

- 3.35 As discussed further in **Section 4**, there are limited viewing opportunities of the Site from publicly accessible land. Views are generally contained to the local landscape with the most close-ranging views being experienced from PRoW 131/9/10 to the north east of the Site, the views are experienced in the context of industrial uses immediately to the east of the Site, and also from the A41 as vehicle users approach Bicester from the east.
- 3.36 From a sensory perspective, the Site is relatively unremarkable within the landscape. It does not form a prominent, or important, part of the appreciation of the wider landscape and is perceived as agricultural field parcels of limited interest, being located between industrial and commercial uses with little association with the wider landscape context.

#### **Value of the Landscape Receptors**

- 3.37 The following paragraphs describe the value of the landscape receptors as assessed by EDP and within published documents. Value and susceptibility to change are considered independently, with consideration of the development proposed, in the assessment of overall 'sensitivity' of landscape receptors in accordance with best practice guidance.

#### **Published Landscape Character**

- 3.38 Published landscape character assessments provide some contextual understanding of the defining characteristics of the wider landscape and, in some respects, the Site itself. However, as set out above, the Site and its surrounding context correlates with only some of the key characteristics of the Clay Vale LCT and, more specifically, the Launton LCA. The description of the local landscape includes detracting urban elements on the urban fringe of Bicester and surrounding Graven Hill, which fall within the visible landscape context of the Site, thus influencing the character of the landscape context of it.
- 3.39 On balance, with any higher elements of landscape value being attributed to the wider landscape well to the east of the Site, the value and susceptibility of the local landscape character is considered to be medium, leading to an overall **medium** sensitivity.

#### **The Site**

- 3.40 The Site itself does not lie within, or contain, any nationally or locally designated landscapes and it does not represent, in a perceptual or physical sense, a landscape of any great importance or distinct character. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the local community places special weight on the Site, meaning overall the Site is considered to be of no more than local landscape value.
- 3.41 Given the recent changes in planning and the completion of commercial development adjacent to the Site, the Site and its context is not considered to be particularly representative of the wider Clay Vale LCT. However, it is noteworthy that the guidelines for the LCT include to "*conserve and enhance the well-defined pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.*" The Site features consist of native hawthorn and blackthorn, field boundary hedgerows with trees including predominantly mature oak trees. These have intrinsic value in defining the pattern, scale and enclosure within the landscape.
- 3.42 The landscape elements with the potential to be adversely impacted by the development of the Site would include hedgerow boundaries, mature trees and existing agricultural field

parcels, though existing boundaries could be retained and enhanced. These landscape elements have been shown to be characteristic of published character assessments and are present within the Site or local context. However, the Site is adversely affected, in a sensory manner, by its proximity to both the A41, a small industrial site to the north-east and now by the established Symmetry Park development to the west of the Site. It is therefore considered of compatible value to the majority of the local landscape, i.e. there is nothing to suggest the local landscape is worthy of any particular sensitivity or protection, apart from as an area of functioning agricultural land with good field boundary features.

- 3.43 Given the maturity of landscape features within the Site, including an area of woodland cover, views are often limited. This, in combination with the urbanising effect of adjacent vehicular corridors, neighbouring commercial and industrial uses, results in the sensitivity of the Site and its context being assessed as **medium**.

#### **Interim Conclusions: Landscape Character**

- 3.44 A number of landscape character assessments provide a helpful contextual understanding of the defining characteristics of the wider landscape. As illustrated on **Plan EDP 1**, the Site has been identified within the Clay Vale LCT and Launton LCA.
- 3.45 In terms of landscape features, the Site comprises relatively simple parcels of agricultural land. The pattern of medium-scale arable fields is defined by maintained hedgerows. There are very few trees within the Site interior.
- 3.46 The rural character of the Site and its immediate landscape context is degraded in part by the visual intrusion of urban elements, including commercial built form within Symmetry Park to the south, which therefore have some influence on site character. The influence of the urban edge of Bicester will be increased further in the future when development is brought forward as part of the overall allocated Bicester 12 strategic development site (remainder), known as Wretchwick Green. Wretchwick Green will have the effect of increasing the prominence of built development in views from the Site, fundamentally changing the character of the immediate landscape context and strongly influencing the character of the Site.
- 3.47 The Site possesses some of the characteristics of the local rural landscape as described for the Clay Vale LCT and Launton LCA; namely the field boundary hedgerows (both maintained and overgrown) and mature oak trees. However, the field pattern could be accommodated within the development proposals, with particular attention given to the protection and retention of the high value hedgerow and mature oak trees where possible.
- 3.48 With regard to the location of the Site on the edge of south-east Bicester, the concept masterplan aims to fulfil the requirements of the Local Plan 2011–2031 Policies ESD 15 and ESD 13 to integrate the new built edge into its rural landscape context. Similarly, with regard to the protection and enhancement of the rural landscape character and its key natural features, the concept masterplan aims to fulfil the requirements of the objectives of Cherwell District Council Local Plan 1996 retained saved policy C5; Non-statutory Local Plan Policies EN34, EN35, D3 and D12; and the new Local Plan 2011–2031 Policies ESD 10 and ESD 13.

3.49 Notwithstanding the above, there are no statutory or non-statutory landscape designations or adopted or saved landscape policies that preclude development. The relevant policies identified above have all been taken into account in the preparation of the proposals and compliance of the proposals with them is considered in **Section 5**.

## Section 4 Baseline Visual Resources

- 4.1 This section identifies those visual receptors that may be able to obtain views to the Site, their distribution, character and value. It also identifies representative viewpoints that form the basis of assessment of views to the Site.
- 4.2 EDP has conducted the assessment of the views available to and from the Site by walking and driving (as appropriate) local roads and rights of way. Before doing so, a broad area of search was defined using a Geographical Information System (GIS) based computer programme that predicts the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), as detailed below.

### VISIBILITY TO THE SITE

- 4.3 Utilising Environmental Agency Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data at 2m resolution (DSM) within a GIS, and to aid the selection of representative viewpoints, EDP prepared a broad ZTV as a step in defining the broader study area. The ZTV was then visited by walking and driving (as appropriate) local roads, rights of way and other publicly accessible viewpoints. Through this exercise, the main visual receptors predicted to have actual visibility to the Site were identified and the Zone of Primary Visibility (ZPV) was established, as illustrated on **Plan EDP 5**.

