

Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester
LVIA Report

RF14-228LVIA01



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1. Introduction

1. This report examines the predicted effects of the proposed development on the local landscape character and visual amenity. The report will refer to the relevant national guidance for:
 - i) the assessment of landscape character
 - ii) making judgements about the visual quality of landscapes and their capacity for accommodating development
 - iii) the siting, layout and design of employment use type (Class B1, B2 and B8) buildings; and
 - iv) methodology for the assessment of landscape and visual effects which is in accordance with the 'Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment', Third Edition (**Ref 1.**)
2. Drawing on this guidance, and an appraisal of the key landscape and visual issues associated with the proposed development, this report will consider:
 - i) the character and sensitivity of landscapes within the vicinity of the proposed development; and
 - ii) the visual amenity of the receiving landscape
3. This report will demonstrate that the development site and the local landscape within the vicinity of the site and the study area vary in sensitivity but have capacity to accommodate new development.
4. This report is structured as follows:
 - i) Description of the site and its immediate context in general terms, identifying the location and main characteristics.
 - ii) Description of the proposed development in respect of the nature, type, and primary uses of the built form interventions proposed, the layout, scale and mass and the associated site infrastructure together with the broad strategic landscape proposals.
 - iii) Identification of the relevant planning policy context at national and local level that are pertinent to landscape character and visual issues.
 - iv) Methodology for determining landscape and visual effects.
 - v) Identification of baseline criteria of the site which is to be used to inform the assessment of landscape and visual effects is established.
 - vi) Assessment of landscape effects.
 - vii) Assessment of visual effects.
 - viii) A summary of the findings and conclusions.
5. The principle of developing the site for a flexible mix of employment has been established for a period of almost twenty years. The site is allocated for employment use (in part) under Saved Policy EMP1 of the 1996 Local Plan and the entirety of the site is allocated within the emerging Local Plan under Draft Policy Bicester 11. This report therefore is testing the likely landscape and visual effects of the maximum (or 'worse case') parameters of the proposed development against the various landscape capacity related development management criteria set out under Bicester 11. The planning status of the site and the parameter plan approach to the application is dealt with in more detail within the planning statement (**Ref 2.**)

6. The boundary of the Bicester 11 allocation and the Green Buffer Policy (ESD15 **Ref 3.**) areas have been agreed through the Examination in Public of the Local Plan (EiP) process and for the purposes of this assessment the planning application boundary is within the agreed Bicester 11 allocation and outside the Green Buffer policy area.

2. The Site

Refer to: **Figure 1.1** - Location Plan
Figure 1.2 – Landscape Context
Figure 1.3 – Landscape Analysis
Figure 1.5 – Landscape Designations

7. The site is located on the north eastern outskirts of Bicester, Oxfordshire. It is adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane/A4421, which forms part of the circular road around the town.
8. The site is primarily used for arable crops and comprises fields separated with native hedgerow and tree planting, and some scrubland to the north east. The frontage to Skimmingdish Lane comprises a mixture of tree and hedgerow planting. Hedgerow planting also cuts across the top third of the site and down the middle from north to south, with intermittent breaks in the planting and variation in density. To the north and east of the site is open pasture and farmland, bounded by hedgerows and post and wire fencing.
9. A public footpath (272/17) crosses through the site in a north-south direction from Skimmingdish Lane. A second footpath (272/19) runs alongside a narrow beck to the eastern side of the Site. Footpaths also run to the north of the site behind the hedgerows.
10. Dense vegetation and scrub planting is located along the north western edge of the site and to the south west on the opposite side of Skimmingdish Lane.
11. The site is adjacent to, and partially includes the Bicester Airfield Conservation Area. Along the northern boundary of the site, the conservation area boundary extends into the site some 60m at its furthest (**Figure 1.5**). Parts of the adjacent Bicester Airfield are also scheduled historical monuments; these are located to the north and west of the site. The Conservation Area and the Scheduled Ancient Monument are dealt with in detail in the Heritage Impact Assessment (**Ref 5**).
12. Residential housing is located on the south western side of Skimmingdish Lane, and is set back from the road by an area of amenity green space and hedgerow planting. Light industrial units are sited to the south-east of the site across Skimmingdish Lane.
13. The site generally follows a gentle slope from west to east.
14. Filtered views of the site are available from the south along Skimmingdish Lane. Open views are available from the public footpath (272/17) which traverses the middle of the site. Views from the public footpaths to the north and east are generally filtered by hedgerows and mature vegetation, as are views from the residential houses to the south west. From Bicester Airfield, the view of site is obscured by the dense tree and scrub planting to the western edge of the site.
15. The site supports a number of habitat types however there are no statutory designations in respect of ecology, biodiversity or wildlife within the site which would need to be taken into consideration when assessing landscape and/or visual effects. There is a Local Wildlife Site adjacent, within the Bicester Airfield, which is a non-statutory designation. Issues of Ecology and Biodiversity are dealt with within the Ecology Report (**Ref 6**).
16. A Tree Survey of the Site has been undertaken (**Ref 7**). The survey has been carried out in accordance with *BS5837 (2012) Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations*. (**Ref 8**.) and it has found that the existing trees on the

site range from moderate to low quality and value. It is understood that there no TPOs present on site.

3. The Proposed Development

Refer to: **Figure 1.4** – Landscape Parameters

Chetwoods Architects Parameter Plans:

3830-25-18 – Parameters Plan Development Area & Building Zone

3830-29-05 – Parameters Plan Site Levels & Building Heights Constraints

3830-28-05 – Parameters Plan Access & Circulation

17. Although the proposed development is at outline stage, set parameters for building & hard standing zones, access and building heights are proposed. The scheme assessed within this report is based on a 'worse case' scenario in respect of building location, mass and height and landscape mitigation permissible within the above parameters. This approach accords within the recommendations set out within the GVLIA Guidelines (**Ref 1.**).

Height, Scale & Massing

18. For the purposes of this assessment it has been assumed that the whole of the building zone shown on Chetwood's Development Area & Building Zone Parameter's Plan drawing 3830-25-18 will be occupied by built form to the maximum height indicated on Chetwood's Building Height Constraint Parameter Plan drawing 3830-29-05.
19. The proposed units will be a maximum of 16m in height from the ground level. For the purposes of this assessment a ground level of 72.0m AOD has been used. Overall maximum building height will therefore be 88.0m AOD.

Access

20. A single fixed point of access has been submitted as part of the application. This new access road will come off Skimmingdish Lane and will provide the sole means of entry and egress to the site. Access within the site is set out within Chetwood's Access & Circulation Parameters Plan drawing 3830-28-05.

Appearance

21. Although the application is at outline stage it has been assumed that the architectural style of the proposed residential units will reflect the character and style of distribution warehouses, such as those found off Launton Road and A4421 to the south-east. The appearance of the units is further informed by the architectural design code produced by Chetwoods (**Ref 9.**).

Landscape & Biodiversity

22. Extensive new landscape planting is proposed in order to augment existing native trees and hedgerows and to visually screen and break up the outline of the new built form. The species type and character of this planting will be locally native in order to reflect local biodiversity objectives (see section 3.). The location and extent of the landscape

zones are shown on the Re-from Landscape architecture Landscape Parameter Plan (**Fig 1.4**)

23. The landscape proposals are intended to complement the character of the surrounding landscape context by retaining much of the existing hedgerow planting to the perimeters of the site, and by adding new locally native plant species to augment and enhance the existing green infrastructure.

24. Areas of new native tree and understorey planting will be provided – specifically to the north of the site within the conservation area extents, to the western boundary adjacent to Bicester Airfield, and to the eastern edge to buffer between the development proposals and the diverted public footpath. These plantations will combine with, and augment existing vegetation on and adjacent to the site to create a naturalised planted edge, which in turn will filter views of the new development and soften the outline of new built form introduced on the site. These are shown as ‘minimum width’ zones on the parameter plans.
25. Amenity planting to the car parking, consisting of trees and shrubs will also be accommodated within the centre of the site to soften the hard standing areas and building elevations. This planting will be subject to detailed applications and the approach to the design of these areas is prescribed within the Design Code document **(Ref 9.)**

4. Relevant planning policy

Refer to: **Figure 1.5** – Landscape Designations

26. The relevant planning policies in respect of landscape and visual issues are set out in this section. . The planning status of the site and the parameter plan approach to the application is dealt with in more detail within the planning statement (**Ref 2.**).
27. The principle of developing the site for a flexible mix of employment has been established for a period of almost twenty years. The site is allocated for employment use (in part) under Saved Policy EMP1 of the 1996 Local Plan (**Ref 3.**) and the entirety of the site is allocated within the emerging Local Plan under Draft Policy Bicester 11 (**Ref 4.**).
28. In terms of national designations, there is a scheduled ancient monument adjacent to the north-west of the site. This is dealt with in detail within the Heritage Impact Report (**Ref 5.**). A wide buffer of new tree and shrub planting to separates the scheduled monument from the proposed development is included within the landscape parameter plan (**Fig 1.4**).

National policy – National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

29. Relevant Sections within the National Planning Policy Framework (**Ref 12**), in respect of landscape and visual issues are as follows:

Section 7:	Requiring good design
Section 11:	Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
Section 12:	Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The importance of good design

30. In respect of Section 7, ‘Requiring good design’, the government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is seen as a key aspect of sustainable development.

This section goes to state at paragraph 58:

‘Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- i) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- ii) establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;*
- iii) optimise the potential of the Site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;*
- iv) respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;*

- v) *create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and*
- vi) *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping’.*

and at paragraph 61:

‘Although visual appearance and the architecture of individual buildings are very important factors, securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations. Therefore, planning policies and decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment’.

31. Although currently at outline planning stage, the masterplan strategy already shows that the overall proposal has been well-considered and satisfies all the main criteria of the NPPF in respect of good design. The proposals are integrated within the existing landscape and topography making best use of the natural assets of the site, such as the landform, built form and existing vegetation. It will create a safe and accessible environment which includes access to communal spaces and the wider landscape setting.

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

32. At section 11 (paragraph 109) the NPPF seeks to ensure that the planning system contributes to and enhances the natural and local environment by:
- i) *‘protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;*
 - ii) *recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services; minimising effects on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government’s commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures*
 - iii) *preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and*
 - iv) *remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate’.*
33. The proposed development aims to significantly improve the existing biodiversity on and adjacent to the development site through a mixture of managed habitats, species rich grasslands, native hedgerows, and native tree and shrub plantings. The objective will be, subject to detailed design and the implementation of appropriate management strategies to deliver a net gain in biodiversity thus meeting with the requirements of paragraph 109 at Section 11 of the NPPF.

Local policy

34. Policies within the Cherwell District Council Local Plan (**Ref 3.**) affecting the site with respect to landscape and visual issues that are relevant to this report are:

ESD 10	- Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment
ESD 13	- Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement
ESD 15	- Green Boundaries to Growth
ESD 16	- The Character of the Built and Historic Environment
ESD 18	- Green infrastructure
Policy Bicester 11	- North East Bicester (strategic employment site)

The boundary of the Bicester 11 allocation and the Green Buffer Policy (ESD15 **Ref 3.**) areas have been agreed through the Examination in Public of the Local Plan (EiP) process and for the purposes of this assessment the planning application boundary is within the agreed Bicester 11 allocation and outside the Green Buffer policy area.

