

Land East of Albion Road and North of Copper Lane, Marden, Kent

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)



7th August 2023



Prepared by Allen Scott for Rydon Homes

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

- 1.0 Introduction**
- 2.0 Landscape Planning Policy Context**
- 3.0 Baseline Conditions**
- 4.0 The Proposed Development**
- 5.0 Identification of Potential Impacts**
- 6.0 Mitigation Measures**
- 7.0 Summary and Conclusions**

Figures

- 1. The Site and topography
- 2. Landscape-related Designations and Public Rights of Way
- 3. The Site, its landscape features and immediate landscape character areas
- 4. Photographs of the site and its immediate context
- 5. Zone of Visual Influence and Viewpoint Locations
- 6.1 - 6.7 Viewpoint Photograph Sheets
- 7. Proposed Development Layout by OSP Architects for Rydon

Appendix A: Assessment Methodology

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This assessment identifies the potential landscape and visual effects of development for a site on land east of Albion Road and north of Copper Lane in Marden ('the Site' – Figure 1) and its environs in relation to a proposed residential development scheme by Rydon Homes Ltd.
- 1.2. The Site, in part, adjoins the existing built up area of Marden to the north and has residential properties nearby to the west along Albion Road.
- 1.3. This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) supports the outline planning application for the development.
- 1.4. The main aim of the assessment is to identify and focus on the potential significant impacts to aid decision making and not to obfuscate those with excessive description of negligible or minor details.
- 1.5. Landscape and visual effects are interrelated to many other environmental effects but assessed separately. There are potential synergies between landscape and ecology, arboriculture and cultural heritage and this assessment should be read in conjunction with any specialist assessments of these issues.
- 1.6. Consideration is also given to the range of proposed landscape-related mitigation measures incorporated into the design of the development that assists to minimise the impacts as far as is reasonable and appropriate. Any additional mitigation measures are also identified.
- 1.7. The assessment methodology (refer to Appendix A) reflects guidance in The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's (2013) publication – Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition.
- 1.8. This assessment, and its iterative process, has had some influence on the concept masterplan for potential development within the Site prepared by OSP for Rydon Homes.
- 1.9. Prior to this assessment, Allen Scott Ltd were commissioned by Rydon Homes Ltd in February 2021 to undertake an initial landscape review of the Site and its context. This initial landscape review has been used as baseline information for this LVIA and had helped inform the masterplan for the proposed development.
- 1.10. The LVIA process included desktop assessment and visits to the Site and its surroundings during 2022 and 2023. Visits were taken during winter, summer and autumn months.
- 1.11. This LVIA provides an assessment of the significance of potential effects which could result from developing the Site based on the development masterplan.
- 1.12. Allen Scott were also commissioned to prepare an Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (OLEMP) in relation to the proposed development. This was developed alongside the development plan, the LVIA and other reports such as the Ecological Assessment and Heritage Statement. It is a standalone report but can be read in conjunction with this LVIA.

2. LANDSCAPE RELATED PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Figure 2

2.1. National: The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – updated July 2021

2.1.1. At the heart of the NPPF is a *'presumption in favour of sustainable development'* (NPPF Paragraph 10). In order to achieve this, the planning system has 3 objectives: economic, social and environmental.

an economic objective – *to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*

a social objective – *to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and*

an environmental objective – *to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.*

Landscape and visual considerations are a part of this environmental role but are balanced with economic and social considerations through the planning process.

Paragraph 78 of the NPPF concerns the promotion sustainable housing development in rural areas *'...housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality or rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive especially where this will support local services....'*

2.1.2. Section 12 of the NPPF concerns the objective for achieving well-designed places. Here, it is stated that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments are, *'sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)'* (NPPF Paragraph 130c) and should, *'optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space)'* (NPPF Paragraph 130e)

2.1.3. Section 11 of the NPPF explains the need for policies to encourage effective use of land. It states that Planning policies and decisions should *'encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside;'* (NPPF Paragraph 120a) and that, *'some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production;'* (NPPF Paragraph 120b)

2.1.4. The overriding policy described in section 3 of the NPPF is about effective plan-making and the requirement for strategic policies to *'address each local planning authority's priorities for the development and use of ;and in its area'*, (NPPF Paragraph 17). The section then continues to goes on to detail the requirements of these policies stating that, *'strategic policies should not extend to detailed matters that are more appropriately dealt with through neighbourhood plans...'* (NPPF Paragraph 21). Non-strategic policies include those determining the local allocation of sites within the Neighbourhood planning tier. Relevant policies from the local development framework and neighbourhood plan are shown the next section of this report.

2.2 Local Policy

- 2.2.1. The local planning authority determining the planning application is Maidstone Borough Council (MBC). MBC are in process of reviewing and preparing a new Local Plan.
- 2.2.2. The consultation on the draft for submission document and Sustainability Appraisal opened in October 2021 and closed on 12 December 2021. The Council is now processing and analysing responses.
- 2.2.3. The draft Local Plan does not yet replace existing plans and strategies. However, it is worth noting the Strategic Land Appraisals does include part of the Site (Site Ref 078).
- 2.2.4. The Reg 19 version of the draft local plan includes the following proposed policy extract relevant to landscape and visual matters:

Landscape / Ecology

- *A phase 1 habitat survey will be required, which may as a result on and/or off site mitigation for the existing habitat of local fauna/flora*
- *Development will be subject to a site-wide strategy to incorporate an appropriate level of biodiversity net gain in accordance with national and local policy.*
- *Public access to areas designated habitat as habitat in any landscape masterplan would normally be limited to maintenance purposes*
- *Balancing ponds and swales shall not be counted towards on-site semi/natural open space needs unless it can be demonstrated that they provide appropriate and undisturbed ecological habitat.*
- *All landscaping to be principally native planting*
- *The proposed woodland area shall not be counted towards on-site semi/natural open space needs unless it can be demonstrated that they provide appropriate and undisturbed ecological habitat.*
- *Existing tree/hedgerow margins should be retained / enhanced in order to provide the opportunity for biodiversity habitat creation / enhancement.*

Open Space

- *No less than 0.35ha of open green amenity space be provided, incorporating appropriate children's play space to meet the needs of the development.*
 - *The development shall deliver no less than 0.9ha of semi/natural open space the principle focus of which shall be to contribute to create new woodland and biodiversity net gain. The location and layout of such areas shall be designed to avoid conflict with accessible residential amenity spaces.*
 - *Where it is not feasible, due to site characteristics, to provide an appropriate open space typology in accordance with Policy SP13(B), the scheme shall make appropriate financial contributions towards off-site provision / public realm improvements within the village.*
- 2.2.5. The following reviews the existing **key policies and designations** most relevant to landscape and visual effects.

