.
- 9.21. Existing hedgerows and trees would be retained and optimised as part of the wider public realm and open space of the scheme, with further landscaping provided to establish new landscape fabric through the site. New planting will be native species of local importance, and where practicable to do so, will be of local providence.
- 9.22. This green infrastructure would facilitate publicly accessible open space as we all as a community orchard, upon a site which is currently within private ownership, and affords no public walking routes. From a historic perspective, the combination of enhanced landscape fabric and new landscaping would preserve the perceived ‘nestled’ effect of residences typically situated in an extensive tree cover within gently undulating landform, which is exemplified by the location of the Bicester Conservation Area, and the western edge of Caversfield as it runs along Fringford Road.
- 9.23. In summary, for the sensory and perceptual aspects of the site, it is assessed that at Year 1, the magnitude of change to the character of the site would be high. When combined with a medium sensitivity, this yields a moderate adverse effect due primarily to the change of use across the site.
- 9.24. Through the maturation of the landscape proposals and reinforcement of landscape fabric, the magnitude of change at year 15 is likely to reduce to medium. This yields a moderate/minor adverse effect on this aspect of landscape character in the long term.
- 9.25. It is noted in the published Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study (2004), that the landscape guidelines for the Woodlands Estatelands Landscape Type (Middleton Stoney Local Landscape Character Area), which seeks to ‘strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash’, ‘conserve and sympathetically maintain species-rich hedgerows and, where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle’, and with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area to ‘maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.’
- 9.26. Consequently, the new green infrastructure proposed as part of the scheme has been mindful of affording the site, and the settlement edge of Caversfield arboriculturally and landscape continuity for the future.
- 9.27. These measures although note extensive in scale in the manner one might consider woodland plantation and tree belt planting, would ensure new scheme remains generally well-integrated by the surrounding hedgerow and tree vegetation, and would be a beneficial effect by Year 15, and beyond.
- 9.28. Importantly, the landscape of the site and its near surroundings are not designated at either a national or local level, which confirms the general reduced value and sensitivity in landscape terms, as described in detail above.



Predicted Effects on the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Area

- 9.29. As detailed in Section 8 above, the overall sensitivity of the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Area examined in the baseline was judged to be medium.
- 9.30. It is the area immediately surrounding the site which will be subject to the greatest change as a result of proposals. However, due to the site's village edge location, and its enclosed nature with extensive tree'd boundaries to the site, and the combination of landscape fabric and gently undulating landform surrounding Caversfield, this is predicted to diminish rapidly with distance from the site.
- 9.31. Many of these features were noted in our analysis of the field-based assessment in Section 5, which noted the effect of these features on the Zone of Primary Visibility, including the following:
- The robust hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small woodland plantations, which are associated with the existing farmsteads within the site, and within the wider open countryside setting to Caversfield – in particular to the north and east; and
 - The neighbouring built form along Fringford Road, within Caversfield and across the former RAF Bicester Conservation Area.
- 9.32. Additionally, ZLA also noted, the field pattern to the north, south and west of the village is smaller than the wider open countryside, and is generally made up of smaller, enclosed fields with robust hedgerows, modest amounts of hedgerow trees and tree belts or small plantations, leading to a greater concentration of tree cover around the western edge of Caversfield, and locally to the site. Locally, this creates a smaller scale, more enclosed landscape around the periphery of the village, with the larger arable crop fields experienced in the wider open countryside.
- 9.33. Also as noted within our analysis of the site, the Zone of Primary Visibility is generally within the local setting of the application site, or within a small geographical area within the village, or on the approach to Caversfield itself. In many cases, the site is experienced on route into, or out of the village.
- 9.34. Consequently, through the siting of proposed scheme, the development would not ingress into the open countryside outside of the site's boundaries, either physically, or in sensory and perceptible terms. The scheme would sit within the enclosed area of the western edge of the village rather than in the wider open, estate farmlands, which has been noted to be situated beyond a smaller, field pattern surrounding small villages and hamlets in many situations. Consequently, the proposed scheme would maintain the extensive broad swathe of estate farmlands landscape which forms the village's setting.
- 9.35. Once mitigation planting has had chance to mature and building materials have weathered over time, it is anticipated that the magnitude of change upon the landscape character area would be no more than low.
- 9.36. Given this nestled character, and enhanced vegetated setting to the village, the proposed scheme would result in only a minimal disturbance to the availability of views to the wider open countryside to the north, and so not disturb the typically open estate farmlands landscape to the west and south of the site, whereby the scheme would not be experienced in combination with the nearby urban areas of Bicester Town and Bicester North East.
- 9.37. Overall, it is considered that proposals would not result in marked change to the character of Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Area (beyond the site edge). In most instances, creating enhancements of the key features noted through softening of the existing settlement edge, retention of the settlement's clustered character and a continued green, open swathe of countryside.
- 9.38. With this in mind, no more than a low magnitude of change is anticipated upon the landscape within the host landscape character area, and as such no more than a minor/-negligible, adverse level of effect, which would diminish rapidly with distance from the site for reasons identified above in Section 5, paragraph 5.6 onwards.