35. Relevant sections of the Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment ESD10 states:

In considering proposals for development, a net gain in biodiversity will be sought by protecting, managing, enhancing and extending existing resources, and by creating new resources

Furthermore:

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. Existing ecological networks should be identified and maintained to avoid habitat fragmentation, and ecological corridors should form an essential component of green infrastructure provision in association with new development to ensure habitat connectivity

36. The site is adjacent to two Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) (see **Figure 1.5**) located to the west and north boundaries on Bicester Airfield. These are allocated in the Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project (**Ref: 10.**) managed by the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust in partnership with Cherwell District Council (CDC):

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are areas of land recognised for having high wildlife value containing rare or threatened habitats and species. They have no statutory designation but together with the legally protected areas of land, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), they form vital links across the county and beyond to create a national network of habitats that provide refuges for our country's diverse flora and fauna.

37. Many LWS contain habitats and species that are priorities for conservation recognised through UK Biodiversity Action Plans. The CDC Biodiversity Action Plan (**Ref: 11**) highlights the importance of LWS to meeting biodiversity targets. The CDC has recognised a proposed extension to the LWS to cover the entirety of Bicester Airfield Conservation Area. With this in mind, future development proposals on the application site should be sensitive to the surrounding context as an area of wildlife importance.

38. In respect of this policy, there will be an overall net gain in biodiversity due to the quantum and range of new species proposed for the locality. New native planting will be connected to existing Green Infrastructure in order to form well connected ecological corridors and good habitat connectivity. Effects on the ecological value of the landscape are dealt with in the Ecology Report (**Ref 6.**)

39. Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement ESD13 states:

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.*

40. Similarly, Green Boundaries to Growth ESD15 states:

Proposals for development on the edge of the built up area must be carefully designed and landscaped to soften the built edge of the development and assimilate it into the landscape by providing green infrastructure that will positively contribute to the rural setting of the towns. Existing important views of designated or attractive landscape features will need to be taken into account. Proposals will also be considered against the requirements of Policy ESD 13: Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement.

In addition, green buffers as indicated on the Policies Maps will be maintained to:

- *Maintain Banbury and Bicester's distinctive identity and setting*
- *Protect the separate identity and setting of neighbouring settlements which surround the two towns*
- *Prevent coalescence and protect the gaps between the existing/planned edge of the towns and surrounding settlements*
- *Protect the identity and setting of landscape and historic features of value that are important to the identity and setting of the two towns*
- *Protect important views*

Development proposals within the green buffers will only be permitted if they would not conflict with these objectives.

41. In respect of Policies ESD13 and ESD15, the exact positioning of the Green Buffer designation is dependent on the Bicester 11 allocation (see below). For the purposes of this assessment it has therefore been assumed that the proposed building zone parameter has been set outside the green buffer designation, which otherwise runs along the north eastern and south eastern boundaries. The site has been allocated for employment use under the Bicester 11 allocation and thus the principle of development is established. With regards to the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development, this is dealt with at sections 7 and 8 of this report respectively.

42. Relevant sections of the Character of the Built and Historic Environment ESD16 states:

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.

43. Furthermore, new development proposals should:

- *Be designed to deliver high quality safe, attractive, durable and healthy places to live and work in. Development of all scales should be designed to improve the quality and appearance of an area and the way it functions*
- *Support the efficient use of land and infrastructure, through appropriate land uses, mix and density / development intensity*
- *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

- *Integrate and enhance green infrastructure and incorporate biodiversity enhancement features where possible (see Policy ESD 10: Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment and Policy ESD 18 Green Infrastructure).*

44. Policy ESD16 reflects NPPF Section 7 'The importance of good design' (see above).

45. The Green Infrastructure ESD18 policy states:

The district's green infrastructure network will be maintained and enhanced through the following measures:

- *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 in accordance with policies on supporting a modal shift in transport (Policy SLE 4: Improved Transport and Connections), open space, sport and recreation (Policy BSC 10: Open Space, Outdoor Sport and Recreation Provision), adapting to climate change (Policy ESD 1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change), SuDS (Policy ESD 7: Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)), biodiversity and the natural environment (Policy ESD 10: Protection and Enhancement of Biodiversity and the Natural Environment), Conservation Target Areas (Policy ESD 11: Conservation Target Areas), heritage assets (Policy ESD 16) and the Oxford Canal (Policy ESD 17)*
- *Ensuring that green infrastructure network considerations are integral to the planning of new development. Proposals should maximise the opportunity to maintain and extend green infrastructure links to form a multi-functional network of open space, providing opportunities for walking and cycling, and connecting the towns to the urban fringe and the wider countryside beyond*
- *All strategic development sites (Section C: 'Policies for Cherwell's Places') will be required to incorporate green infrastructure provision and proposals should include details for future management and maintenance.*

46. In respect of Policy ESD18, the development proposals will compensate the loss of existing green infrastructure such as hedgerows and mature tree planting, with proposed native planting, to be a mix of trees, hedgerows and understorey vegetation. The landscape proposals will strengthen and augment existing planting around the site perimeters. The public footpath running through the site will be diverted to maintain access to open space and green infrastructure.

47. The majority of the site has been allocated for employment uses under Policy 'Bicester 11' (**Ref 4.**). The exact extent of the allocation is clarified within the Planning Report (**Ref 2.**) Notwithstanding the state of flux surrounding the extent of the allocation it is nevertheless, underpinned by the council's Sustainability Appraisal (**Ref 13.**) and by Cherwell District Council's Landscape Capacity Study (**Ref 14.**).

48. Policy 11 Bicester outlines the land use allocation for the site including:

- *Proposals should comply with ESD16*
- *Layout of development that enables a high degree of integration and connectivity between new and existing development, including adjoining employment areas, nearby residential areas and the town centre*
- *Provision of new footpaths and cycleways to connect with the existing footpath/cycleway links around the site including along Skimmingdish Lane*

- *A high quality, well designed approach to the urban edge which functions as an high profile economic attractor but which also achieves a successful transition between town and country environments*
- *Development that respects the landscape setting, and that demonstrates the enhancement, restoration or creation of wildlife corridors, and the creation of a green infrastructure network for Bicester*
- *A comprehensive landscaping scheme to limit visual intrusion into the wider landscape, particularly given the need to preserve the open setting, character and appearance of the Former RAF Bicester and the Conservation Area*
- *A high quality design and finish, with careful consideration given to layout, architecture, materials and colourings and careful consideration given to building heights to reduce overall visual impact*

49. The Policy has been further amended (**Ref 15.**) in order to include additional text to require a landscape buffer and planting along the north eastern boundary of the sit. The additional text is as follows:

- *Creation of a landscape buffer and appropriate planting on the north-eastern boundary of the site to limit visual intrusion and preserve the setting and character of the Former RAF Bicester Conservation Area and Scheduled Ancient Monument. Sufficient landscape boundary treatment at the north eastern boundary of the development site will be agreed with the Council in conjunction with English Heritage (this may include consideration of land outside the Local Plan site area), between the site identified in the Local Plan and the scheduled ancient monument and the RAF Bicester conservation area.*

50. The Cherwell District Council Landscape Capacity Assessment (**Ref 14.**) concludes that Bicester 11 site has medium to Low landscape sensitivity, low visual sensitivity and has a Medium-high capacity to accept development. Notwithstanding this assessment the development proposals are accompanied by a comprehensive scheme of landscape buffer/structure planting presented as a set of minimum parameters (**Figure 1.4**). These parameters are devised to provide appropriate landscape buffers and to connect elements of existing Green Infrastructure surrounding the site.

51. The likely layout, areas, design and appearance of the development are in the main reserved matters. However, typical details are provided within the Chetwoods' Design and Access statement (**Ref 16**) and Design Coding Document (**Ref 9**). In respect of urban edge, landscape setting and green infrastructure, and the visual effects of height and massing, these issues are dealt with in greater detail within this report. Visual issues relating to the setting, character and appearance of the conservation area are to be dealt with in detail within the Heritage Impact Report (**Ref 5**).

5. Methodology

52. We have taken particular care to ensure that an accepted methodology has been utilised in assessing the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development. The aim has been to structure the assessment clearly and identify the method of appraisal at each stage of the process.
53. To this end, this Landscape and Visual Effect Assessment has been prepared according to the '*Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Effect Assessment (GLVIA)*' published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (IEMA), Third Edition (**Ref 1**).

Basis of Assessment

54. The main steps in carrying out the landscape assessment are as follows:
- i) Data collection – primarily in the field but also through desktop studies
 - ii) Description of the baseline landscape conditions
 - iii) Landscape character identification and classification
 - iv) Identification of the potential positive and negative effects of the proposed development
 - v) Assessment of the level of the effects identified.

Assessment of landscape effects

55. Landscape assessment encompasses appraisal of physical, aesthetic and intangible attributes including sense of place, rarity or representativeness, and unspoilt appearance. The combination of landscape elements (trees, hedgerows, woodlands, arable and pasture land, settlement and buildings, their architecture and fabric) and their arrangement is what provides an area with its unique sense of place, or 'character'. These aspects, together with scale and character of surrounding landscapes, patterns and scale of landform, land cover and built development, need to be taken into account when assessing landscape effects.
56. Landscape effects include, therefore, both the physical effects of the development on the existing landscape character and the potential change in character, and the quality of the affected landscape. The level of landscape effects is assessed by taking into account the sensitivity and importance of the receptor and the nature, scale or magnitude and duration of the change or effect. Factors taken into account are:
- i) Changes to the visual appearance of the development area (proportion, scale, enclosure, texture, colour, views);
 - ii) Changes to the character of the development area, including changes to the factors such as the physical structure of buildings and development pattern, microclimate, landscape history, archaeology and cultural associations; and
 - iii) Perceived changes to surrounding buildings, street scenes, routes or open space resulting from any changes to context and setting.
 - iv) The value of the landscape character to the public at a local, regional and national level.
57. Once the character areas have been identified, they are classified in terms of landscape condition according to the scales identified in **Table 1.1**. The 'condition' refers to an individual area of landscape, with reference to

maintenance and condition of the individual components that make up that landscape (e.g., buildings, hedgerows, woodland, and drainage)

58. A judgement is then made on the on the value or importance to society of the affected landscape. This is based on the views of consultees (statutory & non-statutory) and if possible, the views of the general public landscape. Landscape value is scheduled at **Table 1.2**.
59. Once the condition and value of the landscape is identified and defined, the landscape sensitivity can then be determined. Landscape quality is measured within the context of landscape at a national level, and not in isolation. The sensitivity of a landscape is defined as its ability to accept change, based on its vulnerability to degradation through the introduction of new features. Landscape sensitivity is scheduled at **Table 1.3**.
60. The sensitivity of the landscape is then used to inform an assessment of landscape effects – based on the likely magnitude of change on the landscape. Effects on the landscape character are not always detrimental and can be described as either adverse or beneficial. **Table 1.4** defines the magnitude of change, and **Table 1.5** illustrates how the predicted level of the landscape effect is then calculated.