MBC Local Plan Adopted 25 October 2017

Table 1: Summary and Extracts of Landscape Relevant Policies

Policy	Requirement and relevance
SS1	<p>Maidstone Borough spatial strategy</p> <p><i>10. The green and blue network of multi-functional open spaces, rivers and water courses, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, the setting of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and landscapes of local value will be conserved and enhanced.</i></p> <p><i>11. Infrastructure schemes that provide for the needs arising from development will be supported. New residential and commercial development will be supported if sufficient infrastructure capacity is either available or can be provided in time to serve it.</i></p>
DM1	<p>Principles of Good Design</p> <p><i>6.4 In establishing the use and designing the layout and site coverage of development, landscape shall be integral to the overall design of a scheme and needs to be considered at the beginning of the design process. In appropriate locations, local distinctiveness should be reinforced and natural features worthy of retention be sensitively incorporated. It is also important that all new development protects and enhances any on-site biodiversity and geodiversity features, or provides sufficient mitigation measures, and in areas at risk of flooding, inappropriate development should be avoided.</i></p>

Policy	Requirement and relevance
DM3	<p>Natural Environment</p> <p>1. To enable Maidstone borough to retain a high quality of living and to be able to respond to the effects of climate change, developers will ensure that new development protects and enhances the natural environment by incorporating measures where appropriate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Protect positive landscape character, areas of Ancient Woodland, veteran trees, trees with significant amenity value, important hedgerows, features of biological or geological interest, and the existing public rights of way network from inappropriate development and avoid significant adverse impacts as a result of development; ii. Avoid damage to and inappropriate development considered likely to have significant direct or indirect adverse effects on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Internationally, nationally and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; and b) Local Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats;..... v. Provide for the long term maintenance and management of all natural assets, including landscape character, associated with the development; vi. Mitigate for and adapt to the effects of climate change; and vii. Positively contribute to the improvement of accessibility or natural green space within walking distance of housing, employment, health and education facilities and to the creation of a wider network of new links between green and blue space including links to the Public Rights of Way network. <p>2. Where appropriate, development proposals will be expected to appraise the value of the borough's natural environment through the provision of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. An ecological evaluation of development sites and any additional land put forward for mitigation purposes to take full account of the biodiversity present, including the potential for the retention and provision of native plant species; ii. Arboricultural assessments to take full account of any natural assets connected with the development and associated sites; and iii. A landscape and visual impact assessment to take full account of the significance of, and potential effects of change on, the landscape as an environmental resource together with views and visual amenity. <p>3. Publicly accessible open space should be designed as part of the overall green and blue infrastructure and layout of a site, taking advantage of the potential for multiple benefits including enhanced play, wildlife, sustainable urban drainage, tree planting and landscape provision. The form and function of green infrastructure will reflect a site's characteristics, nature, location and existing or future deficits.</p> <p>4. When significant harm cannot be avoided through consideration of alternative sites or adequate mitigation provided on-site within the immediate locality, compensatory measures will be achieved within the relevant Biodiversity Opportunity Area, or other location as agreed by the local planning authority.....</p> <p>.....Account should be taken of the Landscape Character Guidelines SPD, the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.</p>

DM19	<p>Publicly accessible open space and recreation</p> <p>1. For new housing or mixed use development sites, the council will seek to deliver the following categories of publicly accessible open space provision in accordance with the specified standards:</p> <p>i. Quantity standards</p>		
	Open space type	Standard (ha/1000 population)	Minimum size of facility (ha)
	Amenity green space (e.g. informal recreation spaces, recreation grounds, village green, urban parks, formal gardens and playing fields)	0.7	0.1
	Provision for children and young people (e.g. quipped play areas, ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateborard parks, teenage shelters and "hangouts)	0.25	0.25 excluding a buffer zone
	Publicly accessible outdoor sports (e.g. outdoor sports pitches, tennis, bowls, athletics and other sports)	1.6	To meet the technical standards produced by Sport England or the relevant governing bodies of sport.
	Allotments and community gardens (e.g. land used for the growing of own produce, including urban farms. Does not include private gardens)	0.2	0.66
	Natural / semi-natural areas of open space (e.g. woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands, wetlands, open and sunning water, banks to rivers, land and ponds, wastelands, closed cemeteries and graveyards)	6.5	0.2
	<p>ii. Quality Standards</p> <p>All new open spaces should meet the following general standards:</p> <p>a. Be designed as part of the green infrastructure network in a locality, contributing to local landscape character, connecting with local routes and green corridors for people wildlife as well as providing multifunctional benefits such as addressing surface water management priorities;</p> <p>b. Provide a location and shape for the open space which allows for meaningful and safe recreation and be sufficiently overlooked by active building frontages;</p> <p>c. Be easily found and accessible by road, cycleway, footpaths and public transport including by those with disabilities, with pedestrian crossings on road where appropriate;</p> <p>d. Make the entrances accessible for all users, of appropriate size and inviting with a welcoming sig where appropriate;</p> <p>e. Provide clearly defined boundaries with fences or hedges where needed to ensure safety of users;</p> <p>f. Where appropriate provide interest and activities for a wide range of users in particular meeting the needs of elderly and less able users as well as children, young people and families;</p>		