10. EVALUATION OF THE PREDICTED VISUAL EFFECTS

Predicted Effects on Visual Amenity

- 10.1. An assessment of effects on each representative viewpoint has been undertaken, and a summary of the result contained in Table ZLA 10.1 overleaf; see Appendix ZLA 5 of this LVA for the representative viewpoints:

Table ZLA 10.1: Summary of Visual Effects on Representative Viewpoints (mid-winter January 2024)

View-point	Receptor Type	Visual Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect
1.	View from PRow (LPA ref:153/1/10) situated on the north western edge of Caversfield passing through open countryside	High	Low (Con) Low (Yr1) Very Low (Yr 15)	Moderate/-minor, adverse Moderate/-minor, adverse Minor, adverse
2.	View from PRow (LPA ref:367/16/40) situated on the north to north east of Caversfield with open countryside	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
3.	View from PRow (LPA ref:218/6/10) situated outside of Caversfield with open countryside	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
4.	View from the junction of PRow (LPA ref: 218/8/10) and the local minor roadway, Fringford Road, to the north east of Caversfield passing through open countryside	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
5.	View from local minor roadway, Fringford Road, to the north east of Caversfield passing through open countryside	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
6.	View from PRow (LPA ref:153/1/10) passing through open countryside on the village edge of Caversfield	High	Moderate (Con) Moderate (Yr1) Low (Yr 15)	Moderate, adverse Moderate, adverse Moderate/-minor, adverse
7.	View from local roadway, Fringford Road, as it passes through the village of Caversfield (passed the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area)	Medium	High (Con) High (Yr1) Moderate (Yr 15)	Moderate, adverse Moderate, adverse Moderate/-minor, adverse



View-point	Receptor Type	Visual Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect
8.	View from local roadway, Skimmingdish Road, as it passes through the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area	Medium	High (Con) High (Yr1) Moderate (Yr 15)	Moderate, adverse Moderate, adverse Moderate/-minor, adverse
9.	View from local roadway, Fringford Road, as it passes through the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area on the edge of Caversfield	Medium	High (Con) High (Yr1) Moderate (Yr 15)	Moderate, adverse Moderate, adverse Moderate/-minor, adverse
10.	View from the junction of PRoW (LPA ref: 153/1/10) and the local minor roadway, Fringford Road, to the south west of Caversfield passing through open countryside between the village and the existing urban edge of Bicester town	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
11.	View from the pedestrian route along the A4095 main roadway situated on the existing urban edge of Bicester town	Medium	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
12.	View from the junction of Charlotte Avenue and the B4100 Bicester Roadway on the urban edge of Bicester town	Medium	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
13.	View from Charlotte Avenue overlooking public open space within the existing residential development	Medium	Low (Con) Low (Yr1) Very Low (Yr 15)	Minor, adverse Minor, adverse Negligible/-imperceptible
14.	View from Charlotte Avenue overlooking public open space within the existing residential development	Medium	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible



View-point	Receptor Type	Visual Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect
15.	View from the junction of B4100 Bicester Road and the local minor roadway, Aunt Ems Lane, to the north west of Caversfield	Medium	High (Con) Moderate (Yr1) Low (Yr 15)	Moderate, adverse Moderate/-minor, adverse Minor, adverse
16.	View from the junction of Charlotte Avenue and the B4100 Bicester Roadway on the urban edge of Bicester town	Medium	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
17.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:148/7/20) situated on the north western edge of Bicester progressing west toward the open countryside	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
18.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:153/3/10) passing through open countryside on the village edge of Caversfield	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
19.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:153/1/10) situated on the north western edge of Caversfield passing through open countryside	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible
20.	View from PRoW (LPA ref:153/1/10) passing through open countryside north west of Caversfield	High	Indiscernible (Con) Indiscernible (Yr1) Indiscernible (Yr 15)	Imperceptible Imperceptible Imperceptible



11. SUMMARY

- 11.1. This report has summarised the findings of a comprehensive landscape data trawl and field appraisal undertaken by ZLA. Given our field-based assessment, alongside our examination of the proposed development, we find the following:

Predicted Effects on the character of the Site

- 11.2. It is a consequence of the nature of the development proposed that effects on the site would change it completely when compared to the surrounding character area of ‘smaller grass fields around villages’ with gently undulating landform and ‘belts of young mixed and coniferous plantations next to roadside hedges and they often function as field boundaries.’
- 11.3. Whilst the application proposal would retain these typical landscape features, the scheme would adopt similar characteristics of built form at Caversfield, and within the nearby Conservation Area, with new dwellings of two storey in height with smaller, one and a half storey dwellings situated in the western site quarter. The scheme would also use a material palette to reflect the site's local context.
- 11.4. The change in land use would result in a high magnitude of change on the sensory and perceptual dimensions of the landscape character. However, the magnitude of change across the site would be tempered by the following considerations:
- The development optimises the retention of the existing landform, with the site nestled in the western village edge of Caversfield;
 - The proposed new residential dwellings have been deliberately arranged within the body of the site area, enabling broad green buffers, and setting development back from the adjoining woodland block (around Caversfield House);
 - Stepping new built development well into the site with an extensive offset from Aunt Ems Lane to the west to retain an undeveloped and open view corridor along this lane reinforcing the perception of openness along its route from Caversfield to the town edge of Bicester (beyond the A4095 and B4100);
 - To establish new built form well within the physical features enclosing the site including the woodland block between the site and Caversfield House, and within the wider concentration of tree cover to the east and south east (smaller woodland plantations) and extensive tree lined routes of Fringford Road and Aunt Ems Lane to the south and west;
 - The provision of extensive public open space affords opportunities for green infrastructure, ecological / habitat enhancement as well as amenity for residents throughout the scheme, developing new public open spaces, which enhances the gateway into the village;
 - To utilise the existing field boundaries and/or definable features within the western part of the site so that there is a logical, clear, and robust edge for the proposed development; and
 - To provide an extensive and enduring area of green space and planting that provides an appropriate and sympathetic design response to address the transition between built development and the surrounding landscape, and to maintain and strengthen the visual separation that exists between the site (within Caversfield) and the town edge of Bicester including the North West Bicester sustainable extension area beyond the beyond the A4095 and B4100).
 - The proposed development would be consistent – in land use terms – with the adjacent and neighbouring dwellings on Fringford Road, and within RAF Bicester Conservation Area along Skimmingdish Lane, and also along the existing town edge of Bicester to south west and west, and would not constitute a land use that is either un-neighbourly or incongruous in the settlement context, or as the site is experienced. This is demonstrated by our field-based assessment (Section 5), whereby, ZLA determined that the site have a minor Zone of Primary, seen on the approach into/out of the village.



- 11.5. At Year 1, and the first occupation of the scheme, the resulting landscape effect would reduce from major/moderate, adverse during the construction stage to a moderate, adverse. There would be a loss of arable crop field within the site. However, existing hedgerows and trees would be retained and optimised as part of the wider public realm and open space of the scheme, with further landscaping provided to establish new landscape fabric through the site.
- 11.6. At Year 15, the long term, and residual effect of the scheme is predicted to be moderate/minor, adverse. In addition to new landscape planting and habitat creation, the scheme would establish a new community orchard. This would be planted with rare and endangered species local to North Oxfordshire, and the setting of Caversfield.
- 11.7. This initiative reflects the once abundant, but now mainly lost fruit orchards found around North Oxfordshire. New planting across the wider site area, would also reflect this local character, and will be native species of local importance, and where practicable to do so, will be of local providence. These initiatives would seek to contributing to the offset and compensation for the loss of the wider arable crop area.
- 11.8. From a historic perspective, the combination of enhanced landscape fabric and new landscaping would preserve the perceived ‘nestled’ effect of residences typically experienced around the western edge of Caversfield when seen from within and outside of the village, as well as setting development back from Aunt Ems Lane.
- 11.9. The western edge of the scheme would afford an extensive green buffer (ranging from 25 metres width at its narrowest point, and up to 110 metres at its widest point) and strengthened with swathes of new broadleaved planting and areas of green space to form a substantial area of structural landscape that wraps around the western and northern part of the new built form which has been arranged within the central to south eastern part of the site area.