### Zone of Primary Visibility

- 4.4 The ZPV, identified on **Plan EDP 5**, is where the proposed development would be visible to the casual observer on foot, cycling, driving or travelling by train where the views would normally be close-ranging and open; the proposal would be an obvious element of the view. Beyond this area, there is a zone of visibility that is less open, being either partly-screened or filtered. Views from within this wider zone may include the proposal, it may not be immediately noticeable, but once recognised any new development may be a perceptible addition to the view. The extent of the proposal within such views would vary and, in some cases, it would be almost indistinguishable as a consequence of both increasing distance and intervening visual screening.
- 4.5 The visual appraisal illustrated on **Plan EDP 5** shows that:
- The Site is contained by hedgerows and trees on all boundaries, which filter views into the Site;
  - Units within Symmetry Park immediately to the west further curtail views into the Site;
  - Views from the flat valley landscape to the north are heavily filtered by intervening field boundary trees and hedgerows, and in particular the overgrown hedgerow along the northern boundary of the Site;

- Views from the flat landscape to the north-west of the Site, including the south-east urban edge of Bicester, Middle Wretchwick Farm and scheduled monument, are heavily filtered by intervening overgrown field boundary hedgerows and trees;
- Graven Hill and the over-lying woodland and trees to the west and south-west of the Site contain views, and effectively limit views to the A41 road corridor;
- Views from the south and east are contained by the ridge topography, which extends north-east from Ambrosden to south of Marsh Gibbon;
- Intervening trees and hedgerows filter views of the Site from the ridge, including residential receptors on the northern edge of Ambrosden village;
- The A41 descending down the ridge from the east is enclosed by trees and overgrown hedgerows; and
- Views from the bridleway, which follows the ridge slope to the east and north-east of the Site are filtered by trees and hedgerows.

### **Representative Viewpoints**

4.6 Within the actual ZPV, there are clearly many individual points at which views towards the Site may be gained, depending on many factors including weather conditions and the time of year. EDP has selected a number of viewpoints which are considered representative of views experienced by the various receptor groups described above. It is important to appreciate that these viewpoints are not representative of the general nature of views in the area taken as a whole. They are, for a start, taken only from locations where the Site, and possible built form within it, can be seen, not where it cannot (which is a much more frequent experience). Their selection follows from the adoption of the principle that the assessment needs to test the 'worst case' and so EDP has selected only photoviewpoints from the small area within the surroundings towards the Site, where the Site may or is likely to be visible, and where development upon it could accordingly affect the view seen.

4.7 In selecting these viewpoints, EDP has sought to include:

- A range of viewpoints from all points of the compass, north, south, east and west;
- A range of viewpoints from distances at close quarters at the Site boundary to longer distance views from the wider study area;
- Viewpoints from main road corridors;
- Viewpoints from the local PRow network; and
- A number of viewpoints close to people's homes, which may be considered representative of the private views which might be gained.

4.8 Based on fieldwork observations, and the findings of the data trawl, a number of representative viewpoints, or photoviewpoints to be assessed, have been selected, the

locations of which are shown on **Plan EDP 5**, while the views themselves are shown on **Photoviewpoints EDP 1 to 11** at **Appendix EDP 6**.

- 4.9 EDP consider that the proposed scope of the LVA is suitable in enabling the identification of the effects of a proposed development without the need for additional viewpoint locations where limited intervisibility, if at all, is predicted.
- 4.10 Details of each view, and the reason for its selection as a 'representative viewpoint', are given in **Table EDP 4.1**.

**Table EDP 4.1:** Selection of Representative Photoviewpoints

<b>Photoviewpoint No.</b>	<b>Viewpoint Location</b>	<b>Grid Ref</b>	<b>Distance and Direction from the Site</b>	<b>Reason for Selection</b>
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 1</b>	View from PRow (Bridleway 131/9/10) to north-east of site	461169, 221021	270m to the north-east	Walkers and horse riders (High Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 2</b>	View from PRow (Bridleway 131/9/10) to north-east at Blackthorn Hill	461225, 220797	360m to the east	Walkers and horse riders (High Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 3</b>	View from A41 at junction with B4011	460972, 220405	280m to the south-east	Users of private vehicles, buses, cyclists and pedestrians (Low Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 4</b>	View from PRow (Bridleway 105/6/20) to south of Blackthorn Hill Farm	460870, 220254	290m to the south-east	Walkers and horse riders (High Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 5</b>	View from PRow (Bridleway 105/6/20) on open ground to south of Blackthorn Hill Farm	460844, 220169	330m to the south-east	Walkers and horse riders (High Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 6</b>	View from Ploughley Road on northern edge of Ambrosden village	460391, 219919	560m to the south	Users of private vehicles, buses, cyclists and pedestrians (Medium Sensitivity)

<b>Photoviewpoint No.</b>	<b>Viewpoint Location</b>	<b>Grid Ref</b>	<b>Distance and Direction from the Site</b>	<b>Reason for Selection</b>
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 7</b>	View from Ploughley Road. Close to the junction between A41 and Ploughley Road.	460062, 220474	400m to the west of the site	Users of private vehicles, buses, cyclists and pedestrians (Low Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 8</b>	View from the junction between A41 and Ploughley Road.	460037, 220537	420m to the west	Users of private vehicles, buses, cyclists and pedestrians (Low Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 9</b>	View from PRow (Footpath 105/1/20) south of Little Wretchwick Farm	460157, 221101	640m west	Walkers (High Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 10</b>	A41 road west of site	459574, 220878	1km to the west	Users of private vehicles, buses, cyclists and pedestrians (Low Sensitivity)
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 11</b>	View from A41 to east of site	460767, 220425	100m to the south-east.	Users of private vehicles, buses, cyclists (Low Sensitivity)

4.11 The following paragraphs summarise the baseline visual context.

### **Close Proximity Views from Roads and PRow**

#### ***Views to the Site from A41 Road***

- 4.12 Recently completed built form at Symmetry Park screens views towards the proposals from the south-west on the A41 as represented by **Photoviewpoints EDP 7** and **8**. Further west on the A41, there are unlikely to be any views of the Site due to the screening effects of built form within Symmetry Park (**Photoviewpoint EDP 10**).
- 4.13 Travelling from the east towards the Site, as the A41 descends down the ridge it is enclosed by trees and overgrown hedgerows, which contain heavily filtered views, as represented by **Photoviewpoints EDP 3** and **11**. Approaching the Site, there is a limited length of road where trimmed field boundary hedgerows and intermittent trees allow filtered views from the highway across fields adjoining the Site.
- 4.14 Visual receptors travelling along this busy A road would be expected to be travelling for reasons other than to appreciate the views to Bicester. In all of the above photoviewpoints, large industrial/commercial buildings form detractors in the landscape. These visual receptors are therefore considered to be of low sensitivity to change.