<p><i>g. Where appropriate provide seats, litter bins and appropriate lighting to ensure safety of users without adversely affecting wildlife;</i></p> <p><i>h. Provide a range of planting, with appropriate mix of predominantly indigenous species, maintained to a good standard;</i></p> <p><i>i. Promote biodiversity on-site through design, choice of species and management practices;</i></p> <p><i>j. Submit an Open Space Layout and Design statement, to incorporate ecological management measures for approval by council; and</i></p> <p><i>k. Provide a Management Plan with adequate resources identified for on-going management and maintenance.</i></p> <p>iii. Accessibility Standards</p> <p><i>If open space cannot be provided in full on development sites, due to site constraints, housing delivery expectations on allocated sites, or location, then provision should be provided off-site where it is within the distance from the development site identified in the accessibility standard.</i></p>	
<i>Open space type</i>	<i>Accessibility standard (radius from open space)</i>
<i>Amenity green space (e.g. informal recreation spaces, recreation grounds, village green, urban parks, formal gardens and playing fields)</i>	<i>400m</i>
<i>Provision for children and young people (e.g. quipped play areas, ball courts, outdoor basketball hoop areas, skateborard parks, teenage shelters and "hangouts)</i>	<i>600m</i>
<i>Publicly accessible outdoor sports (e.g. outdoor sports pitches, tennis, bowls, athletics and other sports)</i>	<i>1000m</i>
<i>Allotments and community gardens (e.g. land used for the growing of own produce, including urban farms. Does not include private gardens)</i>	<i>1000m</i>
<i>Natural / semi-natural areas of open space (e.g. woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands, wetlands, open and sunning water, banks to rivers, land and ponds, wastelands, closed cemeteries and graveyards)</i>	<i>300m (2hs site)</i> <i>2km (20ha site)</i> <i>5km (100ha site)</i> <i>10km (500ha site)</i>
<p>2. A financial contribution in lieu of open space provision will be acceptable, provided:</p> <p><i>i. The proposed development site would be of insufficient size in itself to make the appropriate new provision; or</i></p> <p><i>ii. The open space cannot be accommodated on-site due to site constraints, housing delivery expectations on allocated sites or location, and alternative appropriate off-site provision cannot be identified.</i></p> <p>3. Where it can be demonstrated that existing open space provision can either wholly or partially mitigate the impacts of development in accordance with the above standards, the council may seek a reduced level of provision or financial contribution. Developers should take full account of open space requirements at an early stage of the development management process and are encouraged to engage with the council to determine the most appropriate quantum, type and location of open space provision.</p>	

Policy	Requirement and relevance
	<p>4. <i>The council will operate the policy flexibly to secure the provision of the typologies of open space which are most needed in the relevant area, taking account of the above standards and the suitability of the site to accommodate the identified needs.</i></p> <p>5. <i>Proposals for, and including, new publicly accessible open space and recreation provision will, where feasible, seek to reinforce existing landscape character, as defined in the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment.</i></p> <p>6. <i>Proposals for, and including, new publicly accessible open space and recreation provision shall respect the amenities of neighbouring occupiers, by ensuring that development does not result in excessive levels of noise or light pollution. New lighting relating to such development will also preserve the character and visual amenity of the countryside.</i></p> <p>7. <i>Proposals for new development which would result in the net loss of existing open space or sport and recreation facilities will not be permitted unless there is a proven overriding need for the development. In addition, the development will only be permitted if:</i></p> <p><i>i. There is no resulting deficiency in open space or recreation facilities in the locality when assessed against the quality standards of this policy; or</i></p> <p><i>ii. An alternative provision, determined to be of an equivalent community benefit by the Borough Council and community representatives can be provided to replace the loss.</i></p> <p>8. <i>In dealing with applications to develop existing open areas within the urban area, rural service centres, larger villages and other locations, the Borough Council will have regard to the impact of the loss of the contribution that the existing site makes to the character, amenity and biodiversity of the area.</i></p>

3. BASELINE CONDITIONS

General Context Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

3.1 The Site is located on the south east edge to Marden and comprises a variety of different shaped field parcels, hedgerows, mature trees, and sloping ground, ponds and fruit trees. It is bounded by mature hedgerows on Copper Lane to the south and mature hedgerow trees along property boundaries to east.

The Site abuts a new housing development (Russet Grove) to the north. The Site does not include a large field parcel adjoining Thorn Road and Copper Lane but does include a narrower rectangular parcel of land between this open field and the residential Property named The Howlands. This is where the Site adjoins Albion Road.

The Site itself does not fall within a statutory designated Landscape. It currently falls outside of the built extent of Marden but abuts its southern edge to the north.

The High Weald AONB boundary is 4km to the south of the Site.

There are no recorded Public Rights of Way (PRoWS) or Bridleways within the Site itself. However there is a nearby PRoW (KM276) to the north of the site beyond the new Russet Grove housing development along Stanley Road and beyond. There are other nearby PRoWs namely KM278 to the east of the Site and KM281 directly opposite the Site's boundary with Albion Road.

There are public roads and lanes within 1km of the Site. Notably Copper Lane along the southern boundary and Albion Road / Thorn Road to the west of the Site. Nether have public footpaths / pavements close to the Site, however it is evident that the roads and lane are used by pedestrians.

There are no known listed buildings or structures on the Site, however there are nearby Grade II listed buildings. Notably Jewell House / Bishop House, Stone Pit Farmhouse and Barn northwest of Stone Pit Farmhouse.

3.2 The Landscape of the Site – Main Features and Elements

Figures 1 to 4

The application Site is approximately 6.1hectares and is mainly used as an operational plum and apple orchard.

The main landscape / townscape components within the Site and the immediate surroundings area are described further below. The associated value and the amount these are changed or influenced by the proposed development forms part of the judgement of whether effects are considered significant.

3.2.1 *Topography and Landform*

The Site is gently sloping from north to south generally following the sloping ground of Thorn and Albion Road and wider landscape topography.

The north west field parcel and the upper levels are on generally flatter ground with a slight north south slope. The mid and lower levels are gentling sloping down to Copper Lane.

The majority of the settlement of Marden, to the north, is on higher ground than the Site.

The wider landscape to the north and south is generally undulating. The sloping and undulating ground is gentler to the west and east of the Site.

3.2.2 *Land-use and Vegetation*

The majority of Site is currently used for fruit production. Predominantly plum and apple orchards in rows are located within the sloping field parcels and on the upper levels. To the south are four ponds of various shapes and sizes.

The north west parcel comprises of overgrown vegetation and dilapidated buildings / structures. There is also a small pond close the southern boundary of the northern parcel.

The boundaries consist of hedgerows and trees at varying stages of development and levels of maintenance.

As noted in the arboriculture impact assessment, there are three category A oak trees (retention most desirable, 40 years lifespan remaining), which are all on the southern Site boundary.