Predicted Effects on the Host Landscape – Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Area

- 11.10. It is the area immediately surrounding the site will be subject to the greatest change as a result of proposals. It is noted within our analysis of the site, the Zone of Primary Visibility is generally within the local setting of the application site, or within a small geographical area outlying to the village. Consequently, the effects on the host landscape character would diminish rapidly with distance from the application site.
- 11.11. The field pattern to the north, south and west of the village is smaller than the wider open countryside, and is generally made up of smaller, enclosed fields with robust hedgerows, modest amounts of hedgerow trees and tree belts or small plantations, leading to a greater concentration of tree cover around the western edge of Caversfield, and locally to the site.
- 11.12. In sensory and perceptible terms, the proposed scheme would not ingress no further into the open countryside than the current arrangements to the village edge at present. The scheme would sit within a smaller scale, more enclosed landscape around the periphery of the village, with the larger arable crop fields experienced in the wider open countryside beyond. Consequently, the proposed scheme would maintain the extensive broad swathe of estate farmlands landscape which forms the village’s setting.
- 11.13. Overall, it is considered that proposals would not result in marked change to the character of Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands Landscape Character Area (beyond the site edge). In most instances, creating enhancements of the key features noted through softening of the existing settlement edge, retention of the settlement’s clustered character and a continued green, open swathe of countryside.
- 11.14. No more than a low magnitude of change is anticipated upon this landscape resource, and as such no more than a minor/-negligible, adverse level of effect, which would diminish rapidly with distance from the site. This is a less than significant effect, and a level of effect which would diminish rapidly with distance from the site.



Predicted Effects on Public Right of Way Users

- 11.15. The site is not crossed by any Public Rights of Way (PRoW), and there are no PRoW which pass along the site's boundaries. It is in these instances, that the PRoW users are most likely to experience the biggest change to the character of the route, and the visual amenity as one progresses along the PRoW route.
- 11.16. Beyond this, the nearest PRoW are situated to the north and north east of the application site's location i.e., PRoW LPA ref:153/1/10 which passes through the immediate field system on the edge of Caversfield village; see Viewpoint 1, 6 and 19 (Appendix ZLA 5). This route runs from Caversfield (from Fringford Road) through the open countryside, and links with the wider PRoW network, and eventually progresses towards outlying hamlets such as Bainton.
- 11.17. PRoW LPA ref:153/1/10 passes through the smaller field pattern, and is found at its closest to the application site at circa 0.2km at its closest point (as demonstrated by Viewpoint 6, Appendix ZLA 5). In this situation, PRoW users would not see the site wholesale, rather the site is glimpsed in part through gaps in the existing field hedgerow along the site's eastern edge. However, this is restricted to the north eastern site area due to the filtering effects of the existing mature tree belt and plantation enclosing the site, as well as the existing built form within the site.
- 11.18. The implementation of the scheme would be discernible by PRoW users passing along this closest position on the northern PRoW network. This would result in a moderate alteration to the characteristics of the view, as the wider residential development around the western edge of Caversfield is already seen or experienced by users of this route as they pass to and from the village. The resulting level of change would be Moderate, adverse during the construction stage. This is largely attributable to normal construction activities including noise, vibration, movement of traffic, lighting and the general progression of buildings with scaffolding etc.
- 11.19. Built form within the north eastern edge of the scheme would be discernible from Year 1, with glimpsed views of the new buildings through the retained woodland plantation/tree belt along the eastern to south eastern perimeter. However, the proposed scheme has deliberately stepped new built form in to the core of the site, leaving the wider north eastern site area open and undeveloped. This area is utilised for public open space and green infrastructure. This measure would reduce the level of change perceived change and alteration of the baseline character of the view.
- 11.20. At Year 1, the scheme would have a newly built residential scheme, and whilst existing mature landscape fabric will be retained and bolstered, this new landscaping would be juvenile. The resulting level of effect at Year 1 would continue to be moderate, adverse. This level of effect would reduce further through the maturation of new tree planting along the eastern site edge, as well as the wider green infrastructure of the scheme, with new tree planting within the public open space and streetscape effectively breaking up the mass of development and perception of roof lines by Year 15.
- 11.21. Consequently, at Year 15, the magnitude of change would reduce, resulting in a moderate/-minor, adverse level of effect in the worst case. However, as demonstrated by Viewpoint 1 and 19 (Appendix ZLA 5), the discernibility of the site diminishes rapidly with distance from its location. As noted within Section 2, as well as Section 9, paragraph 9.10, the smaller field pattern with its extensive hedgerows. Scattered hedgerow trees and intervening tree groups, is sufficient to substantially filter the site from view in winter, and potentially screen the site from view in spring and summer.
- 11.22. In the case of Viewpoint 1 (Appendix ZLA 5), whilst the effects of building out the scheme would lead to noise and lighting and the general construction activities, the intervening landscape fabric and distance is sufficient to reduce the level of discernibility. During construction, the predicted level of effect is moderate/-minor, adverse.
- 11.23. Similar to Viewpoint 6, PRoW users would see minor aspects of the proposed scheme, mainly new built form along the eastern edge (until new landscaping has matured and further filter these views). At Year 1, the resulting level of effect would remain similar as the new landscape would be juvenile and not established enough to effectively mitigate the scheme. By Year 15, the resulting level would reduce to minor, adverse.