### **Views to the Site from Ploughley Road**

- 4.15 Views of the Site from Ploughley Road are screened by the village of Ambrosden until exiting the northern edge of the village. From here and travelling towards the junction of the road with the A41, there are tree-filtered views across trimmed field boundary hedgerows towards the Site, as represented by **Photoviewpoint EDP 6**. Existing urbanising influences, such as the completed elements of Symmetry Park adjacent to the Site, can be seen in these views, which provide an urbanising influence. Further, a recent consented residential development will see the northern edge of Ambrosden move further north, though consented development parameters are such that a new landscape buffer, and public open space, would maintain a sense of separation between Ambrosden and Bicester, and also within the Site.
- 4.16 Visual receptors travelling along this B road to the north of Ambrosden are likely to be using the road for reasons other than to appreciate the views. Although views are rural in nature, it is considered that these receptors would be of medium sensitivity to change due to the rural elements within the view, though these are experienced in proximity to the settlement and are also detractors in the landscape, including existing built form at Symmetry Park.

### **Views to the Site from PRow**

- 4.17 Close open views across the Site from PRow are limited to those from Footpath 131/9/10, which is located c.440m to the east (**Photoviewpoints EDP 1 and 2**). North of the Site, views from this footpath become heavily filtered by overgrown hedgerows on the northern boundary of the Site.
- 4.18 To the west of the Site, Footpath 105/5/40 is located c.650m from the Site boundary. Views from this footpath towards the Site are limited in part by overgrown hedgerows to the field bounding the Site and by existing commercial built form. Where breaks in built form may allow for some views, existing hedgerows and tree cover would provide some filtering of the view (**Photoviewpoint EDP 9**).
- 4.19 Extending from the northern edge of Ambrosden, northwards towards Blackthorn Hill Farm, is Bridleway 105/6/20, which has views across fields towards the valley. The industrial buildings at the base of Graven Hill, container storage depot off the A41, and the urban edge of Bicester feature in the view as well as the recently completed Symmetry Park development. Trees lining the A41 filter views towards the Site (**Photoviewpoints EDP 4 and 5**).
- 4.20 Views towards the Site from Bridleway 131/9/10, which runs north-east from the A41, are initially screened by trees and woodland adjoining the Bicester Caravan and Leisure site. To the north of the caravan site is a car breakers yard. This is a prominent detractor in views from the bridleway and forms the foreground context in filtered views of the Site (**Photoviewpoint EDP 2**). Beyond the Site, recently completed development at Symmetry Park comprises large commercial buildings visible below Graven Hill. Travelling further north along the bridleway towards the railway line, the views become dominated by the rural landscape, with filtered views towards the Site across agricultural fields (**Photoviewpoint EDP 1**).



4.21 Though receptors on local PRoW experience views of notable detractors, including the car breakers yard in the middle distance, and in the distance, depot buildings around Graven Hill and the urban edge of Bicester, visual receptors are passing through an undesignated rural landscape and would typically be considered to be of a high sensitivity. This includes users of the bridleway across Blackthorn Hill (**Photoviewpoint EDP 5**) where receptors are passing between the village of Ambrosden and the commercial operations at Blackthorn Hill Farm. Here, there is a greater sense of open character afforded by local landform. Receptors on local PRoW are considered to have a high sensitivity to change.

#### ***Distant Views Towards the Site***

4.22 **Appendix EDP 7** provides elevated views in the direction of the Site and the current extent of the Symmetry Park development from Graven Hill. The location of this view was not accessible at the time of the visit and, as such, previous photography from 2020 is presented here. These views are filtered by existing mature vegetation within the landscape, and in part screened by existing commercial development.

#### ***Residential Receptors***

4.23 This appraisal has focused on the assessment of views from publicly accessible locations. Views from private residential properties, although likely to be of high sensitivity to changes in the view, are not protected by national planning guidance or local planning policy. Good masterplanning of the Site, however, has considered the visual amenity of domestic dwellings in close proximity to the proposals.

4.24 The closest views of the Site are from Mill Cottage, c.220m to the east, which would have filtered and screened views from upper floor windows across the Site due to intervening mature vegetation.

4.25 Built form within Symmetry Park serves to prevent any views experienced by residential receptors to the west, including Wretchwick Farm Cottages.

4.26 Views from Wretchwick Farm Cottages, c.600m west of the Site would be, in part, screened by mature vegetation enclosing the dwellings, whilst the recently completed commercial units at Symmetry Park would also partly obscure views. Similarly, through the future construction of Unit C, this would entirely screen the Site from view.

4.27 Views from Little Wretchwick Farm are also screened by Symmetry Park, though some views may be seen in gaps between the units where breaks in vegetation would allow.

4.28 Views from Blackthorn Hill Farm, c.300m to the east of the Site, are interrupted by an area of parking for coaches and restricted by two large corrugated agricultural/commercial buildings. Beyond the farm, trees bounding the property and lining the A41 road filter views towards the Site (**Photoviewpoint EDP 4**).

4.29 Due to topography, views towards the Site from Ambrosden are limited to residential properties on the northern edge of the village, off West Hawthorn Road and Briar Furlong. Overgrown field boundary hedgerows and trees bounding properties, and Bridleway 105/6/10, which runs along the back of the rear gardens of West Hawthorn Road, heavily

filter views from the properties. In summer, when the trees are in full leaf, views would be further reduced.