The Site also contains many (16) category B trees/groups of trees (moderate quality and value and 20 years life expectancy).

A row of trees, horizontal across the site on higher ground, comprises of Silver Birch (G39 and G41) graded B/C, with 20-40 years of longevity remaining.

In terms of ecological value, the areas of relatively greater ecological value in the context of the site are the existing hedgerows/trees.

As noted in the Ecological Assessment:

The hedgerows and trees within the site are of relatively greater ecological value in the context of the site. The hedgerows offer suitable nesting opportunities for birds, foraging and navigational opportunities for bats, and potentially suitable terrestrial habitat for amphibians.

The site was surveyed based around extended Phase 1 survey methodology, as recommended by Natural England, with a number of visits conducted between May 2019 and April 2022. In addition, specific surveys were undertaken within the site in respect to bats, Badgers, Great Crested Newts and reptiles.

There are not considered to be any significant adverse effects on any other statutory and non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest from the development proposals.

3.2.3 Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

For the general public the sense of landscape character is defined by the combination of landscape features, mainly topography and vegetation, and is experienced most by residents overlooking the adjoining countryside but also by those wider members of the public through use of the public rights of way network.

There are no Public Rights of Way through the site.

PRoW in the wider area are all considered to be highly valued by users and susceptible to changes. The footpaths that are considered most relevant to the Site due to their proximity or overlooking potential are discussed below and shown on Figure 2.

- Footpath KH281, with its access from Albion Road located directly opposite the Site's northern parcel.
- Footpath KH 278 located to the south and east of the Site from Copper Lane
- Footpath KH 279 adjoins KH 278 within open fields to the south east of the Site.

Other PRoW within the study area are essentially scoped out due to orientation, topography and intervening mature vegetation in relation to the Site.

3.2.4 Settlement and buildings

The broad settlement pattern is shown on Figures 1, 2 and 3.

The Site is positioned to the south of the existing settlement boundary to Marden.

As noted, the recently built Russet Grove development abuts the Site's northern boundary. This is generally on higher ground and is visible from within the Site and from beyond.

There are residential properties along Albion Road and Thorn Road that follow the sloping landform down to a relative level with Copper Lane.

There are several Listed Buildings within 1km of the Site, many within the village conservation area or further on the outskirts of Marden's settlement boundary. There is one notable Grade II Listed Building, namely Bishop House Jewell House, only 50m northwest on Albion Road.

3.3 Defining the Landscape's Character, Value and Sensitivity

This section of the assessment considers a detailed landscape character assessment of the Site and the broader study area. It draws from the hierarchy of existing landscape character assessments, the landscape designations and is informed by site visits, desktop research and professional judgement.

3.3.1 Landscape Related Designations

Figure 2

The Site itself does not fall within a statutory designated Landscape or have any Public Rights of Way within or directly adjoining it.

As noted above the Site falls outside of the built extent of Marden but it does abut a new housing development (Russet Grove) to the north.

There are no recorded Public Rights of Way (PRoWS) or Bridleways within the Site itself. However, there is a nearby PRoW (KM276) to the north of the site beyond the new Countryside housing development along Stanley Road and beyond. There are other nearby PRoWs namely KM278 to the east of the Site and KM281 directly west opposite the Site's boundary with Albion Road.

There are public roads and lanes within 1km of the Site. Notably Copper Lane along the southern boundary and Albion Road / Thorn Road to the west of the Site. Neither have public footpaths close to the Site, however it is evident that the roads and lane are used by pedestrians.

3.3.1.1 Grade II Listed Buildings

There are no known listed buildings or structures on the Site however there are nearby Grade II listed buildings. Notably Jewell House / Bishop House, Stone Pit Farmhouse and Barn northwest of Stone Pit Farmhouse.

As noted in the Heritage Assessment:

The subject Site itself does not contain any listed buildings. Within a 1km radius of the Site there is one Grade 1 Listed building, one Grade ii listed building and 44 Grade II listed buildings. Owing to the limited intervisibility through tree screen, local topography, intervening built form and historic relationships only those assets most proximate to the subject site, with historic ownership connections to the subject site, or with a higher listing denoting their increased sensitivity to change within their environs, required separate assessment.

Those assessed are as follows:

- Grade II Listed Bishop House Jewell House
- Grade II listed Stone Pit Farmhouse
- Grade II listed barn about 20 metres northwest of Stone Pit Farm
- Grade II listed Jewell Cottages

3.3.1.2 Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) and Ancient Woodland

There are no TPOs or ancient woodland within the Site.

3.3.2 Existing Landscape Character Assessments

There is a hierarchy of national and local landscape character assessments (LCAs) that are intended to provide a basis for understanding and appreciating the components of any landscape to assist in decision making.

3.3.2.1 National

At national level the site falls within Natural England's National Character Area No 121 Low Weald. Key characteristics that relate to the Site and its surrounding context are described as:

- *A generally pastoral landscape with arable farming associated with lighter soils on higher ground and areas of fruit cultivation in Kent. Land use is predominantly agricultural but with urban influences....*
- *Field boundaries of hedgerows and shaws (remnant strips of cleared woodland) enclosing small, irregular fields and linking into small and scattered linear settlements along roadsides or centred on greens or commons. Rural lanes and tracks with wide grass verges and ditches.*
- *Small towns and villages scattered among areas of woodland, permanent grassland and hedgerow on the heavy clay soils where larger 20th century villages have grown around major transport routes.*
- *Abundance of ponds, some from brick making and quarrying, and hammer and furnace ponds, legacies of the Wealden iron industry.*
- *Traditional rural vernacular of local brick, weatherboard and tile hung buildings plus local use of distinctive Horsham*

3.3.2.2 County

At a county level the Kent Landscape Assessment, October 2004 sub-divides the county into character areas. The site falls within character area Low Weald Fruit Belt. The landscape analysis for this wider area concludes that the LCA is in good condition and has moderate sensitivity to change.

The summary of actions include:

- *Conserve the rural elements of the landscape around the settlements*
- *Conserve the scale and tranquillity of rural settlements and hamlets*
- *Conserve and manage mature tree stock*
- *Reinforce enclosure patterns*
- *Reinforce the ecological interest of ditches and watercourses*
- *Conserve and reinforce the attributes of rural lanes*

This results in a strategy to **Conserve and Reinforce** the wider LCA area.