Table 1.1. Landscape condition

Category	Criteria
Exceptional	<p>Strong landscape structure, characteristics, patterns, balanced combination of landform and land cover</p> <p>Appropriate management for land use and land cover</p> <p>Distinct features worthy of conservation</p> <p>Sense of place</p> <p>No detracting features.</p>
High	<p>Strong landscape structure, characteristic patterns and balanced combination of landform and land cover</p> <p>Appropriate management for land use and land cover but potentially scope to improve</p> <p>Distinct features worthy of conservation</p> <p>Sense of place</p> <p>Occasional detracting features</p>
Good	<p>Recognisable landscape structure, characteristic patterns and combinations of landform and land cover are still evident</p> <p>Scope to improve management for land use and land cover</p> <p>Some features worthy of conservation</p> <p>Some detracting features</p>
Moderate	<p>Distinguishable landscape structure, characteristic patterns of landform and land cover</p> <p>Scope to improve management of vegetation</p> <p>Some features worthy of conservation</p> <p>Some detracting features</p>
Poor	<p>Weak landscape structures, characteristic patterns of landform and land cover are often masked by land use</p> <p>Mixed land use evident</p> <p>Lack of management and intervention has resulted in degradation</p> <p>Frequent detracting features</p>
Very poor	<p>Degraded landscape structure, characteristic patterns and combinations of landform and land cover are masked by land use</p> <p>Mixed land use dominates</p> <p>Lack of management/intervention has resulted in degradation</p> <p>Extensive detracting features</p>
Damaged landscape	<p>Damaged landscape structure</p> <p>Single land use dominates</p> <p>Disturbed or derelict land requires treatment</p> <p>Detracting features dominate</p>

Table 1.2: Landscape value

Value	Typical Criteria	Typical Scale	Typical Examples
Exceptional	High importance (or quality) and Rarity. No or limited potential for substitution	International, National	World Heritage Site, National Park, AONB
High	High importance (or Quality) and Rarity. Limited potential for substitution.	National, Regional, Local	National Park, AONB, AGLV, LCI, ALLI
Medium	Medium importance (or Quality) and Rarity. Limited potential for substitution	Regional, Local	Undesignated but value perhaps expressed through non-official publications or demonstrable use.
Poor	Low importance (or Quality) and Rarity	Local	Areas identified as having some redeeming feature or features and possibly identified for improvement.
Very Poor	Low importance (or Quality) and Rarity	Local	Areas identified for recovery.

Table 1.3: Sensitivity to change

Sensitivity to Change	Description
High	A landscape particularly sensitive to change. Proposed change would result in major adverse effects on landscape character/features/elements
Medium	A landscape capable of accepting limited change. Proposed change could be accommodated with some adverse effects on landscape
Low	A landscape capable of accepting or benefiting from considerable change. Proposed change could be accommodated with little or no adverse effects, or would result in beneficial effects on landscape character/features/elements.

Table 1.4: Magnitude of landscape effects (emboldening has been inserted to emphasise the difference between subsequent levels)

Magnitude of Change	Description
High	Total loss or substantial alteration to key elements/ features/ characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements considered to be totally uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape.
Medium	Partial loss or alteration to one or more key elements/ features/ characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not necessarily be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape.
Low	Minor loss or alteration to one or more key elements/ features/ characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements that may not be uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape.
Negligible	Very minor loss or alteration to one or more to key elements/ features/ characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape.

Table 1.5. Level of landscape effects

		Landscape Sensitivity		
		Low	Medium	High
Magnitude of Change	High	Moderate effect	Substantial effect	Substantial effect
	Medium	Slight to Moderate effect	Moderate effect	Moderate to Substantial effect
		Low	Slight effect	Slight effect
	Negligible	No Change	Negligible	Slight effect

61. In accordance with the methodology suggested by the GLVIA, the level of effect in this assessment are classified as follows:

Substantial Adverse Effect: Where the proposed scheme would result in a complete variance from the scale, pattern and landform of the landscape, and cause a very high quality landscape to be permanently changed and its quality diminished.

Moderate Adverse Effect: Where the proposed scheme would be out of scale with the landscape, or conflict with the local pattern and character, and cause an adverse effect on a landscape of recognised quality.

Slight Adverse Effect: Where the proposed scheme would not quite fit into the local scale and pattern of the landscape, and affect an area of recognised character.

Negligible/No Change: Where the proposed scheme would complement the scale, pattern and character of the existing landscape, and no discernible character change was apparent.

Slight Beneficial Effect: Where the proposed scheme would fit in well with the scale, character and pattern of the area, and has the potential to improve the existing landscape quality.

Moderate Beneficial Effect: Where the proposed scheme would fit in well with the landscape character of the area, and improve the quality of the landscape.

Substantial Beneficial Effect: Where the proposed scheme would have the potential to fit in very well with the landscape character of the area, and greatly improve the quality of the landscape.

Assessment of visual effects

62. When assessing the visual effect of the proposals the baseline position is the area from which the proposed development is theoretically visible. This is established on plan through desktop surveys. Once this Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) is established, then the true visibility of the development site is checked on site in order to understand the screening effect of existing vegetation and buildings and the effect of distance on a receptor's

perception of the site. A number of key views are then selected within these areas which are most representative of the available views of the site.

- 63. Viewpoints have been selected in order to demonstrate the worst case scenarios. It is not required that the assessment describe every effect of the proposed development, but only the main or likely level visual effects which are required to inform the decision-making authority. The viewpoint locations selected have been in agreed in advance with the decision making authority.
- 64. For each view selected the level of the effect of the key views can be determined. According to the GLVIA, the two principal criteria determining the level of visual effects are the scale or magnitude of the effect and the environmental sensitivity of the location or receptor.
- 65. The scale or magnitude is defined as the degree to which the proposals will intrude into or obstruct existing views, this is also particularly relevant when dealing with issues of 'Openness' and the extent to which this would affect the visual amenity of the landscape from the view.
- 66. The sensitivity of the receptor is also taken into account, so that views from public paths or footpaths are considered more important than transient views from roads or views from workplaces. The term 'receptor' is used to mean an element or assemblage of elements that will directly or indirectly be affected by the proposed development. Quantification of the number of people affected is also a factor in determining the level of effect. The sensitivity of receptors is defined at **Table 1.6**.

Table 1.6: Sensitivity of receptors

Sensitivity	Receptor
High	Residents, walkers and cyclists using public rights of way for recreational purposes
Medium	Motorists and train travellers; and
Low	People in their place of work.

- 67. **Table 1.7** defines the Magnitude of change to the views.

Table 1.7: Magnitude of Visual Effects (emboldening has been inserted to emphasise the difference between subsequent levels)

Magnitude of Change	Description
High	Total loss or substantial alteration to the baseline view or introduction of elements considered to be totally uncharacteristic to view.
Medium	Partial loss or alteration to the baseline view or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not necessarily be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic of the view
Low	Minor loss or alteration to the baseline view or introduction of elements that may not be uncharacteristic when set within the view.
Negligible	Very minor loss or alteration to the baseline view or introduction of elements that may not be uncharacteristic when set within the view.

68. When assessing the effect, the following factors are also considered:
- i) Proximity to the site and level of visual intrusion likely to be incurred through development;
 - ii) Number of visual receptors (i.e. people) likely to be affected;
 - iii) The scale of the development in relation to the overall context of the view;
 - iv) The quality of the existing view and the degree to which this will change; and
 - v) The visual quality of the proposed development (after mitigation).
69. It is also the case that visual effects are not always detrimental and can therefore be described as either adverse or beneficial.
70. **Table 1.8** illustrates how the predicted level of the visual effect is calculated:

Table 1.8: Level of visual effects

		Visual Receptor Sensitivity		
		Low	Medium	High
Magnitude of Change	High	Moderate	Substantial	Substantial
	Medium	Slight to Moderate	Moderate	Moderate to Substantial
	Low	Slight	Slight	Slight to Moderate
	Negligible	No Change	Negligible	Slight

71. The level of effect in this assessment is classified as follows:
- Substantial Adverse Effect:** Where the proposed scheme would cause a significant deterioration in the existing view.
 - Moderate Adverse Effect:** Where the proposed scheme would cause a noticeable deterioration in the existing view.
 - Slight Adverse Effect:** Where the proposed scheme would cause a slight deterioration in the existing view.
 - Negligible/No Change:** No discernible deterioration or improvement in the existing view.
 - Slight Beneficial Effect:** Where the proposed scheme would cause a slight improvement in the existing view.

6. Landscape baseline assessment

72. This section describes the principal spatial and built form components which give the site and surrounding area its particular characteristics. The relevance of these components is identified and described below.
73. re-form landscape architecture Ltd has undertaken a desk study and visual site analysis. Key documents include the following:
- i) Cherwell District Council Local Plan (**Ref 3.**)
 - ii) National Character Area Map (**Ref 17.**)
74. We have identified that the following are key issues in respect of landscape and visual effect relating to the site:
- i) Location and character of landscape elements and components which contribute to the landscape character
 - ii) Identification of key receptors and their sensitivity.
 - iii) Determination of the existing landscape character and visual quality of the site.
 - iv) The ability of the existing landscape to accommodate change.
 - v) The likely effects of development within the landscape – whether it is negative or positive, including:
 - Potential landscape effects on the existing landscape character of the site and its context
 - Potential visual effects on views into, out of and across the site
 - Potential night time effects in respect of lighting.
 - Potential visual effects during the construction works
75. For the purposes of this assessment the following elements were considered relevant in determining the character of the study area: existing urban form, open space and vegetation; topography; and existing land use.
Refer to: **Figure 1.6** - Existing Urban Form, Open Space and Vegetation
Figure 1.7 - Topography
Figure 1.8 – Existing Land Use
Figure 1.9 – Character Areas

Topography

76. The topography is an important part of the character of the area. Visually, it is relevant in defining the character of views around the site, particularly in its low lying character.
77. The site is located on gently sloping ground, which typically falls from west to east. The topography of the wider landscape is generally very gently sloping to flat (see **Figure 1.7**).

Significant Vegetation

78. Existing vegetation is identified and assessed at two levels – firstly, the contribution it makes to the area as a whole and secondly, specific vegetation which may be physically affected by the proposed development. The existing vegetation has been mapped using aerial photography with supporting fieldwork.
79. There are a number of stands of mature vegetation located on and in close proximity to the site (see **Figure 1.6**). These primarily consist of hedgerows with mature trees, which join together with larger areas of tree and scrub planting, particularly on the western edge of the site.

80. There is a narrow beck to the east of the site which is vegetated along its length and contributed to the network of hedgerows around the site.
81. The verge edges to Skimmingdish Lane are vegetated with a mix of hedgerow and tree planting. This runs along most of the length of the site to Skimmingdish Lane.
82. There is an area of scrub vegetation sits adjacent to the site and the care home. This scrubland was formerly allotments.
83. A large swath of mature tree planting and woodland vegetation in the corner of Bicester Airfield runs along the north western boundary of the site.
84. Within the site, and extending beyond it to the north, is an area of overgrown scrub vegetation. Some of the scrub spans the conservation area boundary.

Urban Settlement

85. The urban settlement is used in the assessment as a shorthand term for the pattern and inter-relationship of buildings and open space. A study of this pattern can contribute to an understanding of landscape and character to highlight the ratio of built form to open space as a precursor to defining Landscape Character.
86. The site is located at the north eastern edge of Bicester, and is separated from it by the A4421 loop road. The settlement here consists of suburban housing to the south and light industrial development to the south-east. The site itself is surrounded on 2 sides by open farmland, and to the western edge by Bicester Airfield. Some airfield defence structures are located to the north but such development is atypical of the area. Generally settlements beyond Bicester comprise of smaller villages such as Launton and Stratton Audley, and scattered farmsteads (see **Figure 1.6**).

Existing landscape use

87. The existing land use (see **Figure 1.8**) shows the adjacent land to the development site as a mix of residential areas, employment and retail areas, and farmland. Bicester Airfield is also shown as a distinctive land use adjacent to the site. The surrounding countryside is mainly open farmland and pasture, with dispersed settlements and woodlands. The proposed development would change the land use from farmland to employment and retail use.