- 4.30 The northern extension of Ambrosden following recent planning consents may enable some new views experienced by residents. However, views are likely to be seen in the context of the existing units at Symmetry Park and with the benefit of mature tree cover aligning the A41 affording some visual screening, similar to those views illustrated in **Photoviewpoint EDP 6**.

### **SUMMARY OF THE VISUAL BASELINE**

- 4.31 As a complement to the appreciation of the character and evolution of the landscape (**Section 3** of this report), EDP has assessed the nature and distribution of views within, from and towards the Site.
- 4.32 EDP's analysis focuses on the assessment of visual impacts of the development of the Site from the surrounding landscape, concentrating on the views towards the Site from surrounding public locations. Such analysis provides an understanding of the location and sensitivity of surrounding areas with views towards the Site and therefore forms the basis of an assessment of the significance of any visual impacts arising from the Site proposals.
- 4.33 It is already clear from EDP's field appraisal and a review of the visual context that:
- Views from close quarters are generally only available from very small sections of busy road corridors, if at all, and from very short sections of the local PRoW network immediately surrounding the Site;
  - From most roads and footpaths, views towards the Site are filtered by intervening vegetation within a relatively flat landscape;
  - There are very few residential receptors in close proximity to the Site due to the dispersed settlement pattern in the rural landscape; with no properties bounding the Site or any with clear views across it. Views from close proximity farmsteads, and properties on the north-western edge of Ambrosden are largely filtered by trees and overgrown hedgerows;
  - Sensitive design of the Proposed Development, and an effective landscape design strategy in accordance with the Clay Vale LCT guidelines, would be required to minimise the effect of change on the above visual receptors;
  - Views of the Site from higher ground are filtered by the pattern of trees and hedgerows across the valley landscape. However, as **Photoviewpoint EDP 4** illustrates, though set within a well-treed landscape during summer months, existing large buildings are visually prominent in the urban fringe landscape of Bicester and in particular around Graven Hill. Sensitive design in terms of materials and colours would be required to minimise visual effects on these distant visual receptors; and
  - Much of the wider study area lies outside the visual envelope from where no views of the entire site are possible.

## Section 5

### Masterplanning and Design Recommendations

#### THE DESIGN RESPONSE

5.1 The findings of EDP's early and ongoing field appraisals have been fed into the evolving proposals in order to ensure that the masterplan is 'landscape led' (refer to **Appendix EDP 8**). Accordingly, any proposed development should incorporate designed and embedded mitigation. The recommendations include:

- Existing mature landscape framework comprising hedgerows and associated mature trees at the Site boundaries to be retained where possible;
- Creation of a landscaped buffer from Proposed Development zones to protect and enhance retained boundary features of landscape and ecological interest. This is particularly the case at the southern and eastern boundaries to address the character of the approach to Bicester on the A41, matching the treatment implemented as part of the existing Symmetry Park scheme, and also on the northern boundary to address the transition to the wider open agricultural landscape;
- Broad-leaved native tree planting, including heavy standard trees, is proposed to fragment views of any proposed development, again, particularly at the eastern and southern boundaries which would have a strong influence on the character of the approach to Bicester and where, although receptor sensitivity is low, short distance views from road corridors are possible;
- A gentle 'ecotone' to be created at the vegetated site boundary by the planting of scrub vegetation, offering breeding, foraging, sheltering and overwintering opportunities for wildlife;
- Landscaped bunds, outside the development zone, and additional tree planting, would aid visual screening of the proposed built form and enhance habitat heterogeneity across an otherwise relatively flat landscape;
- Additional native trees added to strengthen the northern boundary to integrate the proposals into the wider landscape setting; and
- Proposed tree belts to include fastigiated species that would grow tall in time and break up visual massing of buildings.

5.2 EDP's field appraisals have also fed into the lighting design for the Proposed Development (included at **Appendix EDP 9**). The lighting strategy for the Proposed Development responds to the Site context by limiting light spill at the Site boundaries, particularly at the northern edge, where new landscape features will provide a transition to the wider rural context, and also to the south and east where the Site boundaries would be reinforced in order to maintain the character of the approach to Bicester on the A41. As illustrated at **Appendix EDP 9**, light spill beyond the Site boundaries is limited.

5.3 In addition to the above, there are a number of general landscape design principles that would guide the implementation of a suitable landscape scheme for the Proposed Development:

- Save for site access and internal access roads, existing boundary hedgerows and trees should be retained where possible (with buffers to development), reinforced and brought into regular, long-term management. This would protect visual amenity and landscape character as well as continuing to offer commuting and foraging opportunities for protected species;
- Provision of structural landscaping, native trees and shrubs that reflect the local context throughout the scheme to maintain a buffer to the wider setting. Particularly within the northern areas of the Site, existing landscape features would be reinforced with additional planting measures in order to maintain the 'green' setting to the wider rural setting to the north. Similarly, structural tree planting on the eastern and southern boundaries would assist in addressing the character of the approach to Bicester on the A41;
- The proposals should complement the existing landscape features of the Site and character of adjacent uses and rural areas; and
- The landscape strategy should take into consideration the long-term vision for the Site, using tree planting to filter into the proposed Development from adjacent green corridors and to frame and buffer the proposed built form.

#### **CONSTRUCTION MITIGATION**

5.4 The following mitigation measures should be proposed during the construction of the Proposed Development, to be secured through a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) or similarly agreed method. They include:

- To safeguard the existing vegetation to be retained around the perimeter of the Site, tree protection zones should be created and fenced-off to ensure that the development would not encroach onto the root protection areas. An approved Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) should be adopted, incorporating best practice guidance set out in British Standard 5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction, which would ensure retained trees and other vegetation are not adversely affected during the construction process;
- The use of visual screening, such as hoardings around sections of the Site boundary to protect more sensitive visual receptors in close proximity, including residential receptors that have the greatest potential to be affected by the project; and
- Existing residents that live in close proximity to the Site, and receptors on local PRoW, would be more sensitive to construction lighting. Mitigation measures for construction lighting are likely to include directional fittings and restricted hours of operation and would be outlined within a Lighting Strategy for the project (produced by others). As a minimum requirement, any proposed lighting should be in accordance with local

authority standards and with consideration of Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice (DCLG and CC, 1997). During construction, lighting effects would be mitigated by implementing good practice measures across the Site. Measures to be implemented include:

- a. Specified working hours, uses of lighting, locations of floodlights;
- b. Lighting to be switched off unless specifically needed; and
- c. Barriers to be erected to shield adjacent receptors where appropriate.