- 11.24. As PRoW users progress along this route, the site becomes substantially filtered, if not screened by intervening field hedgerows, hedgerow trees, tree belts and small woodland blocks; see Viewpoint 19, and further along PRoW LPA ref:153/1/10 at Viewpoint 20 (Appendix ZLA 5). In these situations, the effect of the scheme at construction stage, Year 1 and Year 15 rapidly diminished to become imperceptible.
- 11.25. In these instances, the proposed development is unlikely to be seen in combination with the wider setting of Bicester (south of the A4095), or with the existing neighbourhoods of Bicester North East along Charlotte Avenue.
- 11.26. This is further illustrated by the predicted level of effect on PRoW users as they pass along the wider PRoW network to the north and north east of the application site; including Viewpoint 2, 4 and 18 (Appendix ZLA 5). In these situations, discernibility of the scheme is substantially filtered, if not screened by Bainton Copse and Cotmore Covert to the north west and north east. In these situations, the predicted level of effect on PRoW users is imperceptible.
- 11.27. Given the effect of existing residential development around the wider Caversfield village, and that within RAF Bicester Conservation Area, those PRoW users progressing along routes to the east and south east of Caversfield are unlikely to have direct sight of the site, with view generally screened by built form, as well as the extensive tree components within RAF Bicester Conservation Area, and enclosing the site along Fringford Road and Aunt Ems Lane.
- 11.28. In these instances, the proposed development is unlikely to be seen in combination with the wider setting of Bicester (south of the A4095), or with the existing neighbourhoods of Bicester North East along Charlotte Avenue, or the wider settled areas of Caversfield and RAF Bicester Conservation Area.
- 11.29. Similarly, as demonstrated by Viewpoint 10 (Appendix ZLA 5), the effect of existing tree belts along the Fringford Road, and the tree components enclosing the site along its southern edge and western edge with Aunt Ems Lane is sufficient to screen direct views of the site during winter-time conditions.
- 11.30. The stepping back development from the western edge with Aunt Ems Lane and the restriction of building height up to 1.5 storey at the western site quarter, is predicted to reduce the discernibility of the scheme during its implementation. The potential for construction noise is very limited due to the background noise of traffic along the B4100 and A4095, as well as along Fringford Road. The likely level of effect during construction would be imperceptible.
- 11.31. The proposed scheme would retain existing landscape fabric to the nearest boundaries, as well as extensively bolster it with green infrastructure including substantial new tree planting. This would enhance the existing concentration of tree cover along the western edge of Caversfield.
- 11.32. The site's western boundary, which is defined by retained established tree belt and native hedgerow to Aunt Elms Lane, with the provision of an extensive green buffer (ranging from 25 metres width at its narrowest point, and up to 110 metres at its widest point) and strengthened with swathes of new broadleaved planting and areas of green space to form a substantial area of structural landscape that wraps around the western and northern part of the new built form which has been arranged within the central to south eastern part of the site area.
- 11.33. The effect of these measures would lead to an imperceptible effect on PRoW users at Year 1 and further 1 at Year 15. In these instances, the proposed development is unlikely to be seen in combination with the wider setting of Bicester (south of the A4095), or with the existing neighbourhoods of Bicester North East along Charlotte Avenue.
- 11.34. There are a number of PRoW which pass west to north west of the recently completed urban districts of Bicester North West i.e. beyond Charlotte Avenue and roads thereof. In these situations, the combination of this built form, and the concentration of tree cover on the western edge of Caversfield (i.e., along Aunt Ems Lane, around St Laurence Church, and associated with Caversfield House) is sufficient to screen direct site of the sight.



- 11.35. The proposed scheme would be integrated within this setting, and as these PRoW routes pass through similar landform as the site is found within, there is no elevated landform with broad, wide panoramic views down onto the site's position. The predicted level of effect would be imperceptible during the construction stage, with noise and lighting unlikely to be experienced during to the construction activities at Bicester North East ongoing; see Viewpoint 17 (Appendix ZLA 5).
- 11.36. PRoW users passing through the wider open countryside to the north west and across to the north east, generally, are unlikely to have direct views of the site due to the screen effect of intervening woodland plantations, tree belts within scattered hedgerow trees within the intervening fields. These plantations including Bainton Copse, Cotmore Covert, tree blocks along the B4100 and around Caversfield House and St Laurence Church.
- 11.37. In these instances, the proposed development is likely to have an imperceptible effect, and not seen in combination with the wider setting of Bicester (south of the A4095), or with the existing neighbourhoods of Bicester North East along Charlotte Avenue; see Viewpoints 13 to 15 (Appendix ZLA 5).