Existing landscape character

88. Landscape assessment encompasses appraisal of physical, aesthetic and intangible attributes including sense of place, rarity or representativeness, and unspoilt appearance. The combination of landscape elements (trees, hedgerows, woodlands, settlement and buildings, their architecture and fabric) and their arrangement give the different areas a unique sense of place, or 'character'. These aspects, together with scale and character of surrounding landscapes, patterns and scale of landform, land cover and built development, need to be taken into account when assessing landscape effect.
89. Natural England has produced a National Character Area (NCA) Map for England, which identifies broad areas of distinct and individual countryside character. The character map takes account of the physical landform and the effect of human activities on the natural world. The national framework of character areas identifies and describes the diversity of landscape character across England and provides a common starting point for more detailed local assessments.

90. The development site is located within the Upper Thames Clay Vales Landscape Character Area No 108 (**Ref 17.**), which summarises this area as follows (page 7):

The area is situated between the Chalk and limestone plateaux of the Cotswolds to the north and the Marlborough Downs, Berkshire Downs and Chilterns to the south and east. In the centre is the Midvale Ridge NCA, a low ridge of sandy Corallian Limestone. Either side of this ridge are river valley landscapes of flood plains, which form this NCA. Due to its size, and the different character of the Vales, this NCA has two distinct areas: Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Vales to the north and west of the Midvale Ridge; and the Vales of the White Horse and Aylesbury to the south. The unifying feature is the Thames (or Isis) and its flood plains and tributaries.

Key Characteristics of this landscape are as follows:

- *Low-lying clay-based flood plains encircle the Midvale Ridge. Superficial deposits, including alluvium and gravel terraces, spread over 40 per cent of the area, creating gently undulating topography. The Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous clays and the wet valley bottoms give rise to enclosed pasture, contrasting with the more settled, open, arable lands of the gravel.*
- *Woodland cover is low at only about 3 per cent, but hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent. Watercourses are often marked by lines of willows and, particularly in the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park, native black poplar.*
- *Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. Fields are regular and hedged, except near the Cotswolds, where there can be stone walls. The Vale of White Horse is made distinct by large arable fields, and there are relict orchards on the Greensand.*
- *In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates, with limited areas of historic wetland habitats including wet woodland, fen, reedbed and flood meadow. There are two areas of flood meadow designated for their importance at a European level as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). There are also rich and extensive ditch systems.*
- *Gravel extraction has left a legacy of geological exposures, numerous waterbodies and, at the Cotswold Water Park, a nationally important complex of marl lakes.*
- *Wetland habitat attracts regionally important numbers of birds including snipe, redshank, curlew and lapwing and wintering wildfowl such as pochard. Snake's head fritillary thrives in the internationally important meadows. The area also supports typical farmland wildlife such as brown hare, bats, barn owl, tree sparrow and skylark.*
- *Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, including its Capability Brown landscape, is the finest of many examples of historic parkland in this NCA. There are many heritage features, including nationally important survivals of ridge and furrow, Roman roads, deserted medieval villages and historic bridges.*
- *Brick and tile from local clays, timber and thatch are traditional building materials across the area, combined with limestone near the Cotswolds and occasional clunch and wichert near the Chilterns.*
- *Settlement is sparse on flood plains, apart from at river crossings, where there can be large towns, such as Abingdon. Aylesbury and Bicester are major urban centres, and the outer suburbs of Oxford and Swindon spread into this NCA. Market towns and villages are strung along the springlines of the Chilterns and Downs. Major routes include mainline rail, canals, a network of roads including the M40 and M4 and the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.*

91. The countryside to the north of the site is typical of the landscape with this NCA. Field boundaries are defined predominantly by hedgerows resulting from parliamentary enclosure. There is some woodland cover and it is sparsely populated. Farmland is predominantly for livestock grazing and /or arable and is defined by large, grassy fields. The low-lying vales means some areas near watercourses may be prone to localised flooding and with an underlying clay soil, some fields are prone to water-logging.
92. The Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS) (**Ref 18.**) looks more locally at landscape types in the region. Around Bicester, four landscape types are identified as wooded farmland, clay vale, pasture hills and estate farmland. These are characterised by:

Wooded farmland:

- Large blocks of ancient woodland and a large number of plantations.
- A varied field pattern of arable land and pasture enclosed by woodland and hedges.
- Species rich hedgerows with many hedgerow trees.
- Dispersed settlement pattern with settlements and scattered farms.

Clay vale:

- A flat, low-lying landform.
- Mixed land uses, dominated by pastureland, with small to medium-sized hedged fields.
- Many mature oak, ash and willow hedgerow trees.
- Dense, tree-lined streams and ditches dominated by pollarded willows and poplars.
- Small to medium-sized nucleated villages.

Pasture hills:

- Prominent hills standing out from the surrounding landscape.
- Small fields, predominantly grassland, enclosed by prominent hedges.
- Small woodland copses and scrubby vegetation including gorse scrub.
- A sense of remoteness with no settlements.

Estate farmlands:

- Medium to large, regularly shaped, hedged fields
- Small, geometric plantations and belts of trees.
- Large country houses set in ornamental parklands.
- Small estate villages and dispersed farmsteads.

93. The site is split between wooded farmland and clay vale landscape character types within the OWLS assessment. The western side of the site is more heavily vegetated and extends through Bicester Airfield and up to Stratton Audley in the north. Clay Vale landscape type extends to the east of the site and is less vegetated and comprising of significant hedgerow boundaries.
94. Using these national, regional and local landscape character studies, together with our own landscape context analysis (land use, urban settlement, topography and significant vegetation) together with maps, aerial photographs and fieldwork, we have identified the following key character areas which represent the site and its landscape context. These areas are shown on **Figure 1.9**.

95. **Character area 1: Agricultural landscape**

There is a recognisable pattern of vegetated field boundaries traversed by a network of public footpaths. The landscape condition can be described as 'Good'. There are some former agricultural related buildings and detracting features such as the Bicester to Bletchley railway line. Fields are used for arable crops and some grazing pasture. Hedgerows comprise of mixed deciduous native species. The character area is traversed by a network of drainage ditches and natural brooks. The area has demonstrable use through public access and can therefore be described as having 'Medium' value. The landscape is capable of accepting a limited amount of change, which could be accommodated with some adverse effects, its sensitivity therefore can be described as 'Medium'.



Photo 1: Agricultural land character area

96. **Character area 2: Bicester Airfield**

Bicester Airfield has a strong landscape structure comprising an open flying field with vegetated edges, together with some distinct built structures including grade II listed aircraft hangers and to the south east, several airfield defence structure which are listed as scheduled monuments. The flying field is now used for recreational flying. The aircraft hangars are atypical of the area, and are a legacy from its use as a military base, and the character area as a whole retains the layout of a military site. Landscape Condition can be described as being 'High'. Due to its Conservation Area status and the presence of the Scheduled Ancient Monument the area can be described as having 'High' landscape value. Due to its sensitive nature any significant change to the setting of the airfield would be considered to detract from the airfield's setting, its sensitivity to change therefore is considered to be 'High'.



Photo 2: Bicester Airfield

97. **Character area 3: Suburban Residential**

Suburban residential comprising a mix of circa late 20th century brick build houses, mainly 2 storeys with gardens. The massing is arranged in curvilinear forms around cul-de-sac estate roads. Rear gardens fences face towards Skimmingdish Lane and the proposed development site. The fences are of mainly timber construction. There is an area of open land to the north of the character area currently subject to a planning application for further housing. Overall the landscape condition can be described as 'Poor' due to the weak landscape structure and detracting features. In terms of landscape/townscape value the area is 'Poor'. Any change to the setting of this area can be accommodated with little or no adverse effect, the sensitivity of this area is therefore considered to be 'Low'.



Photo 3: Suburban Residential (Benson Close, Bicester)

98. **Character area 4: Launton Village**

Established settlement comprising of stone and brick built houses and cottages, most of which date between 17th and late 20th centuries. The settlement is arranged around some principle streets – Bicester Road, West End, and Station Road. Houses are separated by rear gardens interspersed by garden-scale vegetation. The western fringes of the settlement are contained within mature field boundaries. The character of the village is distinguishable, although there are some detracting features, the condition can therefore be described as 'Moderate'. In terms of townscape value the village can be described as having 'Medium' Importance, it is not designated protection; however, it is locally well regarded. The character area is capable of limited change in respect of its setting as there are already some detracting features present. There would be some adverse effect however, therefore its sensitivity can be described as 'Medium'.



Photo 4: Launton (The Bull Inn, Bicester Road)

99. **Character area 5: Employment land**

The area is dominated mainly by large scale distribution warehouse, characterised by large building massing of simple form. Materials are mainly proprietary metal cladding systems punctuated with some fenestration associated with office accommodation. Externally the building forms are separated by areas of dense vegetation. The character area is visually separated from the suburban residential land to the west by a wide area of open space. The urban structure is degraded with extensive detracting features, the condition can therefore be described as 'Very Poor'. In terms of Value the area can be categorised as being 'Very Poor' in need of repair and/or recovery. The landscape sensitivity here is 'Low' as any change to the areas setting can be accommodated without adverse effect.



Photo 5: Employment land (distribution warehouses, Launton Road)

100. **Character area 6: Former quarries**

A redundant former extraction, site which is now naturally colonised by scrub vegetation. The scrub vegetation appears quite dense towards the edges of the character area. The area is damaged, disturbed and derelict with no apparent landscape management. Overall the landscape condition can be described as 'damaged'. In respect of landscape value the area can be categorised as being Very Poor and in need of repair/recovery. Again, the landscape sensitivity here is 'Low' as any change to the areas setting can be accommodated without adverse effect.



Photo 6: Former quarry off Bicester Road

101. The landscape quality of the landscape character areas is assessed in terms of their condition, value and sensitivity as follows:

Table 1.9: Landscape quality of character areas

Character area	Condition	Value	Sensitivity
1. Agricultural land	Good	Medium	Medium
2. Bicester Airfield	High	High	High
3. Suburban residential	Poor	Poor	Low
4. Launton Village	Moderate	Medium	Medium
5. Employment land	Very poor	Very poor	Low
6. Former quarries	Damaged	Very poor	Low

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

Refer to: **Figure 1.10** - Zone of Theoretical Visibility,

102. In order to establish the ZTV i.e. the area within which the development is theoretically visible, the site layout was assessed in relation to survey maps. This provisional visual envelope was then refined in the field at which stage visual receptors were also identified. These include highways, public footpaths and bridleways, as well as residential properties, work places and public open spaces.
103. The result of this analysis is illustrated on **Figure 1.10** which is based on visibility of the proposed development after implementation. The ZTV is based on available views at ground level from publicly accessible areas. For the purpose of this assessment a maximum proposed building height of 16m has been assumed from a ground level of 72m AOD. This represents the 'worse case' development scenario.
104. The analysis of the ZTV reveals that due to the local flat topography and the laying effect of densely planted field boundaries, there is limited intervisibility between the site and surrounding areas, other than those areas that are in close proximity to the site boundaries and thus the development itself. Glimpsed views of the site extend to the west across the Airfield to the former aircraft hangars, and to the A4421 beyond. Views from the north are obscured due to dense vegetation associated with former quarries and the localised layering effect of field boundary hedgerows. From the east the heavily vegetated embankments to the Bicester-Bletchley railway line obscure views of site. From the south, glimpsed views are possible from Skimmingdish Lane and from the edge of the suburban residential area and employment land beyond.