#### **DESIGNED OR EMBEDDED MITIGATION**

- 5.5 The masterplan for the Site has evolved over time, with inputs from the applicant's consultant team, including EDP. Consistent with the landscape-led approach, EDP's landscape team has provided continuing feedback from the early stages of this LVA Baseline process. EDP's role was to recommend masterplan responses to avoid or minimise potential landscape and visual effects in light of the more detailed findings of our field assessments.
- 5.6 The avoidance of effects is always challenging when there is a material change to land use, such as in the conversion of a greenfield site to future commercial use. However, the landscape and visual sensitivities of the Site have influenced masterplanning through an iterative process. Thus, the Site incorporates a degree of integral (or embedded) mitigation designed to avoid or reduce potential landscape and visual effects. Primarily they include the retention of the existing landscape fabric around the boundaries of the Site, including key biodiversity assets, as informed by the findings and recommendations of the ecology assessment.
- 5.7 Embedded mitigation provides a form of preventative mitigation, and as discussed above, is that which has been considered as an integral part of the overall design and locational strategy for the Site. It is not an 'add-on' measure to ameliorate significant environmental effects, but part of the positive and pro-active approach whereby mitigation has been assessed and considered at all stages of the project to prevent or reduce the occurrence of potentially significant environmental effects.

## Section 6 Assessment of Effects

### INTRODUCTION

- 6.1 In this section, the predicted effects on landscape character and visual amenity are assessed. The assessment uses the thresholds for magnitude, sensitivity and significance defined at **Appendix EDP 1** as a guide, but moderated where appropriate with professional judgement. 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.
- 6.2 Predicted effects on receptors are assessed at construction and upon the first year following completion (year 1), these effects tending to be the 'worst case'. Also provided is an assessment of effects at year 15, once mitigation has had time to mature and the proposals are settled in their context. Year 15 (and beyond) is the timeframe over which the Proposed Development should be judged for its acceptability, with landscape change properly measured over this longer-term horizon.
- 6.3 The assessment of effects is supported by a more detailed visual assessment provided at **Appendix EDP 10**. Furthermore, four of the Photoviewpoint locations have been used for the production of visualisations (AVR Level 1 (wirelines)) to illustrate the massing of the Proposed Development in local views (refer to **Appendix EDP 11**).
- 6.4 For the Proposed Development at the Site, it is considered that there is potential for effects on the receptors listed below:
- The potential effects on the character of the landscape (including the character of the Site itself and the surrounding area), including:
    - The character of the Site and its immediate context (Medium sensitivity);
    - The Clay Vale LCT (Medium sensitivity); and
    - The Launton LCA (Medium sensitivity).
  - The potential effects at the selected viewpoint locations, which examines the effects on the visual receptors at each location and enables a 'calibration' of the general assessment; and
  - The potential effects on visual amenity (having regard to the conclusions of the representative viewpoints), including assessments of the following receptors:
    - Close proximity views from roads and PRoW; and
    - Distant views towards the Site.

## EFFECTS UPON THE LANDSCAPE RESOURCE

- 6.5 There are large agricultural and industrial buildings that appear in many views within the surrounding context, including a former campsite which is now used for car salvage to the north-east of the Site and existing commercial built form to the west, detracting from the otherwise rural character of the Site as an enclosed parcel of land. Clearly, in terms of the Site itself, the construction of commercial built form would constitute a notable alteration to the existing agricultural character of the Site, with some influence on land to the north. However, it would be seen in the context of completed built form to the east of the Site, with other visually intrusive elements including industrial buildings and a car breakers yard to the east. The existing mature landscape framework, largely on the boundaries of the Site, would be retained, including important hedgerow trees.

### Construction Effects on the Landscape Resource

- 6.6 Within the Site itself, it is inevitable that construction activity would result in a change to the localised agricultural character of the Site as an enclosed parcel of land. However, within the Site's immediate context, any construction activity would be experienced against the partly urbanised context found at the Site boundaries, reducing the effects of any construction activity on the Site context and on the wider landscape resource. Landscape features at the Site boundaries would be retained, except to enable access, with the loss of any fabric amounting to grassland within the Site's interior. The magnitude of change to the Site and its immediate context would be medium, being a partial loss or alteration to one or more key elements/features/characteristics of the baseline condition, and the addition of elements that may be evident but do not necessarily conflict with the key characteristics of the existing landscape.
- 6.7 This medium magnitude of change, with consideration of the Site's medium sensitivity, leads to **moderate adverse** effects at construction stage within the Site and on the immediate context, which would remain for the duration of the construction activities (and not beyond).
- 6.8 Within the wider landscape, construction activity would inevitably change the character of the landscape within a discrete geographical area, but this is an unavoidable result of development in green field locations. However, the change would not be experienced within a wide area and the most obtrusive elements (noise, etc.) would cease upon completion of the development. It is considered that construction activities would be seen in the context of existing urbanising elements of the urban fringe of Bicester, including commercial built form to the south within Symmetry Park, influencing the character of the landscape context. There would be localised excavation of land, ground remodelling and the storage of topsoil, and slight alteration to local features of the Site. Additionally, movement and machinery associated with site operations would introduce additional localised activity.
- 6.9 Higher-level construction activities may be visible in medium distance in views from the surrounding context. Together, these operations would lead to an incremental increase in effects on the local landscape as construction draws to completion. This would result in a medium magnitude of change on the Clay Vale LCT and the Launton LCA, giving rise to a **moderate adverse** and temporary effect.