Predicted Effects on Road Users

- 11.38. As demonstrated in Section 5, the combination of physical features, landform, built form and landscape fabric determines the Zone of Primary Visibility for the application site. This 'ZPV' is located largely to local setting of the application site within Caversfield, or small geographical areas of the village as one approaches the site from the open countryside beyond. In many cases, the site is experienced on route into, or out of the village itself by road users; albeit glimpsed.
- 11.39. Users of the immediate roadways are likely to be influenced the most by the proposed scheme – these routes being Aunt Ems Lane passing the site, Walnut Field as it bounds, and in part overlooks the site.
- 11.40. Overall, whilst there would significant effects during the construction stage, this level of adverse effect is temporary. At Year 1, the character of these routes would be influenced by newly built homes, and the juvenile landscaping along the western edge where the retained mature landscape features re retained and bolstered.
- 11.41. Through setting back development into the site from the western quarter, and the retention and enhancement of existing field hedgerows, and the establishment of further tree planting and habitat creation, the overall discernibility of the scheme would diminish. At Year 1, the scheme would still have the character of a newly built neighbourhood on the village edge.
- 11.42. However, as demonstrated within Section 6, the area by which the scheme would be experienced has a small geographical influence, and intervening built form in the wider Conservation Area and village would filter, screen and mitigate the extent of the scheme to be seen on these routes.
- 11.43. The change experienced by road users passing along Aunt Ems Lane would be moderate/-minor, adverse at Year 1, which would diminish rapidly by Year 15 through the maturation of new landscaping, leading to a Minor/-negligible, if not imperceptible effect in the long term.

Predicted Effects on Residential Dwellings

- 11.44. From our field based assessment, and analysis presented earlier in this LVA at Section, a significant number of residential areas have been scoped out of this appraisal.
- 11.45. It is considered, that the construction stage would lead to significant effects due to noise, dust and vibration, movement of plant, machinery, deliveries and general activities. This is not a permanent effect and would cease on the completion of this short term construction stage.
- 11.46. Beyond that at Year 1, the proposal would be experienced as a new development, especially with its new native scrub and tree planting which would be juvenile. The long term residual effect would be less than significant due to the maturation of new landscaping and the established hedges and hedgerow trees substantially filtering views.



11.47. For the limited residential receptors with potential views of the proposed development, views are predominantly available, but the site is experienced with the existing residential built form neighbouring the application site along Fringford Road.



12. CONCLUSION

- 12.1. Zebra Landscape Architects Limited ('ZLA') was commissioned by Richborough (the 'Applicant') to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal ('LVA') for the development of land west of Fringford Road, Caversfield, Oxfordshire (the 'site'); see Appendix ZLA 1.
- 12.2. The Applicant is seeking an Outline planning approval for the demolition of existing structures and erection of up to 99 dwellings, access, open space and associated works (outline, all matters reserved save for access (the 'proposed development'); see Appendix ZLA 2.
- 12.3. The site is located at OS Grid Reference: SP 58338 25075 (site centre), and is found on the northern edge of Bicester town, within an area subject to current and forthcoming residential, employment and tourism development schemes to be delivered within the period of the currently adopted Local Plan. The site is in the county of Oxfordshire, and found within the administrative authority of Cherwell District Council the ('LPA').
- 12.4. Given our field-based assessment, alongside our examination of the proposed development, ZLA concludes the following:

Compliance with National Planning Policy

- 12.5. At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a presumption in favour of sustainable development; this being the golden thread running throughout the document. For landscape, this means recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside (para. 180 (b)) and balancing any 'harm' to the landscape resource with the benefits of the scheme in other respects. Para 180 (b) states the following:
- '.....recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.'*
- 12.6. This balancing exercise is to be undertaken by the decision taker (in this case the Local Planning Authority) and falls outside the remit of this report. However, this LVA finds that the proposed scheme would afford benefits to the landscape that outweigh the likely adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity.
- 12.7. The layout and proposed landscape enhancement and mitigation proposals respond to the local landscape character, provides enhancement and new planting of native species, and where practicable to do so, advocates new planting of local provenance to ensure that the proposal optimises the opportunity to conserve and enhance the landscape, as well as establish a community orchard to reflect local orchard species.
- 12.8. Furthermore, the landscape measures detailed in Appendix ZLA 4, also draws on the published landscape management guidelines published within the Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study (2004) for the Woodlands Estatelands Landscape Type. For this, the proposal will protect and retain existing field hedgerows and establish new planting for soften and integrate the scheme. The scheme does not propose the amalgamate of existing fields, which would adversely impact the openness of the landscape, and make the village edge prominent.
- 12.9. The proposed green infrastructure, landscape enhancement and habitat creation (see Appendix ZLA 4), would accord to the Local Planning Authority's published Landscape Guidelines, which recommends:
- *'Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash;*
 - *Conserve and sympathetically maintain species-rich hedgerows and, where appropriate, replant gappy hedges using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, dogwood and spindle;*



- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses such as quarries, landfill sites, airfields and large-scale development, such as new barns and industrial units, with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside; and*
- *Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.'*

12.10. Additionally, the proposed facilitates the retention of an extensive swathe of existing grassland along the northern and western site quarter, which would be retained and enhanced and accommodate new green infrastructure initiatives. This retention goes some way to retain existing pasture, which accords to the further landscape management guidelines for the host landscape character areas which is to 'conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland', as well as the smaller field pattern found locally to Caversfield.

12.11. Through the undertaking of this LVA, ZLA considers that the development proposal is visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping, which is sympathetic to the character of the host Landscape Character Area which forms the setting on the village edge of Caversfield, and accords with the published Landscape Guidelines within the Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study (2004).

Local Planning Policy

12.12. With regard to local planning policy, the development proposal would accord with pertinent landscape policies. Whilst the scheme develops land adjoining the village edge, the scheme would sit within the western edge of the village rather than in the wider open, wooded estate lands landscape, which has been noted to be situated beyond localised improved grassland, smaller grass fields around villages in many situations. Consequently, the proposed scheme would maintain the extensive broad swathe of the wooded estate lands which forms the village's setting.

12.13. Accordingly, the scheme accords to adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031, Policy ESD13 (Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement) where 'development will be expected to respect and enhance local landscape character' and 'opportunities will be sought to secure the enhancement of the character and appearance of the landscape, particularly in urban fringe locations, through the restoration, management or enhancement of existing landscapes, features or habitats and where appropriate the creation of new ones, including the planting of woodlands, trees and hedgerows.'

12.14. This is further demonstrated through the manner which the proposed scheme has been developed through iterative inputs through undertaking this Landscape Visual Appraisal, and with regard to the information and advice contained in the Council's Countryside Design Summary Supplementary Planning Guidance, and the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS). In particular:

- To establish new built form well within the physical features enclosing the site including the woodland block between the site and Caversfield House, and within the wider concentration of tree cover to the east and south east (smaller woodland plantations) and extensive tree lined routes of Fringford Road and Aunt Ems Lane to the south and west;
- The provision of extensive public open space affords opportunities for green infrastructure, ecological / habitat enhancement as well as amenity for residents throughout the scheme, developing new public open spaces, which enhances the gateway into the village;
- To utilise the existing field boundaries and/or definable features within the western part of the site so that there is a logical, clear, and robust edge for the proposed development
- Maintenance and reinforcement of the tree and hedgerow structure at settlement edge to help to ensure the continued integration of settlement and buildings within the wider landscape; and



- Conservation and management of the mosaic of grasslands and farmland features including roadside verges and avoiding the further loss of connectivity of habitat.
- 12.15. Additionally, the proposal has developed a green infrastructure strategy which establishes a community orchard within the central public open space enables the restoration of a fruit orchard of locally found species. This initiative reflects the once abundant, but now mainly lost fruit orchards found around Bicester, and detailed landscape design proposals would involve consultation with the Mid-Shires Orchard Group, an independent group of enthusiasts of orchards, apples and heritage top fruit in Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire. Further fruit tree planting would be established within the wider green corridors, informal landscaped areas and new hedgerow planting for habitat creation and ecological diversity.
- 12.16. This is part of the landscape led masterplanning approach, which retains and expands upon the existing landscape features of the site, delivers a scheme that is sensitive, responsive, and appropriate to its setting and its landscape features, and one in which new built development is located with an extensive green setting.
- 12.17. This green infrastructure is an integral part of the proposed site layout, which in turn, will deliver the enhancement of the local landscape and betterment of ecological habitat value, as well as affording amenity space which has a pedestrian and cycle focus for substantial links between existing and new neighbourhoods.
- 12.18. In collaboration with the consulting Arboriculturist and Ecologist for this proposal, several green and blue infrastructure initiatives, and ecological enhancements have been integrated into the proposed development. The focus of these measures is less about screening and filtering views, rather, the enhancement of the local landscape and habitat value, as well as the better integration of development at the site through new landscaping and the conservation and enhancement of existing trees and hedgerows within the site.
- 12.19. Given the foregoing, ZLA considers that the proposal accords with the adopted Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031, Policy ESD 17 (Green Infrastructure), for which, the proposed development embraces the aspirations of the policy, and supplementary planning guidance for the establishment of green infrastructure in association with new development. Through the retention and enhancement of the site's landscape fabric, as well as the provision of the landscape and ecological enhancements to the site, and the specification of local species, local provenance for planting, as well as endangered fruit tree species for the community orchard. The proposed landscape scheme of formal, semi-informal and naturally focussed landscaping (for bio-diversity betterment) seeks to attain local distinctiveness through the scheme.
- 12.20. The proposal enables the protection and enhancement of the local landscape, delivering green and blue infrastructure within the scheme, as well as significant mature native trees. The proposed Landscape Strategy has been developed iteratively with the project Ecologist and Arborist, and aims to conserve and enhance the primary characteristics defined in the published landscape character assessments, through the iterative development of the site's masterplan with the execution of this appraisal.
- 12.21. Furthermore, and to accord with the supplementary planning guidance contained within published Cherwell District Council Bicester Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2010) for Site K, recommending 'mitigation would be necessary to protect the setting of Caversfield hamlet with its listed church and barn, and the setting of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area'.
- 12.22. Additionally, with consideration of the published Bicester Green Buffers Report (2013), the main purposes of the Caversfield Green Buffer is to:
 - *'Prevent coalescence and maintain a gap between development at the former DLO Caversfield site, Caversfield and the planned future edge of Bicester in the form of the proposed North-west Bicester Eco-town development;*
 - *Protect the setting of the historic hamlet of Caversfield and its associated area of parkland; and*