3.3.2.3 Borough

At a more local level the Site and the surrounding area fall within Maidstone Borough Council's Landscape Character Area (LCA) 44 – Staplehurst Low Weald. Broadly speaking, this LCA cover Marden through to Staplehurst. It also covers the area of land to the north of the trainline towards Chaphurst.

The key characteristics of this area is described as:

- *Low lying gently undulating clay landscape of the Low Weald*
- *Small fields with orchards, pasture, ponds and watercourses enclosed by thick native hedgerows creating an intimate atmosphere*
- *Dominance of mature oak trees as imposing hedgerow trees and sometimes within fields where hedgerows have been lost*
- *Large scale open fields where hedgerows have been removed for intensive arable cultivation*
- *Sparse scattered small woodlands*
- *Winding roads with wide verges bounded by ditches and mixed native hedgerows*
- *Historic buildings scattered through the landscape and in the historic cores of Staplehurst and Marden*

The condition is considered good and the sensitivity is high. The LCA goes to provide guidelines to **Conserve** this LCA.

The summary of actions that relate to the Site include:

- *Consider the generic guidelines for the Low Weald*
- *Conserve the abundance of oak as a dominant species, and plant new isolated oaks within pasture and oak standards within hedgerows to replace ageing species*
- *Conserve and enhance the hedgerows, ensuring that they are correctly managed and gaps replanted*
- *Conserve the pastoral land and orchards and resist conversion to arable land*
- *Conserve and enhance the small scale field pattern and sense of enclosure, encouraging restoration and management of historic field boundaries*
- *Conserve the landscape setting of historic settlements*
- *Conserve the largely undeveloped rural landscape and the remote quality of isolated farmsteads and hamlets*
- *Soften the visual prominence of large agricultural barns through native planting and encourage native hedgerows around commercial and housing developments*
- *Enhance habitat opportunities around water bodies and ditches by promoting and managing a framework of vegetation in these areas*

3.3.2.4 Maidstone Borough Council Landscape Capacity Study: Sensitivity Assessment (2015)

Maidstone Borough Council had commissioned Jacobs to undertake a report to determine the broad comparative sensitivity of landscape character areas within the borough to possible development. The report formed part of a robust evidence base to the Local Plan and will be used to inform the Sustainability Appraisal of any land allocation proposals, assisting the Council in meeting the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The objective is to assess the comparative sensitivity of the borough's landscapes to development. The study excludes the general urban area of Maidstone and the nationally designated Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as these are afforded protection through other policies, but includes the fringe landscapes of both areas. The landscape character areas used in this assessment are as defined in the published Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2012 (excluding the Kent Downs AONB and urban area of Maidstone).

As noted above the Site falls within a wider LCA 44 – Staplehurst Low Weald.

Relevant extracts from the Landscape Capacity Study for LCA 44 include:

*Landscape Sensitivity is **High***

The coherent pattern of elements include the low lying landform, small fields with mature oaks, orchards, pasture, ponds, watercourses and the enclosure provided by thick native hedgerows. However the A229, large barns, large arable fields, static caravan developments, horse grazing paddocks and stables detract slightly. The ecological integrity is relatively strong because hedgerows, verges, ditches and watercourses provide a strong and well connected network. The cultural integrity is also good although the land use has changed in some areas to more extensive arable cultivation and hop gardens have been lost. Although many scattered farmhouses and hamlets respect the local vernacular and provide a very strong sense of place, recent and indistinct development at Staplehurst and Marden dilutes this slightly.

*Visual Sensitivity is **Moderate***

Whilst there are occasionally some long views to the Greensand Ridge to the north and the High Weald to the south, intervening vegetation encloses many immediate views across the gently undulating landform, except where hedgerow removal has created large open fields. Overall visibility is moderate. Population is concentrated within the key settlements of Staplehurst and Marden, along with scattered properties and farmsteads throughout the area. This means there are relatively low numbers of people in residential properties with potential views of the landscape. Marden Meadow Nature Reserve and the network of footpaths are likely to attract moderate numbers of people with potential views

The study goes on to summarise LCA 44 as:

*Staplehurst Low Weald is assessed as being of high overall landscape sensitivity and is **sensitive to change**.*

Housing development potential is limited to within and immediately adjacent to existing settlements and farmsteads in keeping with existing. Other development could be considered to support existing rural enterprises and existing commercial parks, although extensive, large scale or visually intrusive development would be inappropriate.

3.4 Summary of Landscape Character and its Sensitivity to Change Figure 3

The Site and its immediate surroundings reflect and demonstrate some of the key characteristics described in the LCAs above. Predominantly:

- The Site is immediately adjacent to the existing edge of the Marden settlement
- The gently sloping landform (from north to south)
- Thick native hedgerows and mature trees that surround the Site and provide a sense of enclosure
- Non-traditional orchards (small trees, apple and plum)
- Although diminished through loss of hedgerows, small scale field patterns
- Ponds on lower ground close to Copper Lane
- Winding roads with wide verges bounded by ditches and mixed native hedgerows nearby (e.g. Thorn Road)
- Intervening vegetation encloses views of the Site.

There are very few detractors within the Site and its immediate surrounding, other than the dilapidated structures and buildings within the overgrown/vegetated north western part of the Site.

The characteristics reflect an edge of settlement within a rural context.

The formal line of existing Birch trees on higher ground is visible from a distance to the south.

Existing residential housing on the west side of Thorn Road follows the sloping landform down to Copper Lane and face towards the Site, but at some distance across the adjoining open field. This, together with the hedgerows along Thorn Road and the mature trees and hedgerows along the Site boundaries provide a sense of distance and separation between the Site and these residential houses.

New housing within the adjoining Russet Grove development is visible from within the Site and further South from along Copper Lane and Thorn Road.

3.4.1 Landscape Character Areas in relation to the potential development on the Site

Following the desk top summary of the studies above, and informed by site visits and professional judgement, the following more local level character areas have been identified for the purposes of establishing a basis for assessment of impact on local landscape character.