7. Assessment of landscape effects

105. This section of the report assesses the effects on the existing landscape character – both short and long term, which will depend on the scale of the proposed development, and the value and significance of the wider landscape. For the purposes of this assessment the ‘worse case’ in respect of potential development scale, mass and height permissible within the development parameters submitted (see Chetwood’s Drawings) has been assessed.
106. The landscape character areas (**Figure 1.9**) that are potentially effected upon by the proposed development have been identified within the baseline assessment, together with the value and the sensitivity of these landscapes.
107. The magnitude of change to each landscape character area will be determined by what changes are made to the various elements already described which combine to make up a landscape’s character.
108. The ZTV of the proposals, derived from the baseline study (**Figure 1.10**), also determines the extent to which the new development will affect the existing landscape character of the surrounding area.
109. In terms of topography and context, there will be no change to the fabric of the landscape beyond the immediate Site boundaries. This results in a low magnitude of change in character to areas other than those in immediate proximity to the Site.
110. The effects of construction and the effects of lighting are considered in respect of predicted effects on landscape character.
111. Once all factors are considered, the magnitude of change can be determined. This is used in conjunction with Landscape Sensitivity to produce the predicted effect on Landscape Character. These are detailed in **Tables 1.1 to 1.7** and the effects are summarised in **Table 1.8**.

Mitigation

112. Although the application is for outline consent only at this stage, the reduction or elimination of negative effects on the landscape and visual environment has nevertheless been a key objective of the design team. Assessment and design is an iterative process, the one informing the other to arrive at a preferred solution which both satisfies client and end user requirements whilst minimising any potential adverse landscape and visual effects. The proposed mitigation measures and their effect in terms of reducing potential effects are detailed in **Tables 1.10 to 1.15** and the effects are summarised in **Table 1.16**.
113. When assessing the landscape and visual effect of the proposals, the mitigation measures described above have been taken into account. The mitigation strategy will follow two main principles:
- i) Avoidance
The siting of the proposals has been carefully considered from the inception of the project to avoid adverse effects. The development site is located on land set aside for employment use. All proposed buildings will have a height of 16m or less. Wherever possible proposed buildings are to be kept away from the undeveloped boundaries of the site which reduces potential adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity still further. The majority of field boundary hedgerows to the perimeter of the site are to be retained. These will serve to break up and soften the outline of any new built form.

ii) Reduction

The reduction of potential effects on the landscape has been very carefully considered. A substantial new number of trees and hedgerows are proposed in order to augment existing hedgerows and areas of vegetation, and also to create new blocks of woodland and new hedgerows. Collectively this new planting will serve to screen, filter and soften views of the proposed development. Specifically this landscape mitigation comprises (Refer to **Figure 1.4** Landscape Parameters and Chetwood's Design & Access Statement (**Ref 16.**)):

Northern Boundary - Abutting Conservation Area

Retention, improvement and augmentation of existing boundary hedgerow feature and existing field trees. Additional planting to provide a 5m wide (from existing boundary fence line) structural landscaping buffer where existing hedgerow abuts existing woodland on the Bicester Airfield site, widening to 10m wide at the north eastern section where the existing woodland thins out.

New Planting shall comprise native hedgerow trees and shrub species.

Purpose: To improve GI, biodiversity and to mitigate visual effect of new development on the adjacent Bicester Airfield Conservation Area.

North Eastern/Eastern Boundary – Abutting Conservation Area & Green Buffer Land

The existing salient of scrubland associated with (but not limited to) the Conservation Area boundary and Green Buffer Land shall be retained and augmented on the development side with a further landscape buffer of 10m minimum width. Beyond the southern extents of the Conservation Area this planted buffer will be increased in width to 20m from the allocation boundary/Green Buffer. Drainage swales will be accommodated within these areas – affording the opportunity for further biodiversity enhancements and public rights of way shall also be accommodated and maintained.

This buffer shall comprise native trees and shrub understory planting.

Purpose: To improve GI, biodiversity, allow public access (via Public Rights of Way) and to mitigate visual effect of new development on the adjacent Bicester Airfield Conservation Area, and on the Green Buffer Policy Area, and existing public rights of way.

Southern Boundary – Abutting undeveloped allocated land and Green Buffer beyond.

A 20m wide dense planting strip shall be provided along the southern boundary with a further 3m 'maintenance access zone provided between this planting and the building zone. At the southern edge of the planting strip will run the diverted public footpath No 272/17. The footpath will be 2.5m wide, surfaced with self-binding gravel and edged with pegged treated timber boards.

This buffer shall comprise native deciduous and evergreen woodland scale trees and shrub understory planting.

Purpose: To improve GI, biodiversity, allow public access (via Public Rights of Way) and to mitigate visual effect of new development on views from the south, in particular local public rights of way and Launton Village.

South Western Boundary with Care Home.

A 15m wide buffer zone comprising mounding and dense tree and shrub planting will be provided between the building & hardstanding zone and the boundary to the care home, in order to screen and soften the outline of the proposed development from views from the Home. Mounding will be 1.5m high from adjacent ground levels. The buffer zone will also accommodate a 3m maintenance access zones and 2.5m public footpath zone.

This buffer shall comprise native deciduous and a high percentage of evergreen woodland scale trees and shrub understory planting.

Purpose: To improve GI, biodiversity, allow public access (via Public Rights of Way) and to mitigate visual effect of new development on views from the Care Home.

Western Boundary with Skimmingdish Lane.

A 2m wide hedgerow will be planted between the edge of the building zone and the boundary fence (except at the point of vehicular access). Existing native planting within the highway verge shall be retained where possible.

The hedgerow shall comprise native hedgerow and field tree species.

Purpose: To improve GI, biodiversity, and to mitigate visual effect of new development on views from the public highway.

Site Access Road

A boulevarded access road a minimum of 16 m width will be provided. This will comprise a 7.4m wide carriageway, 2m wide footpaths either side of the carriageway and 2.3m planted strips between footpaths and plot boundaries.

The planting shall consist of avenue trees and low (below 1.2m high) amenity shrub species.

Purpose: To create legible access and provide high quality visual amenity on site.

Effects of construction

114. In order to facilitate any development on the site there will be a period of construction activity. The site shall be subjected to following activities during construction. These will have the potential to generate effects on landscape character and visual amenity:

- i) Material stockpiling.
- ii) Lighting of the works.
- iii) Movement and activity of construction equipment and plant.
- iv) Increase of heavy traffic to site.
- v) Other site related activities.

It is not envisaged that tower cranes will be required during the construction period. Mobile cranes will be utilised but for short periods of time only.

Mitigation construction effects

115. The potential effects during construction already identified will be short term when compared to the effect of the completed development discussed below, however, they need to be addressed in order to minimise any adverse effects on surrounding receptors. In addition to the mitigation of the long term effects of the development, a number of measures will be undertaken to minimise construction phase effects. These will include:

- i) screening of site with temporary hoarding;
- ii) managed working hours;
- iii) controlled access points;
- iv) considered location of stockpiles and equipment;
- v) considered location of temporary buildings/cabins;

Predicted effects during construction

116. However, beyond activities on site and an increase of heavy traffic to the Site, there are not likely to be any effects during the construction phase which affect areas or receptors not already affected by the development itself. For this reason, no other specific mitigation measures will be required. In conclusion, the predicted overall effect of the construction phase of the proposed development is likely to be substantial adverse in terms of both landscape character and visual amenity. However, these effects will only exist for the construction period which is estimated as approximately 2 to 3 years, the complexities in constructing employment use type buildings are relatively simple in comparison with other potential building forms.

Effects of lighting

117. Any development taking place on the site will, in all likelihood, be subject to an internal and external lighting scheme. An illustrative lighting proposal has been prepared for the proposed development in order to accompany the planning application (refer to Chetwood's Design & Access Statement (**Ref 16.**)). However, lighting will be subject to further detailed design on a unit by unit basis. However, for the purposes of this assessment the following lighting proposals have been assumed:
- Building mounted safety/security lighting at a height of 3m illuminating access paths to an average of 12 lux,
 - Car park lighting at a height of 8m, illuminating external parking areas to 23 lux
 - Service Yard lighting at a height of 8m, illuminating to 50 lux
 - Hardstanding/HGV Parking area lighting at a height of 8m, illuminating to 51 lux
 - Access Road lighting at a height of 8m, illuminating to 18 lux.

it can be concluded that a greater level of development and general use later into the evening will increase lighting level throughout the Site. . Lighting is therefore likely to be generated throughout the evening from those parts of the Site that are developed. The proposed development will be visible at night from vantage points within the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV).

Mitigating lighting effects

118. The amount of light and 'throw' or 'spill' can be mitigated and reduced through the use of appropriate shrouds, angled fittings, and low energy light fittings.

Predicted effects of lighting

119. Taken within the context of these mitigation measures and the existing urban and urban fringe setting which already produces a high level of night time lighting and light spill, it can be concluded that there will be encroachment of night-time lighting effects west and north west of Skimmingdish Lane. However, these effects will be localised and will not provide any significant change in the overall light level effects on the surrounding area. Effects on landscape character and visual amenity due to lighting are therefore to be assessed as being Moderate adverse. Lighting from internal sources however will be minimal due to the proposed building use (the buildings are envisaged to be mainly enclosed with little external opening except for office elements and/or loading bays).

Landscape effects

120. The predicted effects due to the proposed development on each character area are set out as follows:

Table 1.10: Assessment of landscape effects – Character area 1

Character Area 1: Agricultural land	
Proximity to Site	On-Site.
Landscape receptor	Existing arable fields
Sensitivity	Medium.
Description of landscape effects	Substantial alterations to the baseline due to redevelopment of the site. Removal of exiting hedgerows on site and modifications to topography to create development plateau. Construction of new buildings, construction of new access road. Permanent duration.
Magnitude of change	High.
Predicted landscape effects	Substantial adverse.
Description of mitigation	Site to be buffered by dense native vegetation which will soften and break up outline of buildings and contribute to green infrastructure of surrounding area. Existing hedgerows retained to be augmented with hedgerow, understory and tree planting. Conservation Area vegetation to be retained and augmented with tree planting and new hedgerow. New road to be planted with amenity trees and shrubs
Magnitude of change with mitigation taken into account	Medium.
Predicted landscape effects with mitigation measures in place (residual effect)	Moderate adverse.

Table 1.11: Assessment of landscape effects – Character area 2

Character Area 2: Bicester Airfield	
Proximity to Site	Close.
Landscape receptor	Airfield Conservation Area
Sensitivity	High.
Description of landscape effects	<p>Minor alteration of the baseline character.</p> <p>Existing tree belt to east of Airfield creates a substantial barrier between the airfield and the Site. However, proposed development will punctuate the skyline.</p> <p>Proposed development is not substantially uncharacteristic of the current setting to the airfield due to the presence of existing employment use type buildings south of Launton Road.</p> <p>Permanent duration.</p>
Magnitude of change	Medium.
Predicted landscape effects	Moderate to substantial adverse.
Description of mitigation	<p>Retention of hedgerow to west edge of site adjacent to Airfield. Hedgerow augmented with native planting to provide further screening and softening of the building outline and thus reduce the prominence of the proposed development.</p> <p>Retention of dense wooded tree belt to east of Airfield.</p>
Magnitude of change with mitigation taken into account	Low.
Predicted landscape effects with mitigation measures in place (residual effect)	Slight to moderate adverse.