### **Operational Effects on the Landscape Resource**

- 6.10 The Proposed Development would result in a permanent change of use within the Site from agricultural land to built development. The localised landscape character of the Site and its immediate surroundings would be altered by the Proposed Development, retaining existing landscape features at the Site boundaries where possible and appropriate, and enhancing existing landscape corridors. The Proposed Development would introduce a variety of native, valuable soft landscape elements and features which would positively contribute to the new character of the area, including generous tree planting belts at the northern, eastern and southern boundaries, contributing to the overall structure of the landscape while also addressing local character.
- 6.11 At year 1, it is unlikely that the landscape scheme would provide a notable addition to the character of the Site or provide visual screening to proposed built form. This would result in a medium magnitude of change on the Site and its context, giving rise to a **moderate adverse** effect. At year 15, proposed landscape measures within the Site, including tree planting and a range of habitat types, would have matured, assimilating the proposals into the wider landscape context. Despite the introduction of commercial built form, the maturation of the proposed landscape framework would give rise to beneficial effects as set out within the Landscape Strategy. The integration, and maturation, of a well-designed landscape scheme, aided by landscaped bunds, would assimilate the proposals into the immediate setting such that it would not necessarily conflict with the characteristics of the Site's immediate setting. It is considered that, at year 15, the magnitude of change would reduce to low as the Proposed Development would not be uncharacteristic with the existing context. This gives rise to a **moderate/minor**, long-term, adverse and permanent residual effect.
- 6.12 The Proposed Development would result in the introduction of commercial built form into both the Clay Vale LCT and Launton LCA, being similar in character to built form immediately to the west of the Site. The Proposed Development would retain existing landscape features within the Site, therefore reducing the visual impact of the proposals on the local landscape character. At year 1, it is considered that the Proposed Development would result in a low magnitude of change upon the Clay Vale LCT and Launton LCA, giving rise to a minor, long-term, adverse effect. In the long-term, design mitigation proposals on the Site boundaries, including landscaped bunds adjacent to the Site boundaries in key locations, particularly to the west, north and east boundaries where the Site adjoins agricultural land, would assimilate the Proposed Development into the surrounding landscape context and minimise the effect on the rural landscape setting. Glimpsed views of the proposed built form within the Site may remain, particularly during winter; however, the Proposed Development would be seen in the context of other visually intrusive elements within the immediate context. It is considered that, despite the maturation of the proposed landscape framework, the key characteristics of Clay Vale LCT and Launton LCA would be subject to a low magnitude of change giving rise to a **minor**, long-term, adverse and permanent residual effect.

### **EFFECTS ON VISUAL AMENITY**

- 6.13 Visual effects relate to changes that arise in the composition of available views as a result of changes to the landscape; to people's responses to the changes; and to the overall



effects with respect to visual amenity. Effects upon these receptors are derived through the changes to the views experienced, and through this, the change to the overall visual amenity of the study area as brought about by the Proposed Development. A detailed assessment of the effects at each viewpoint has been undertaken (see **Appendix EDP 10**), and a summary of the results of this assessment are provided in **Table EDP 6.1**.

6.14 Effects above moderate are considered to be ‘material’ in visual terms (highlighted in orange) and effects of moderate/minor or lesser (highlighted green) are ‘not material’ in visual terms. In certain cases, where additional factors may arise, a further degree of professional judgement may be applied when determining whether the overall change in the view will be material or not. For example, in cases where a moderate effect is experienced by a high or very high sensitivity receptor, this may be considered to be material. Similarly, where a moderate effect is experienced by a very low sensitivity receptor, this may not be considered material. Where this occurs, further explanation is given within the assessment.

6.15 A summary of the effects on key receptor groups are discussed further below.

**Table EDP 6.1:** Summary of Visual Effects

Receptor	Sensitivity	Level of Effect		
		Construction	Year 1	Year 15
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 1</b> PRoW Users	High	<b>Major/Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	Moderate
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 2</b> PRoW Users	High	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Moderate/Minor
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 3</b> Road Users PRoW Users	Low High	Minor Moderate	Minor/Negligible Moderate/Minor	Minor/Negligible Moderate/Minor
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 4</b> PRoW Users	High	Moderate/Minor	Moderate/Minor	Moderate/Minor
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 5</b> PRoW Users	High	<b>Moderate</b>	Moderate/Minor	Moderate/Minor
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 6</b> Road Users	Medium	Moderate/Minor	Moderate/Minor	Moderate/Minor
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 7</b> Road Users	Low	Minor	Minor	Minor/Negligible
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 8</b> Road Users	Low	Minor/Negligible	Minor/Negligible	Minor/Negligible

Receptor	Sensitivity	Level of Effect		
		Construction	Year 1	Year 15
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 9</b> PRoW Users	High	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Moderate/Minor
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 10</b> Road Users	Low	Minor/Negligible	Minor/Negligible	Minor/Negligible
<b>Photoviewpoint EDP 11</b> Road Users	Low	Moderate/Minor	Moderate/Minor	Minor

6.16 A summary of the effects on key receptor groups are discussed further below.

### Summary of Effects on Visual Amenity

6.17 It would be very surprising for a project such as this not to give rise to some predicted 'material' visual effects in the temporary construction phase, although it is very notable how geographically confined and limited in number these significant effects actually are for receptors within publicly accessible areas, which is an indication of how little this project, notwithstanding its extent, impacts on views from the wider landscape.

### Receptors Using Public Rights of Way

6.18 There would be a very limited visual effect upon users of the PRoW within the wider LVA study area, due to screening provided by vegetation and built form combined within the local landscape context. As illustrated on **Plan EDP 4**, **Photoviewpoint EDP 1** is located to the north of the Site. At this location, it has been identified that receptors will experience material effects during the short-term and temporary construction phase, largely due to the likelihood of taller construction activities being visible from the wider agricultural context. However, further south on the same PRoW, though there is some elevation due to local landform, views become screened by mature tree cover and also by the car breakers yard in the foreground. Where views may be possible, construction activity would not be considered to be out of character within the existing view. Overall, the construction of the scheme would generally form a minor constituent of the view and would largely be seen in the context of existing built form.

6.19 Similarly, for receptors on higher ground to the south of the A41 (illustrated at **Photoviewpoints EDP 4 and 5**), construction activity would either be barely perceptible, or again would be seen in the context of existing built form, such that effects arising from the Proposed Development would not be material. Beyond these locations, receptors using PRoW would experience views where the Site, and any construction activity within it, would be barely perceptible. From PRoW 105/6/20 (with views illustrated by **Photoviewpoint EDP 5**), receptors will experience material effects during the short-term and temporary construction phase, largely due to the likelihood of taller construction activities being visible from the wider agricultural context, though, again, being seen in the context of existing built form within Symmetry Park.