The broad character areas are shown on **Figure 3** and their key characteristic features and their judged value and sensitivity are described below:

Character Area A – The Site

With regards to the Site, the sensitivity to change is considered mixed because of its varied context / edges, the sloping landform and the irregular shape of the north western part of the Site.

The southern part of the Site is generally sensitive because of its topography, relationships with the surrounding countryside and the rural characteristics of Copper Lane.

The northern part on higher ground is generally less sensitive to change because of the existing housing and this being immediately adjacent to the existing edge of settlement. Rear fences to those properties within Russet Grove form the edge of settlement. This is mixed in quality and character and creates an abrupt edge to the settlement.

The north western part of the Site and where this meets Albion Road is sensitive in the context of Albion Road and the sense of arrival into Marden. However, the quality of this area is considered mixed. Detractors, such as the dilapidated structures and lower quality boundary to the neighbouring property reduces the sensitivity to change.

The Site's existing boundary vegetation and those field boundaries within the Site are all sensitive to change.

The Site's ponds are also sensitivity to change as is the sloping topography.

Although contained, the orchards within the Site, set with a backdrop of housing and mature vegetation along field parcels, reflects an edge of settlement landscape with charm and rural distinctiveness.

Overall and in the context of the Site's existing landscape qualities and its contribution to its immediate surroundings, Character Area A is considered to be a landscape of **Medium to High landscape sensitivity**.

Character Area B – The edge of settlement to the north and to the west of the Site

This area includes the housing development (Russet Grove) directly to the north of the Site and those houses on the west of Albion Road and Thorn Road. It also includes the large sloping field parcel between the Site and Thorn Road.

The character of Thorn Road has rural charm with a transition from scattered farmhouses through to a row of several distinctive houses facing onto Thorn Road. The road and adjacent large field parcel both follow the sloping landform, rising from Copper Lane to Albion Road. The majority of Marden sits on higher ground.

The character of Albion Road also has rural charm and verdant frontages to some of properties. The intersection between Albion Road, Thorn Road and Plain Road comprises a small triangular area of grass with finger posts and bollards. Apart from the bollards, the area has a 'village like' charm.

Directly to the north of the north western corner, property The Howlands, is set within the centre of its land plot, a good 38m back from Albion Road.

Although closer, the recently built neighbouring Russet Grove development is set back from Albion Road 10m, compromising of carparking, trees and chestnut cleft timber fencing along this front edge.

The entrance to PRoW 281 is located opposite to the Site from Albion Road between property boundaries. Although signposted, the entrance to the PRoW is not that obvious as it is set back 5m from the road.

Detractors in this part of the character area include the variety of different boundary treatments, residential paraphernalia such as wheelie bins.

Broadly speaking, Character Area B is of edge of settlement in character and is considered to be of **Medium landscape sensitivity**.

Character Area C – The countryside to the south and east of the Site

This area includes Copper Lane and the neighbouring fields and the land to the south and east of the Site.

The character of this area resembles many of the characteristics described in the wider LCA studies and assessments.

The landform is fairly flat but with some undulation.

Visibility is contained by mature vegetation along roads and along field parcel boundaries.

However there is the presence of the Marden settlement with some glimpsed views towards the higher ground influencing the character.

In the context of the Site and its potential development, Character Area C is considered to be of **Medium to High landscape sensitivity**.

The AONB and its Setting

As noted earlier in this report the High Weald AONB Boundary is around 4km south from the Site. It's closest boundary being at Curtisden Green. This area falls without the Goudhust Parish LCA within the High Wealds AONB Landscape Character Assessments 2018.

This provides information on this wider area in relation to the five key defining elements to the AONB character. Geology, landform and water systems; Settlement; Routeways; Woodland; Field and Heath.

Whilst these elements and the AONB as a whole is highly sensitive to change, the Site, located a good 4km away from its boundary with extensive intervening open countryside between, is considered not to have major influence on its setting. The magnitude of change to the AONB and its setting caused by a housing development of this scale and density is likely to be low. It is therefore not considered further in this assessment.

Also worth noting that the Site is 15km away from the closest boundary of the Kent Downs AONB to the North.

3.5 Baseline Conditions: Visual

3.5.1 The Zone of Visual Influence

Figures 5 and 6.1 to 6.7

The Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) of the proposed development has been assessed to determine the visual envelope within which the built elements are likely to be significant in views. This is defined using mapping, site visits, photographs from site visits and professional judgement. It has been chosen in favour of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility, which is a digitally produced approach and assumes the landscape is 'bare earth' (i.e. no buildings or trees), to take into account the actual context and enclosed nature of the Site, surrounding landform, vegetation and existing houses, which all influence potential visibility.

The approximate extent of the predicted ZVI for the Site within a 1km of it is shown on Figure 5. The ZVI is very localised due to existing intervening vegetation, existing buildings and topography.

Whilst there may be some glimpses from certain locations beyond these areas, such as through gaps in hedgerows, the influence of any development on the Site is considered to be negligible due to distance, the effects of intervening landform and vegetation and the context of the existing settlement edge where there are already glimpses of roofs and buildings within the landscape.

It should also be emphasised that within the ZVI there will be many localised screening effects from existing hedgerows and other buildings. The extent of existing vegetation is such that, despite the proposed development, in many parts there will be very little undue influence.

3.5.2 Visual Receptors and their Sensitivity

The most sensitive receptors are considered to be those most likely to benefit from and appreciate the existing Site's landscape, its setting and views. The most sensitive receptors are usually considered to be nearby users of community facilities and recreational users of PRoWs (walkers, cyclists, horse riders etc) and of other accessible public open spaces. The least sensitive receptors are usually considered to be users of public transport, motorists and employees at work engaged in activities other than those to do with enjoying the view. In order of sensitivity the following potential receptors have been identified and either included for assessment or 'scoped out' due to very minor or negligible potential views of any proposed development:

3.5.3 Residents

Sensitivity Assessment of Residents within the ZVI:

High Potential Sensitivity due mainly to proximity and/or current openness of views directly towards the Site. All will be susceptible to some extent by the proposed construction and the change in current views.

- At least 15 dwellings within Russet Grove development that back onto the Site.
- The Howlands, adjacent to the North west edge of the Site (however noting this is in the same ownership as the Site).