- *To assist with the protection of the setting of the residential area associated with the former Bicester Airfield as an historic feature and designated Conservation Area.'*

12.23. From the outset of the developing the masterplan, one of the key opportunities was to realise a scheme which would still retain an appropriate gap between Caversfield and the surrounding edge of Bicester (North West Bicester Strategic Allocation). In doing so, the masterplan has ensured the following measures:

- The proposed new residential dwellings have been deliberately arranged within the body of the site area, enabling broad green buffers, and setting development back from the adjoining woodland block (around Caversfield House);
- Stepping new built development well into the site with an extensive offset from Aunt Ems Lane to the west to retain an undeveloped and open view corridor along this lane reinforcing the perception of openness along its route from Caversfield to the town edge of Bicester (beyond the A4095 and B4100);
- To establish new built form well within the physical features enclosing the site including the woodland block between the site and Caversfield House, and within the wider concentration of tree cover to the east and south east (smaller woodland plantations) and extensive tree lined routes of Fringford Road and Aunt Ems Lane to the south and west; and

To reduce building heights along the western edge of proposed built form to a level of one and a half storeys, rising to two storey within the body of the scheme. This lower roof height along the western quarter enables a further measure to reduce the discernibility of new built form, which would sit within an extensive green corridors with retained and enhanced tree cover.

12.24. The site's westernmost boundary, which is defined by retained established tree belt and native hedgerow to Aunt Ems Lane, with the provision of an extensive green buffer (ranging from 25 metres width at its narrowest point, and up to 110 metres at its widest point) and strengthened with swathes of new broadleaved planting and areas of green space to form a substantial area of structural landscape that wraps around the western and northern part of the new built form which has been arranged within the central to south eastern part of the site area.

12.25. Given our field-based assessment during winter-time conditions (January 2024), we have identified that the application site is not seen wholesale, and has a very minor Zone of Primary Visibility, where it can be glimpsed through the existing landscape fabric, tree components and smaller field pattern along the western edge of Caversfield.

12.26. In this examination (contained in Section 5 of this appraisal), we have demonstrated, that there are very few instances, that the application site is seen in combination with the wider urban setting and its residential built form of Bicester town and North West Bicester as already built out. Given the foregoing, and the employment of the above landscape mitigation measures and designed mitigation embedded in the proposed layout, ZLA concludes that the scheme would have only a minor effect on the openness of the land between Caversfield and Bicester.

12.27. The application site is well contained within a concentrated tree cover on the west of the village. Whilst the proposed scheme would reduce the perception of spatial openness in the intervening space, the effect of the scheme on the visual openness would be negligible. Consequently, the opportunity for the scheme to be seen in combination, and lead to physical or perceived coalescence would be limited to the immediate road network as it passes through Fringford. The maturation of new landscaping measures along the western site quarter, and the above mitigation measures would reduce the perception of new built form a negligible, or even imperceptible level.

12.28. Given the foregoing, it is considered, that in landscape terms, the proposed scheme would respect and provide landscape enhancement to the village's setting, within which the scheme would be integrated into, mitigating coalescence between Caversfield and Bicester. Consequently, the proposed development would not (physically or perceptually) extend incongruously into the wider interlying space between the two settlements, and would not detrimentally impact its visual openness, preventing their coalescence and maintaining their separate identities.