- 6.20 In the medium to long-term, the continued maturation of landscape proposals at the perimeter of the Site, including the reinforcing of existing hedgerows with new trees, would assimilate the Proposed Development into the surrounding context, which would be seen as being similar in character to existing commercial built form to the west of the Site. Tree planting within green corridors around the Site would serve to break up the massing of proposed built form in local views and therefore reduce the horizontal massing of the Proposed Development. Although the Proposed Development is likely to remain a recognisable element within local views, it would not fundamentally change the character of the local context, which are now informed by completed built development within Symmetry Park. As such, overall, the Proposed Development would not be considered to be a 'new' element within the view, being partially visible. Therefore, effects on PRow users in the long-term would be no greater than **moderate/minor**.
- 6.21 Upon completion, it is predicted that there is unlikely to be any notable change to views from the wider setting as, although glimpsed views of taller elements within the Site may be possible, the Proposed Development would be well-screened by retained landscape features and, where it is visible, would be seen in the context of existing built form within Symmetry Park to the south of the Site.
- 6.22 It should be noted that following the completion of the wider Bicester 12 (remainder) Wretchwick Green strategic development, which has been allocated for development within local planning policy, the character of the immediate setting of **Photoviewpoints EDP 9, 10, 11 and 12** would change from agricultural to urban. It is considered that views from within the wider Bicester 12 (remainder) Wretchwick Green site would be limited to glimpsed views between built form in the foreground. The area would be more urbanised and therefore less susceptible to change and less sensitive to the introduction of urban components within the landscape. The development of the Bicester 12 (remainder) Wretchwick Green strategic development would largely prevent any views of the Site from this location for PRow users.
- 6.23 Future receptors within the Proposed Development at Graven Hill would largely experience views limited by proposed built form within the Bicester 2 Graven Hill allocation. A public open space within Bicester 2 Graven Hill (**Appendix EDP 8**) currently affords views to the north-east where views of the Site are screened by mature tree cover. Following completion of the Bicester 2 Graven Hill site, which is to be undertaken in phases, views of the Site would be restricted by new residential properties. It is considered that at operation year 15, receptors at this location may experience glimpsed views of the roof structure of the Proposed Development, being similar in character to existing commercial built form within Symmetry Park to the south of the Site. The maturation of the landscape framework would further screen already heavily filtered views. Therefore, at year 15, it is considered that receptors at Graven Hill would be no greater than minor.

#### ***Road Users including Pedestrians***

- 6.24 Views from local roads are extremely limited by existing built form and mature landscape features; views are essentially limited to within the Site's immediate context. Where views are possible, i.e. from small sections of the A41 and Ploughley Road, receptors experience relatively short distance views towards the Site, although most views that look towards the Site are characterised by existing commercial built form within Symmetry Park.

- 6.25 While it is considered that the construction works and Proposed Development may be an identifiable component of local views from road corridors, the proposals would not alter the character of views experienced by receptors using the local road network in a general sense. During construction, it is considered that views for road users would not change fundamentally.
- 6.26 Upon completion, the proposed mitigation measures, combined with the retention of the existing landscape framework, would limit effects on road users and pedestrians. For road users approaching Bicester from the east, the retention of the Site's southern boundary, reinforced with new structural landscaping, with planting height being enhanced by a new bund, the character of the A41 would remain well-treed, similar to the existing character illustrated at **Photoviewpoint EDP 3**.
- 6.27 At **Photoviewpoint EDP 3**, receptors would experience effects no greater than moderate/minor, though in summer views there would be no perceptible change. During winter months, from a short section of the A41 (illustrated at **Photoviewpoint EDP 11**), views through mature roadside hedgerow may be possible. However, here, there is also unlikely to be any perceptible change until road users are travelling along the A41 immediately adjacent to the Site (the character of the A41 at this location is illustrated at **Images EDP 3.4** and **3.5**). During winter though, the Proposed Development may be recognised in the view, such that the magnitude of change would increase to medium in the short-term, giving rise to a worst-case moderate/minor adverse effect for road users passing immediately adjacent to the Site.

#### ***Private Viewpoint Receptors***

- 6.28 There are very few residential receptors in close proximity to the Site due to the dispersed settlement pattern in the wider landscape. Views from close proximity farmsteads, and properties on the north-western edge of Ambrosden are largely filtered by trees and overgrown hedgerows. Following the completion of strategic development proposals, namely at Graven Hill and at the northern edge of Ambrosden, there may be some opportunity for filtered views. However, this is likely to be limited to public open space on Graven Hill, and also from lower lying ground to the north of Ambrosden when only heavily filtered views may be possible. In addition, residential receptors to the east of the Site, in very close proximity to the existing car breakers yard, may experience some views of both taller construction activity and taller built form. However, as with viewing experiences from publicly accessible locations, the Proposed Development would be seen as similar in character to built form within Symmetry Park to the south of the Site and would not be considered a 'new' element within the view. As such, long term effects would not be considered to be material.
- 6.29 With consideration of future receptors within the wider Bicester 12 (remainder) Wretchwick Green strategic development site, which has been allocated for development within local planning policy and has an extant planning permission, views would be limited to the immediate setting due to visual screening provided by newly built form. It is considered that some minor glimpsed views of the Proposed Development may be possible, forming a barely noticeable component of the view and being seen in the context of existing commercial built form adjacent to the Site. Therefore, future receptors, including residents who are considered to have a very high sensitivity, would be subject to a moderate/minor effect.