Medium Potential Sensitivity due to context and/or partially oblique or screened view:

- At least 25 dwellings along Thorn Road that face onto the neighbouring field to the west of the Site
- At least 5 dwelling along Albion Road opposite the north western part of the Site where it meets with Albion Road.
- Holdens Farm and Cottages, neighbouring to the east of the Site
- Farm houses to the south on Thorn Road.

Other houses in the vicinity are essentially 'scoped out' as views to the Site are limited by other surrounding houses, mature vegetation, orientation and / or distance away from the Site.

3.5.4 Users of PRoWs and Open Space

Sensitivity Assessment of Users of PRoWs:

Medium to High Potential Sensitivity due to orientation to the Site, proximity, rural context and/or openness of view:

- Users of footpath KH281, with its access from Albion Road located directly opposite the Site's northern parcel.
- Users of footpath KH 278 located to the south and east of the Site from Copper Lane
- Pedestrians using Thorn Road/Albion Road to the west of the Site.
- Pedestrians using Copper Lane to the south of the Site

Medium Potential Sensitivity due to context and/or partially oblique or screened view:

- Users of footpath KH 279 adjoins KH 278 within open fields to the south east of the Site.

Users of other PRoWs and open spaces in the vicinity are essentially 'scoped out' as they are either screened behind dense vegetation or houses, orientated away from the Site or set within the existing settlement context to be assessed further.

Other users of the road network including motorists, cyclists, horse riders, pedestrians

Medium Potential Sensitivity due to orientation, context of existing settlement and/or level of screening:

- Copper Lane
- Albion Road
- Thorn Road

3.6 Selection of Viewpoints for Assessment

Figures 6.1 - 6.7

The following public viewpoints have been selected as representative of the views of the range of receptors with high and medium sensitivity identified above for further assessment. The viewpoint locations are shown on Figure 5 and the accompanying photographs on Figures 6.1-6.8.

A selection of photography has been used dating from winter 2021 to summer 2023. The 8 key viewpoints are set out below with their associated visual sensitivity. The Viewpoint Photography Figures include an alternative photo taken from either a slightly different angle / position or from a different season providing the viewer to understand the wider context and seasonal change of the existing vegetation.

Viewpoints 1: This view has been taken from Albion Road opposite the existing vehicle access to the Howlands looking towards the western boundary of the Site. This view is also close to where PRoW KH281 joins Albion Road.

Receptors using the Albion Road near to the Site heading into or out of Marden are susceptible to change.

Current views along this stretch of Albion Road consist of the existing property entrance and a 'gappy' hedgerow forming the boundary between the Site and the road. Detractors include the dilapidated structures / boundary treatments, overhead wires and the bollards at the intersection with Plain Road.

There are no formed footpaths / pavements along this part of Albion Road.

Nearby views for pedestrians using Albion Road outside the Site are considered to be of **Medium sensitivity** to change. Receptors using vehicles are less so.

Private views from neighbouring houses are considered to have **Medium sensitivity** to change.

Viewpoints 2: This has been taken from Plain Road, at the intersection with Albion and Thorn Road, looking toward the northern part of the Site.

Mature vegetation that forms the boundaries to the Site and its field parcels is visible. There are also glimpsed views of the roofs of some houses within Russet Grove and Howlands. However, these are not necessarily prominent because of the intervening neighbouring fields and mature hedgerow that forms the boundary with Albion Road and Thorn Road.

Similar to Viewpoint 1 nearby views from along Plain Road are susceptible to change however slightly less so because of intervening neighbouring field and its boundary vegetation. Public views from here are considered to have **Medium to Low sensitivity** to change. Receptors using vehicles are less so.

Private views from neighbouring houses are considered to have **Medium to Low sensitivity** to change.

Viewpoints 3: This view has been taken on Thorn Road, close to the junction with Copper Lane, looking North.

Residential houses located on the sloping landform on Thorn Road are visible, as is some of the roofs of houses within the Russet Grove development.

There are views of existing field parcels and their boundary vegetation, particularly during winter months. The views represent how receptors experience the edge of the settlement and transition between open countryside and the residential area.

In the context of the Site and its potential development, views from along Thorn Road are considered to have **Medium sensitivity** to change.

There are likely to be private views towards the Site from those houses along Thorn Road. These will also have **Medium sensitivity** to change.

Viewpoint 4: This is taken from along Copper Lane at the existing access gate looking north across the Site.

This photo represents views from receptors using Copper Lane and looking across the Site through gaps in the existing hedgerows towards the Site's sloping ground, fruit orchards and the ponds.

In the context of the development Site, receptors using the lane as a pedestrian are considered the most susceptible to change. Although there are some views of residential building and associated infrastructure, the views are predominately rural.

It is worth noting that views towards and within the Site from along Copper Lane are limited because of the existing mature hedgerows on the boundaries.

Views from Copper Lane are considered to have **Medium to High sensitivity** to change.

The view also provides a retrospective view of some of those properties within Russet Grove that have views across the Site.

Private views from those residential properties that experience views across the Site are considered to have **Medium to High sensitivity** to change.

Viewpoint 5: This is taken where PRoW KM278 between Copper Lane and Holders Farm.

The viewpoint represents views for receptors using this part of the PRoW network. The Site and its boundary vegetation is beyond further vegetation within the neighbouring Farm and is not obviously visible from along this part of the PRoW network. Although relatively close to the Site, views from along this part of the PRoW network are considered to have **Medium sensitivity** to change.

Viewpoint 6: Taken from along Thorn Road, south of the Site looking north towards Marden.

This is taken on the approach to Marden and represents receptors using Thorn Road on the approach to the settlement.

There are glimpsed views of residential houses within Russet Grove on higher ground that form the existing edge of the settlement and also those residential houses on Albion Road. The foreground is predominately rural countryside in character, with mature field boundaries and trees that screen the settlement edge some of the residential properties on lower ground along Thorn Road.

There are no footpaths along Thorn Road, and it is considered that the majority of receptors experiencing these views would be in vehicles travelling from the national speed limit to the 30 miles an hour. It is assumed that some pedestrians may use the road.

In the context of the development Site, receptors using this part of the road network are considered susceptible to some change. Views are considered to have **Medium sensitivity** to change.

Private views from this area are considered to have **Medium to low sensitivity** to change.

Viewpoint 7: Taken from PRoW KM278 southeast of the Site looking back towards Marden.