Table 1.12: Assessment of landscape effects – Character area 3

Character Area 3: Suburban residential	
Proximity to Site	Close.
Landscape receptor	Suburban residential area.
Sensitivity	Low.
Description of landscape effects	<p>Partial loss of baseline character.</p> <p>Encroachment of built form, into existing open countryside.</p> <p>Some loss of tree down the hedgerows and structures.</p> <p>Permanent duration.</p>
Magnitude of change	Medium.
Predicted landscape effects	Slight to moderate adverse.
Description of mitigation	<p>Site to be buffered by dense native vegetation which will soften and break up outline of buildings and contribute to green infrastructure of surrounding area.</p> <p>Verge planting retained to Skimmingdish Lane.</p> <p>New access road to be planted with amenity trees and shrubs.</p>
Magnitude of change with mitigation taken into account	Medium.
Predicted landscape effects with mitigation measures in place (residual effect)	Slight adverse.

Table 1.13: Assessment of landscape effects – Character area 4

Character Area 4: Launton Village	
Proximity to Site	Long.
Landscape receptor	Suburban residential area.
Sensitivity	Medium.
Description of landscape effects	Very minor alteration to baseline character. Potential loss of sense of adjacent pastures and fields due to development.
Magnitude of change	Low.
Predicted landscape effects	Slight adverse.
Description of mitigation	Dense native tree planting to soften building elevation and strengthen existing green infrastructure.
Magnitude of change with mitigation taken into account	Negligible.
Predicted landscape effects with mitigation measures in place (residual effect)	Negligible.

Table 1.14: Assessment of landscape effects – Character area 5

Character Area 5: Employment land	
Proximity to Site	Medium.
Landscape receptor	Existing buildings, highway infrastructure and embankments.
Sensitivity	Low.
Description of landscape effects	<p>Minor alteration to the baseline character, encroachment of built form into open landscape context. However, landscape effects are contained some distance from the receptor character area.</p> <p>Permanent duration.</p>
Magnitude of change	Low.
Predicted landscape effects	Slight adverse.
Description of mitigation	Retention of existing boundary vegetation along western edge of the site together with augmentation with new tree belt planting.
Magnitude of change with mitigation taken into account	Negligible.
Predicted landscape effects with mitigation measures in place (residual effect)	No change.

Table 1.15: Assessment of landscape effects – Character area 6

Area 6: Former quarries	
Proximity to Site	Medium.
Landscape receptor	Open fields/former quarries.
Sensitivity	Low.
Description of landscape effects	Very minor alteration to the baseline character. Some potential encroachment in built form. Permanent duration.
Magnitude of change	Negligible.
Predicted landscape effects	Negligible.
Description of mitigation	Substantial boundary structure planting to north eastern edge of the site. Retention and augmentation of existing hedgerow planting along northern and western edges of site.
Magnitude of change with mitigation taken into account	Negligible.
Predicted landscape effects with mitigation measures in place (residual effect)	No change.

Significance of landscape effects

121. **Table 1.16** draws together the significance of the landscape effects for character areas considered:

Table 1.16: Predicted significant of landscape effects

Character Area	Magnitude of change	Sensitivity	Predicted effect	Predicted effect with mitigation (residual effect)
1 Agricultural land	High	Medium	Substantial adverse	Moderate adverse
2 Bicester Airfield	Medium	High	Moderate to substantial adverse	Slight to moderate adverse
3 Suburban residential	Medium	Low	Slight to moderate adverse	Slight adverse
4 Launton village	Low	Medium	Slight adverse	Negligible
5 Employment land	Low	Low	Slight adverse	No change
6 Former quarries	Negligible	Low	Negligible	No change

Summary of landscape effects

122. The proposed development site will affect a number of character areas; these have been identified and evaluated within the baseline study. The proposed developments will have long term and short term effects on these character areas as is to be expected with any development taking place on the site.
123. The effects on the landscape during construction will be limited, temporary and short term (2 to 3 years) and will be no greater than the long term effects of the proposed development. The construction period for this form of development is relatively short when compared with other potential form of development which fall within the allocation.
124. There is the potential for long term effects during the night time periods due to additional light throw; however, these impacts are perhaps lessened when the amount of lighting in the current surrounding urban context is taken into consideration. Again, any form of development on site is likely to require lighting both within buildings and externally. With the form of building proposed there will be relatively little internal lighting visible within the receiving landscape.
125. Significant mitigation measures are proposed. These will reduce any long term landscape effects, short term effects relating to the construction activity, and any potential lighting effects.
126. In respect of long term effects, the development site itself the predicted landscape effects are 'substantial' due to the transformational nature of the proposed development. In respect of all other character areas the predicted landscape effects range from 'no change' to 'moderate-substantial'. With mitigation measures taken into account any effects would range from 'no change' to 'moderate'. These effects will be adverse.

127. Overall this assessment is in line with Cherwell District Councils own Landscape capacity study (**Ref 14.**) which concludes that the site has 'medium' sensitivity and 'medium' capacity to accept Employment type uses.
128. This assessment is based on the 'Worse Case' development scenario. In all probability the quantum of development on the site will be less than that assessed and the residual impacts, are likely to therefore be at a lower level than that indicated in this report.

8. Assessment of visual effects

Refer to: **Figure 1.11** - Photographic Viewpoint Locations
Figures 1.12 to 1.21 - Photographic views 1 to 10

129. A comprehensive visual assessment has been undertaken to determine the degree of visual effect the proposed development would have upon the surrounding landscape. A total of ten representative views within the established ZTV (**Figure 1.10**) have been selected for the analysis of visual effects. For all views an indicative block model illustrating the typical form, massing and heights of the types of development proposed within the landscape setting have been produced. These are shown with and without the effects of landscape mitigation.
130. Key views have been selected at strategic locations around the site and they have been agreed in advance with the Local Planning Authority. It is considered 'best practice' to categorise views into 3 ranges depending on the proximity of the viewpoint. The categorisation is based on the scale and nature of the landscape, and is as follows:
- i) Close: less than 250m
 - ii) Medium: between 250m – 1km
 - iii) Long: More than 1km

The views locations are shown on **Figure 1.11**

Sensitivity of visual receptors

131. The views shown on **Figures 1.12 to 1.21** have been selected in order to be representative of a range of locations and distances from which the site is visible, and for the type of occupancies (e.g. residential properties), activities (e.g. footpath users) and the expectations of potential receptors (e.g. visitors to the locality). The sensitivity of the receptor has been recorded against each view considered. The most sensitive receptors are people using footpaths, bridleways and public rights of way network. These tend to be local people – dog walkers and so forth and ramblers.

Mitigation

132. A detailed description of proposed landscape mitigation measures are provided at paragraph 113. In section 8 above.

Visual effects

133. The predicted effects for each of the representative views are assessed in **Tables 1.17 to 1.26**. These effects are then summarised in **Table 1.27**:

Table 1.17: Assessment of visual effects - View 1

View 1 – View south west from Launton Road	
Figure Reference	1.12
Distance	Long
Direction	South west
Season	Winter.
Conditions	High cloud.
Visibility	Hazy.
Type of Receptor	Highway users
Sensitivity	Medium
Reason for view selection	View across open countryside from Launton Road
Description	<p>View from a gateway into field – forming a break in the roadside hedgerow.</p> <p>The site is located in the distance beyond the treeline, in the centre of the view. There is a pasture in the foreground. The view consists of boundary trees and hedgerows, which is representative of the field system defining the landscape character of the area. There are several mature trees in the foreground, running along the back edge of the field. The field is framed on the sides by dense hedgerow.</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be a minor alteration to the baseline view.</p> <p>Glimpsed views of the roofs/upper limits of the proposed development may just be possible during winter months but these will not be obvious features in the landscape.</p>
Magnitude of change	Low.
Predicted visual effects	Slight to Moderate adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>Very minor alteration to the view.</p> <p>Augmentation of the existing hedgerow and tree belt to the north of the site and the setting back of new buildings from the boundary will result in further softening and screening of the new build form.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	Negligible.
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Negligible.

Table 1.18: Assessment of visual effects - View 2

View 2 – View south from Launton Road, Stratton Audley	
Figure Reference	1.13
Distance	Long.
Direction	South.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	High cloud.
Visibility	Hazy.
Type of Receptor	Residents, Highway users.
Sensitivity	High.
Reason for view selection	Residential area to the north of site.
Description	<p>View across fields from an opening in roadside hedgerow.</p> <p>The site located to the right hand side of the view. In the foreground there are a collection of low farm buildings and an electricity pylon which acts as a visual detractor. The buildings are surrounded by a mix of mature tree planting and hedgerows. The view in the background is of trees and hedgerows.</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be very minor alteration to the baseline view.</p> <p>It is likely that some glimpsed views of the upper parts of the new development will be possible during winter months; however the mass and form of the buildings will be obscured by the existing barns in the middle ground as well as the vegetated field network. The majority of existing mature vegetation will remain and serve to break up and soften the outline of the development.</p>
Magnitude of change	Negligible.
Predicted visual effects	Slight.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>Very minor alteration of the baseline view.</p> <p>Augmentation of the existing hedgerow and tree belt to the north of the site and the setting back of new buildings from the boundary will result in further softening and screening of the new build from the boundary.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	Negligible.
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Slight.

Table 1.19: Assessment of visual effects - View 3

View 3 – View South across airfield from junction of Bicester Road/A4421	
Figure Reference	1.14
Distance	Long.
Direction	South.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	High cloud.
Visibility	Hazy.
Type of Receptor	Highway users, airfield users.
Sensitivity	Medium.
Reason for view selection	View across Bicester Airfield Conservation Area to site
Description	<p>The view is glimpsed through a break in the existing hedgerow to Bicester Airfield.</p> <p>The airfield occupies the foreground and extends over 1km into the distance. The airfield is open and has a dense row of mature trees in the background. The site is located behind this dense row of planting to the left of the view. To the right of the view are the airfield buildings. Existing warehouses can also be made out from the existing estate off Launton Road in the centre background of the view.</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be a minor alteration to the view.</p> <p>The existing mature vegetation the airfield will be retained and the roof/upper facade to the proposed development will be seen above the existing tree line. The development will appear low and horizontal within the flat landscape. The existing employment use type buildings off Launton Road/A4421 means that the proposed development is not uncharacteristic of other development in the area within the view.</p>
Magnitude of change	Low.
Predicted visual effects	Slight to moderate adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>There will be a very minor alteration to the view.</p> <p>New structure planting augmenting the boundary vegetation to the north west of the Site will, over time, serve to reduce the magnitude of change to negligible due to further softening and filtering of the limited views of new development beyond the airfield.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	Negligible.
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Negligible.

Table 1.20: Assessment of visual effects - View 4

View 4 – View south east from A4421 Caversfield	
Figure Reference	1.15
Distance	Medium.
Direction	South east.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	High cloud.
Visibility	Hazy.
Type of Receptor	Resident's, Highway users.
Sensitivity	High.
Reason for view selection	View from highway and houses at Caversfield across Bicester Airfield Conservation Area
Description	<p>The view is glimpsed through a break in the existing hedgerow to Bicester Airfield.</p> <p>Looking across Bicester Airfield through the hedgerow, with the airfield control tower in the foreground and mature trees in the background. The site is situated in the centre of the view. The view is partially obscured in the immediate foreground by signs and fencing to the airfield which appear as detractors within the view..</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be a partial alteration to the view.</p> <p>The building rooftops/upper facade will be visible from this location, but the majority of the development will be obscured by the existing mature vegetation to the far edge of Bicester Airfield, and the hedgerow in the immediate foreground. The proposed buildings will appear horizontal within the context of the flat landscape.</p>
Magnitude of change	Medium.
Predicted visual effects	Moderate to substantial adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>There will be a minor alteration to the view.</p> <p>Mitigation includes augmentation of existing hedgerow to the north west boundary of the Site with dense tree and shrub planting. Mitigation will provide further screening and softening of the building outline.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	Low.
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Slight to Moderate adverse.