## **SUMMARY OF EFFECTS ON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND VISUAL AMENITY**

- 6.30 This appraisal has considered the effects of the Proposed Development on the Clay Vale LCT and the Launton LCA and finds that the Proposed Development results in limited impacts. The Proposed Development would not cause any material effects on the overall character of these areas.
- 6.31 The Site is well contained by mature field boundary hedgerows that include individual mature trees. Although the Site is currently part of a rural context, though with limited connection to the wider landscape to the north, there are many prominent urban detractors which are visible in the surrounding context. These detractors include the car breakers yard; the A41 road bounding the Site to the south; existing distribution buildings; a container storage depot; large-scale warehouses and the urban edge of Bicester. In addition, recently built commercial development to the west of the Site has informed the character of local views. This appraisal concurs with the findings of the CLSA which identified that the Site is essentially an enclosed parcel of land, with limited associations with the wider landscape context and with the ability to accommodate some development.
- 6.32 The landscape within the study area contains a mix of rural features and urban and industrial/commercial uses, resulting in limited opportunities for views of the Site. In consideration of the impacts on the visual amenity of people, views towards the Site are often obscured by mature landscape features and large elements of built form within a flat landscape. The assessment finds that, due to this visual screening, there would be limited long-term impacts on publicly accessible areas, including highways and PRoW.
- 6.33 In the wider context, the low number of material landscape and visual effects confirm the extent to which Site selection, with strategic planting having been incorporated into the Proposed Development would mitigate views, retaining and reinforcing the characteristic landscape fabric and pattern of the Site and assimilating the Proposed Development, as far as possible, into the urban and rural landscape context.

## Section 7

### Discussion, Opinion and Conclusions

#### DISCUSSION AND OPINION IN RELATION TO POLICY TESTS

- 7.1 As the Design and Access Statement illustrates, the proposed scheme would utilise high quality materials and design features. It also affords further Green Infrastructure investment within the existing site for ecological and landscape character enhancement. During the course of maturation, this would bring a beneficial effect in terms of their function in the broader, coherent vegetation framework. In this regard, the Proposed Development, with a co-ordinated landscape strategy embedded into the design proposals, would remain compliant with the relevant sections of the NPPF.
- 7.2 The visual character of the area, and the Site itself, is already influenced to a degree by the urbanising effects of a road corridor and existing development at Symmetry Park. However, the key characteristics of the Site itself are generally consistent with the current agricultural land use prevalent in the wider area. Through the provision of landscape buffers to the Site boundary, the Proposed Development is considered to respect the local context, being seen as being similar in character to commercial development to the west. In addressing Policy ESD 13, there is a requirement to “*respect and enhance local landscape character, securing appropriate mitigation where damage to local landscape character cannot be avoided*”. It has been shown that, in views from the wider setting, in many cases, the Site is barely perceptible, with available views generally limited to its immediate context. The proposed landscape measures would be considered to provide good visual screening by the end of the medium to long-term period. Moreover, the proposed mitigation is not only effective, but appropriate in this landscape context, so is not, in itself, an incongruous or inappropriate new landscape component. Overall therefore, it is considered that the proposals are not contrary to Policy ESD 13.
- 7.3 A common theme running through Saved Policy C5, Policy ESD 10 and Policy ESD 17 is the requirement to promote and protect Green Infrastructure. The Site’s existing landscape fabric is to be greatly enhanced as a result of the Proposed Development, which would include substantial new tree and scrub planting. The landscape strategy incorporates landscape and ecological recommendations that are specific to the locale to deliver a framework of new planting, strengthening biodiversity and landscape character and addresses the requirements of Saved Policy C5 and Policy ESD 10.
- 7.4 Inevitably, given the nature of development on greenfield land, there would always be a degree of conflict with policy if interpreted strictly and literally. However, the Proposed Development is not considered to materially harm local policies.

#### CONCLUSIONS

- 7.5 This report has undertaken a review of the circumstances of the proposed commercial development on land at Symmetry Park Bicester, Phase 3, in order that an assessment can be made on the potential effects on the underlying landscape and visual resource. A review of national and local policy, landscape character and visual amenity has been undertaken,

and the findings confirm that the Site relates very well in both landscape and visual terms to the existing context, and that the Site represents a logical and easily assimilated development into this part of the countryside.

- 7.6 On completion, following the maturation of the landscape mitigation proposals, there are no anticipated material adverse effects upon landscape designations or the underlying landscape character, nor any material visual effects upon PRow, minor roads or residential receptors in the wider area. There may be some intervisibility experienced by some residents close to the Site to the east, but the existing nature of the landscape, and the use proposed, would serve to moderate any effect accordingly.
- 7.7 The loss of a single agricultural field parcel to facilitate the Proposed Development would create a localised effect. When this effect is considered with the local context, it would not constitute an unacceptable impact on landscape fabric or the wider character. Accordingly, whilst the Proposed Development would certainly yield change to the character of the Site itself, this appraisal finds no reason why the change of land use should be found to be so harmful as to be unacceptable in terms of the effects on the landscape character and visual amenity.
- 7.8 For the reasons outlined within the report, the proposal represents a relatively small-scale development, which is entirely in keeping with local landscape character and would not therefore result in any material landscape or visual effects or policy contraventions.

## **Appendix EDP 1**

### **EDP LVA Methodology**



# **Appendix EDP 1**

## **EDP LVIA Assessment Methodology**

### **Introduction**

- A1.1 This section provides a methodology for landscape and visual impact assessment as used by EDP.

### **Methodology**

- A1.2 The assessment methodology for assessing landscape and visual effects prepared by EDP is based on the following best practice guidance:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Third Edition (LI/IEMA, 2013);
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England 2014); and
- Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note (TNG) 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals (17 September 2019).

- A1.3 Other reference documents used to understand the baseline position in landscape terms comprise published landscape character assessments appropriate to the site's location and the nature of the proposed development.

- A1.4 The nature of landscape and visual assessment requires both objective analysis and subjective professional judgement. Accordingly, the following assessment is based on the best practice guidance listed above, information and data analysis technique, it uses quantifiable factors wherever possible and subjective professional judgement where necessary, and is based on clearly defined terms.

### ***Landscape Assessment***

- A1.5 Landscape effects derive from changes in the physical landscape fabric that may give rise to changes in its character and how this is experienced. These effects need to be considered in line with changes already occurring within the landscape and which help define the character of it.

- A1.6 Effects upon the wider landscape resource, i.e. the landscape surrounding the development, requires an assessment of visibility of the proposals from adjacent landscape character areas, but remains an assessment of landscape character and not visual amenity.

### ***Visual Assessment***