Table 1.21: Assessment of visual effects - View 5

View 5 – View south east along Skimmingdish Lane/A4421	
Figure Reference	1.16
Distance	Close.
Direction	South east.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	High cloud.
Visibility	Good.
Type of Receptor	Highway users.
Sensitivity	Medium.
Reason for view selection	View from road edge to the site.
Description	<p>View along Skimmingdish Lane as experienced by road users.</p> <p>The site is in the foreground and extends along the road edge as it curves right in the view. The vegetated edges of Skimmingdish Lane are prominent on either side of the road and follow the road along its length in the view. Bicester Airfield is to the left of the view and has a steel mesh security fence to its boundary. To the right hand side of the view is a substation and communications mast, which is visible over the trees. To the centre of the view is the newly constructed care home, adjacent to the site on its southern corner. The fence, substation, mast and care home are major detractors within the view.</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be a substantial alteration to the view.</p> <p>The proposed development will be set slightly back from Skimmingdish Lane due to relative levels; however, it will nevertheless address the highway frontage. The new deceleration lane into the site access road will be visible. The development proposals will be higher than the existing buildings, and the highway modifications will result in some loss of trees from the highway.</p>
Magnitude of change	High.
Predicted visual effects	Substantial adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>There will be a partial alteration to the view.</p> <p>There will be new tree and hedgerow planting to the front of Skimmingdish Lane will be retained and augmented from within the site with a new hedgerow comprising tree and shrub planting to the immediate rear of the highway boundary. This will significantly improve the frontage of the site by softening the buildings and reducing the visible frontage of the building elevations.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	Medium
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Moderate adverse.

Table 1.22: Assessment of visual effects - View 6

View 6 – View north west from footpath 272/17 adjacent to new care home	
Figure Reference	1.17
Distance	Close.
Direction	North west.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	Clear.
Visibility	Good.
Type of Receptor	PROW users, highway users.
Sensitivity	High.
Reason for view selection	View from public right of way across the application site.
Description	<p>View from existing highway footpath and junction with public right of way.</p> <p>The view comprises existing hedgerow and timber post and rail fence in the foreground with footpath signage into the field. The right of the view shows the care home adjacent to the site under construction. Skimmingdish Lane runs westwards on the left hand side of the view, and the road is lined with existing hedgerow and tree planting which is dense in places. The field in the middle ground is bounded with mature hedgerow planting and some mature trees.</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be a substantial alteration of the baseline view.</p> <p>The proposed buildings will fill the middle ground of the view, curtailing any views to the landscape beyond. The proposed buildings will also be higher than the existing features in the view. The proposed buildings will be in close proximity to the care home adjacent to the site. The existing view of the surrounding landscape will be curtailed.</p>
Magnitude of change	High.
Predicted visual effects	Substantial adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>There will be a partial alteration of the baseline view.</p> <p>New tree and amenity shrub planting will soften the building elevations. However, the massing and scale of the proposed development will remain evident in the view. Close to the care home a planted mound of trees and shrubs will filter views of the proposed development. The planting proposed will tie in visually with much of the existing to make the buildings less obtrusive. The existing view of the surrounding landscape will remain curtailed.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	High.
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Substantial adverse.

Table 1.23: Assessment of visual effects - View 7

View 7 – View north west from car park adjacent to Launton Playing Fields	
Figure Reference	1.18
Distance	Medium.
Direction	West/north-west.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	Clear.
Visibility	Good.
Type of Receptor	PROW users.
Sensitivity	High.
Reason for view selection	View from public right of way and sports club at the western edge of Launton.
Description	View through a break in existing hedgerow adjacent to Launton Sports & Social Club. The view comprises pasture in the foreground with a mature tree and hedgerow belt in the middle ground associated with Bicester to Bletchley rail line. A timber post and rail fence cuts across the field in front of this vegetated belt. The location of the site within this view is to the right hand side.
Proposed view	There will be negligible alteration to the baseline view. The existing vegetation to the foreground obscures most of the landscape behind it. Whilst the site is less than 1km away, the topography here is also lower, with a railway embankment in the middle ground. This reduces the range of long-distance views and the capacity to see the top of the proposed development.
Magnitude of change	Negligible.
Predicted visual effects	Slight adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	A wide belt of new tree and shrub planting to the south east of the proposed development will serve to further screen the new buildings from Launton, making the development indiscernible.
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	No change.
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	None.

Table 1.24: Assessment of visual effects - View 8

View 8 – View west from footpath 272/11	
Figure Reference	1.19
Distance	Medium.
Direction	West.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	Clear.
Visibility	Good/low sun
Type of Receptor	PROW users.
Sensitivity	High.
Reason for view selection	View from public right of way to the application site.
Description	<p>View from the northern edge of the 'Green Buffer' land.</p> <p>The view comprises arable field in the foreground with a line of mature tree planting and some understorey hedgerow planting to the left. In the background to the right of the view are buildings associated with Bicester Airfield at the corner of the A4421 and Buckingham Road. These are viewed across the 'Green Buffer' as it extends northwards from the Bicester 11 allocation. The airfield buildings are approximately 2km away.</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be a minor alteration of the baseline view.</p> <p>The development proposals will be glimpsed through high-level breaks in the existing tree line canopy to the perimeter of the field , however, the presence of these new buildings will not be uncharacteristic given the height and scale of the airfield buildings..</p>
Magnitude of change	Low
Predicted visual effects	Slight to Moderate adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>Negligible change in the baseline view</p> <p>New tree planting to augment the existing around the perimeter of the site is proposed. This planting will soften the edges of the building and be of native species, in keeping with the existing species in the area. The additional planting will, in time, serve to reduce the magnitude of change to negligible.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	Negligible
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Slight adverse.

Table 1.25: Assessment of visual effects – View 9

View 9 – View south west from footpath 272/17	
Figure Reference	1.20
Distance	Close.
Direction	South west.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	High cloud.
Visibility	Good.
Type of Receptor	PROW users.
Sensitivity	High.
Reason for view selection	View from public right of way to the north east of the application site.
Description	<p>View is taken along footpath 272/17 across the 'Green Buffer' policy area.</p> <p>The view comprises pasture in the foreground with the public footpath running down the middle of the view through a gap in the hedgerow. This area is located within the 'Green Buffer' Policy Area (ESD15). The hedgerow is mature but sparse in places, with some intermittent tree planting. In the centre of the view the new care home building, with existing mature trees to the right of this, along the far side of Skimmingdish Lane. To the left of the view it is possible to make out the existing employment use buildings which are situated to the south of A4421/Launton Road.</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be a substantial alteration of the baseline view.</p> <p>The hedgerow in the middle ground will be removed and the proposed buildings will sit in front of it. The proposed development will extend to the right hand edge of the view. The care home and existing buildings in the background will be obscured completely. The left hand side of the view will partially remain unaltered, with a section of existing mature hedgerow that is outside the site boundary being retained.</p>
Magnitude of change	High.
Predicted visual effects	Substantial adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>There will be a partial alteration of the baseline view.</p> <p>The new tree and shrub planting proposed will replace the hedgerow and tree planting removed. This will form a minimum of 20m planted zone between the development and the 'Green Buffer' area. New hedgerow and tree planting will soften the outline of the buildings, substantially reducing its effect on the view whilst compensating for the loss of existing vegetation. However, glimpses of the upper parts of the proposed buildings facades will remain visible above the tree line. These glimpses will substantially reduce in the summer months due to increased leaf cover. The presence of the new hedgerow is considered to not be uncharacteristic within the exiting view.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	Medium.
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Moderate to substantial adverse.

Table 1.26: Assessment of visual effects – View 10

View 10 – View north east from cycleway adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane	
Figure Reference	1.21
Distance	Close.
Direction	North east.
Season	Winter.
Conditions	High cloud.
Visibility	Good.
Type of Receptor	Cyclists, pedestrians.
Sensitivity	High.
Reason for view selection	View from public footpath/cycleway across to the application Site.
Description	<p>View from opening in highway verge vegetation adjacent to gated access point off Skimmingdish Lane.</p> <p>The Site is viewed across Skimmingdish Lane, which is a major detractor in the view. The view is curtailed by existing maturing highway vegetation and existing tree planting on the Site.</p>
Proposed view	<p>There will be a substantial alteration to the baseline view.</p> <p>The proposed buildings will be visible and will extend across the length of the view. A small portion of hedgerow to the left hand edge of Skimmingdish Lane will be removed to allow access to the site, but along the rest of the frontage, the existing vegetation will be retained. Trees on the site will be removed resulting in a noticeable opening up of the view beyond the line of the highway verge vegetation.</p>
Magnitude of change	High.
Predicted visual effects	Substantial adverse.
Proposed view with landscape mitigation	<p>There will be a partial alteration to the baseline view.</p> <p>On site hedgerow planting to augment the existing boundary planting will soften much of the building elevations and combine with the existing highway planting to form a dense planted edge to the development.. Mitigation proposals will also reduce the presence the buildings within the view, serving to screen and soften the outline of the proposed buildings.</p>
Magnitude of change with landscape mitigation in place	Medium.
Predicted visual effects with landscape mitigation in place (residual effect)	Moderate to Substantial adverse.

Significance of visual effects

134. **Table 1.27** draws together the significance of the visual effects for the ten views considered:

Table 1.27: Significance of visual effects

View	Sensitivity of Receptor	Distance	Significance of effects	
			Without Mitigation	With Mitigation (Residual Effect)
1	Medium	Long	Slight to Moderate	Negligible
2	High	Long	Slight	Slight
3	Medium	Long	Slight to Moderate	Slight to Moderate
4	High	Medium	Moderate to Substantial	Slight to Moderate
5	Medium	Close	Substantial	Moderate
6	High	Close	Substantial	Substantial
7	High	Medium	Slight	No Change
8	High	Medium	Slight to Moderate	Slight
9	High	Close	Substantial	Moderate to Substantial
10	High	Close	Substantial	Moderate to Substantial

135. Overall, the significance of the visual effect of the proposed development can be summarised as ranging from 'Slight' to 'Substantial'. The majority of these effects if mitigated, as described in the tables above, will be reduced to 'No Change' to 'Substantial'. In respect of type of effect, this can be summarised as adverse.

136. Generally, the development proposals will only have substantial effect on selected views located within or directly adjacent the site where any new development will be seen in close proximity. In views from outside the Site the effects are generally slight to slight to moderate adverse.

Summary of visual effects

137. The proposed development site is visible from a range of viewpoints. Due to the low-lying terrain the possibility of long-distance views (over 1km away) of the development proposals has been considered. However, these views tend to be obscured by the strong network of hedgerow and tree planting around the site. Views that fall within the medium to close category are defined more clearly and will be picked up by visual receptors

138. Although still at outline application stage any potential visual effects of new built form has been taken into consideration, particularly in relation to the size, massing and scale of the buildings. Measures have been put in place to avoid or reduce any adverse visual effects and the aim has been to create a harmonious relationship with the landscape setting.

139. Where the proposed development is visible, the more substantial visual effects have been in views where there is little other existing built form visible, such that the relationship between existing and proposed is more evident. In certain views however, the development proposals can be seen in context of the existing built form, such as the Launton Road employment use development, or Bicester Airfield buildings. In all views, mitigation measures comprising the augmentation of existing vegetation with dense plantations of native trees and shrubs, plus the planting of native trees within the development area itself will serve to screen and filter views, and will soften and break up the building outline. These mitigation measures will also better assimilate the proposed development into the existing landscape context.
140. Overall, we conclude that there will be slight to substantial visual effects due to the proposed development. The nature of these effects on the visual amenity will be adverse. These effects will however, become reduced as the proposed mitigation measures take effect, ultimately the residual effect will range from 'No Change' to 'Substantial' adverse when viewed from outside the site.
141. Residual substantial effects are limited to short range views only – i.e. views from within or immediately adjacent to the site. Generally, these changes in the view are not considered uncharacteristic of the area due to the close proximity of other existing similar development to the development site.
142. In respect of medium to longer distant views this assessment concurs with the Cherwell District Council Landscape Capacity Study which concludes that Bicester 11 allocation site has 'low visual sensitivity'.
143. This assessment of visual effects is based on the 'worse case' development scenario.

9. Conclusions

144. The site is located to the north east fringe of Bicester, along the A4421 loop road. Its current main use is arable farming and pasture.
145. The principle of developing the site for a flexible mix of employment has been established for a period of almost twenty years. The site is allocated for employment use (in part) under Saved Policy EMP1 of the 1996 Local Plan and the entirety of the site is allocated within the emerging Local Plan under Draft Policy Bicester 11. Due to its allocation it is understood and accepted that the site will be subject to transformational change due to development in one form or another. This report therefore is testing the likely landscape and visual effects of the maximum (or 'worse case') parameters of the proposed development against the various landscape capacity related development management criteria set out under Bicester 11.
146. There is one landscape designation affecting a portion of the northern end of the site, as part of the RAF Bicester Conservation Area to the east/north east. The site is also located adjacent to a scheduled monument, which comprises of the airfield defence structures and bomb stores to the former RAF Bicester during World War II.
147. The planning application is for outline planning only. Parameter plans establish the maximum development potential for the site in respect of scale, mass and height. Access will be via a single access road off Skimmingdish Lane/A4421 with access set within an access and circulation parameter plan. The proposed landscape treatments to the development are set out as Landscape Parameter Plans (**Ref 16.**) and Design Coding (**Ref 9.**). These include dense tree planting, native hedgerow planting, amenity shrubs and landscaped parking areas. Other measures such as siting buildings away from the undeveloped edges of the site and providing significant landscape mitigation in the form of new dense structure planting, hedgerows and tree planting around the development plots have also been included within these parameter plans. These serve to provide further reduction of any potential adverse effects.
148. The Landscape Parameter plans include for a Landscape Planted buffer to be included at the north eastern boundary of the site – as required by Policy Bicester 11 within the emerging Local Plan, in order to limit any potential visual intrusion into the Bicester Airfield Conservation Area. The boundary of the Bicester 11 allocation and the Green Buffer Policy (ESD15 **Ref 3.**) areas have been agreed through the Examination in Public of the Local Plan (EiP) process and for the purposes of this assessment the planning application boundary is within the agreed Bicester 11 allocation and outside the Green Buffer policy area.
149. The development proposals meet with, and in many cases exceed the key relevant planning policies at national and local level in respect of urban design, landscape, and visual amenity. In respect of specific local policies the findings of the assessment of landscape effects and visual effects demonstrate that the proposals meet with relevant landscape and visual related Policies as follows:
150. In respect of policy ESD 13 Local Landscape & Protection, the development includes for the planting of new blocks of woodland edge, trees and hedgerows, it also respects local landscape character and provides appropriate landscape mitigation. In respect of other criteria, the proposed development does not Cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside or Cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography. The development is consistent with local character and there are no areas judged to have a high level of tranquillity within the vicinity of the site. It has also been demonstrated that there is no Harm the setting of existing settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features or historic landscapes.
151. In respect of Policy ESD 15 it has been demonstrated how landscape has been used to soften the built edge of the development and assimilate it into the landscape. It has been shown how the landscape parameter plans include for new green infrastructure to be strongly connected with existing. There are no notable existing designated important views or landscape features will need to be taken into account and the integrity of the Green Buffer has been maintained
152. Landscape & Visual related objectives of Policy ESD16 (Character of the Built and Historic Environment) are met specifically - sensitive siting, layout and high quality design, addressing the district's distinctive natural or historic assets, respecting local topography and landscape features, including skylines, significant trees, historic boundaries, landmarks, features or views, and the integration and enhancement of green infrastructure and improvements to local biodiversity enhancement features.

153. In respect of Policy ESD18, the development proposals compensate for any loss of existing green infrastructure such as hedgerows and mature tree planting, with proposed native planting, to be a mix of trees, hedgerows and understorey vegetation. The landscape proposals will strengthen and augment existing planting around the site perimeters. The public footpath 272/17 running through the site will be diverted to maintain access to open space and green infrastructure.
154. Turning to Policy 'Bicester 11' the proposals meet with the development management criteria of the policy in the following ways:
- The Proposals comply with ESD16 (see 152 above)
 - Layout of development that enables a high degree of integration and connectivity between new and existing development, including adjoining employment areas, nearby residential areas and the town centre
 - Good footpath/cycleway links around the site including along Skimmingdish Lane are provided
 - The Design Coding document sets out the requirement for a high quality, well designed approach to the urban edge of Bicester.
 - The Development that respects the landscape setting, and also demonstrates the enhancement, restoration or creation of wildlife corridors, and the creation of a green infrastructure network for Bicester
 - A comprehensive landscaping scheme to limit visual intrusion into the wider landscape has been provided in the form of the landscape parameter plan. This has then been tested throughout this Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment.
 - Controls for the sensitive layout, architecture, materials and colourings of proposed buildings have been set out within the Design Coding document. Careful consideration to building heights, site levels, the appearance of buildings and landscape mitigation has been in order to reduce the overall visual impact.
 - A landscape buffer of minimum width of 20m has been provided along the north eastern boundary of the allocation area, this buffer includes the retention of hedgerow, scrub and tree planting contained within the Bicester Airfield Conservation Area boundary

(issues relating to the setting, character and appearance of the Former RAF Bicester and the Conservation Area are dealt with within the Heritage Impact Report (Ref 5.))

155. For the purposes of the assessing the potential Landscape and Visual effects of the proposed development a 'worse case' development scenario was modelled assuming total built form occupancy of the proposed building zone to the maximum height of development prescribed within the architectural parameter plans. This is in line set out within the GVLIA guidelines (Ref 1.). It is reasonable to assume that the quantum of development that will take place on the site will be somewhat less than that assessed, and in all likelihood the level of both Landscape and Visual effects will be somewhat reduced.
156. The site is allocated for development therefore both Landscape and Visual impacts are to be anticipated. The effect of the existing landscape character due to the proposed development is considered to range from 'Negligible' to 'Substantial' adverse. However, substantial effects are limited to the site area only. With mitigation these effects would be reduced to 'No change' to 'Moderate' adverse.
157. The effects on the landscape during construction will be limited and temporary and will be no greater than the long term effects of the proposed development. Again, landscape impacts are to be expected in relation to any form of development taking place on an allocated site.
158. Lighting effects are not considered to be significant within the existing urban fringe context. Any form of development will, in all likelihood, require lighting both internally and externally. In the case of the proposed form of development internal lighting is reduced due to the limited amount of opening in the buildings. External lighting will be seen against a backdrop of other employment uses at the fringes of Bicester and lighting to the A4421/Launton Road roundabout.

159. In respect of visual effects these range from 'Slight' to 'Substantial'. The nature of these effects on the visual amenity will generally be adverse but again, substantial effects are limited to short range views only – i.e. views from immediately adjacent to or within the site. These effects will however, in the main, be reduced when the proposed mitigation measures are taken into consideration, with the exception of views from within the site or immediately adjacent to it.
160. With regard to the effect of the development proposals upon the landscape character of the site, it is considered that although the magnitude will be high in the instance of the site and its immediate environs, the degree of change can be accommodated without detriment to the character of the wider landscape setting. The layout and quality of the proposed built form and the robust landscape proposed will complement the existing urban fringe context. The proposed development will provide an appropriately located, natural extension to the urban area of Bicester, which can be integrated without detriment to the character of the wider receiving landscapes.
161. With regard to the effect upon visual amenity, it is considered that the proposals will have a substantial effect on localised views from within the site or immediately at its edges – as would be the case with any form of development on an allocated site. However, employment type (Use Class B1c, B2, B8, with ancillary Class B1a Office, are not uncharacteristic of the locale.
162. View 8 and 9 in particular illustrate the effect on views from the Green Buffer. There will be substantial adverse effect on uninterrupted (i.e. close proximity) views from within the buffer, as illustrated in View 9, however views across the 'Green Buffer' area will not be impacted upon as greatly due to the layering effect of existing field boundaries and stands of vegetation, – as illustrated in view 8. Here the visual effect will be 'Slight to Moderate' reducing to 'Slight' when mitigation is taken into consideration.
163. Overall it is considered that the proposals can be integrated without substantial harm to the character of the landscape context or on the visual amenities of the localised and wider landscape setting. The proposed development will represent a substantial adverse change on or immediately adjacent to the Site – as would be the case in all likelihood, with any form of development on an allocated site. However, it is considered that within the wider existing landscape / townscape and visual context of the site the significance of landscape and/or visual effects will be within an acceptable range – being no greater than 'Moderate' in regards to both landscape and visual effects.
164. This assessment in respect of likely landscape and visual effects is consistent with the Cherwell District Council Landscape Capacity Study in that the site is considered to be of medium sensitivity and overall, within the broader landscape context, to be of low visual sensitivity.
165. Summaries of residual Landscape effects and visual effects are provided at **Table 1.28** and **Table 1.297** respectively.

Table 1.28: Summary of landscape effects

Character Area	Magnitude of change	Sensitivity	Predicted residual landscape effects
1 Agricultural land	High	Medium	Moderate
2 Bicester Airfield	Medium	High	Slight to Moderate
3 Suburban Residential	Medium	Low	Slight
4 Launton Village	Low	Medium	Negligible
5 Employment Land	Low	Low	No Change
6 Former quarries	Negligible	Low	No Change

Table 1.29: Summary of visual effects

View	Magnitude of change	Sensitivity of Receptor	Predicted residual visual effects
1 South west from Launton Road	Negligible	Medium	Negligible
2 South from Launton Road, Stratton Audley	Negligible	High	Slight
3 South across airfield from junction of Bicester Road/A4421	Negligible	Medium	Slight to Moderate
4 South east from junction of Thompson Drive	Low	High	Slight to Moderate
5 South east along Skimmingdish Lane/A44121	Medium	Medium	Moderate
6 North west from footpath 272/17 adjacent to new care home	High	High	Substantial*
7 North west from car park adjacent to Launton playing fields	Negligible	High	No Change
8 West from footpath 272/11	Negligible	High	Slight
9 South west from footpath 272/17	Medium	High	Moderate to* Substantial
10 North east from cycleway adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane	Medium	High	Moderate to * Substantial

*Donates view taken in close proximity to the site.

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