The viewpoint represents views for receptors using this part of the PRoW network. Existing residential housing on the lower ground of Thorn Road is visible, as is the mature vegetation along Copper Lane. The Site itself is not visible because of the existing mature vegetation along Copper Lane and within neighbouring farms.

Views are considered to have **Medium sensitivity to change** in the context potential development on the Site.

4.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Scheme Description

Figure 7

4.1.1 The proposed residential scheme is shown on Figure 7. It is a layout aimed at achieving a deliverable development solution whilst working within the constraints of the Site, respecting the adjoining neighbours, seeking to respond to policy requirements as far as possible and seeking to fit the wider landscape context.

4.1.2 The scheme is more fully described within the Design and Access Statement (DAS) but of most relevance to landscape and visual issues are the following:

- 117 new dwellings set within a network of verdant landscape
- New entrance from Albion Road close to the existing settlement edge
- A verdant approach through the north western part of the Site leading to a upper and mid levels of new housing
- Boundary vegetation is retained and enhanced
- Creation of central village green within the upper levels
- A greenway spine road leading from the upper levels to the lower mid levels
- Provision on-site for open space throughout the development
- New trees and hedgerows throughout
- Retain areas of the existing orchards and integrating these into the areas of open space visible from Copper Lane
- Creation of a SUDs scheme including existing ponds and new water retention basins, including management of these features

4.2 Conserving and reinforcing the existing landscape

4.2.1 The proposals seek to protect and conserve most of the mature trees around the edges of the Site.

4.2.2 The proposals commit to retaining and enhancing existing and newly-planted hedgerows.

4.2.3 The proposals commit to good management of areas of existing Orchard to be retained.

4.2.4 The layout seeks to conserve and reinforce the existing ponds within the southern part of the Site.

4.2.5 The layout includes and incorporates two parts of the existing row of Silver Birch to help with instant screening while the new trees and planting matures.

4.2.6 The proposals includes an Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (OLEMP) to describe the commitment to ongoing conservation and reinforcement of the existing landscape within the Site.

4.3. Enhancing the landscape

4.3.1 As noted in the landscape proposals by OSP within the DAS, the proposals include:

- *Restoring existing north - south boundaries and integrate these into the development master plan;*
- *Enhancing habitat opportunities around water bodies and ditches by promoting and managing a framework of vegetation in these areas;*
- *Planting new oaks within areas of open space and oak standards within hedgerows to replace aging species;*
- *Incorporating meaningful, accessible and usable areas of public open space;*
- *Enabling new pedestrian links throughout the development. Particularly from PRoW KM281 across Albion Road through the development to Copper Lane; - as pedestrian and cycle route*
- *Integrating Sustainable Drainage Solutions where feasible;*

- *Limiting housing development on the lower / southern parts to the site and reducing the building scale southwards - to one and half storeys;*
- *Avoiding suburban paraphernalia such as close board fencing and using more suitable materials to improve the settlement edge; - brickwork walls;*
- *Carefully positioning, orientating new housing to reduce the sense of encroachment of housing down the sloping ground toward the rural open countryside;*
- *Softening the visual prominence of housing through the native planting throughout the development;*
- *Enhancing the area of ponds and basins to the south and making this area accessible to the community;*
- *Providing large tree groupings to the south;*
- *Retaining working community orchards to east and west; and*
- *All set within wildflower “meadowlands” of indigenous local species*

The extents of usable and natural open space, complimented by the “greenway” and the community village green, respond to the Landscape Strategy diagram with a clear hierarchy of landscaping from north to south across the site.

A Local Area of Play (LAP) is provided to the north east and community orchards are retained and integrated into the wider landscaping to the southern edges of the built proposals.

The extensive ‘parkland’ and existing ponds to the south are interconnected by a meandering raised boardwalk which has educational and amenity features integrated into the design aspirations.

- 4.3.2 The design development also responding to the public engagement resulting in migrating the overall proposals southwards, providing a widened landscape buffer to the north has repositioned the community village green concept more centrally.
- 4.3.3 The “greenway” within the proposals interconnects the site access with the village green and southern areas of the site, retaining the watercourse alignment, and the historic field alignments in a series of smaller pockets of development to the south, set within and overlooking an extensive pond parkland.

4.4 Responding to townscape character

- 4.4.1 Although the DAS provides further information on the approach to layout, massing and arrangement of dwellings some of the landscape principles relevant to this assessment are the measures to integrate the development with both the existing settlement and its context.
- 4.4.2 The scale of the proposed buildings is reduced in the southern area with single and one and half storey properties providing natural surveillance to the parkland. The boardwalk through the parkland is an attractive feature which has educational and leisure benefits for the wider community, providing space for walking and exercise.
- 4.4.3 The choice of materials has been selected to respond to the valued landscape and townscape character of this area.

5.0 IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 5.1 This section identifies the potential impacts on the landscape during construction and those that follow.

5.1.1 Construction Impacts

A full assessment of construction cannot be undertaken at this early stage without further detail although some general observations can be made. Typically, a scheme of this size and scale would be constructed over a period of 2 to 3 years. Therefore, residents along North Street and those users of the neighbouring to the South, being the most sensitive to construction, will be affected by construction but this period will be relatively short term.

Nonetheless during construction the following landscape impacts are possible;

- Potential physical impacts arising from construction of the proposed development on the existing landscape within the Site such as an unplanned loss of trees, temporary haul roads and the like. The scheme has been designed to avoid trees and hedgerows and their Root Protection Areas (RPAs) and will take special construction measures where required, such as working in proximity to retained trees and hedgerows. Potential physical impacts on those retained trees and hedgerows due to construction are therefore considered to be negligible.
 - Potential impacts to the landscape/townscape character within the wider area as a result of loss of tranquillity, visibility of construction activities or the development during construction. Due to the lack of inter-visibility with the wider settlement and the wider landscape area, any effects are considered likely to be minor and also of a short term nature.
 - Impacts of temporary site infrastructure such as visibility of site traffic and construction compounds. Site traffic arriving and leaving a construction site will always be unpopular but in this context the visual issues will be short term and mainly affect the immediate environs of the entrance. Wider landscape impacts are considered negligible.
- 5.1.2 Assuming that a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is put in place prior to construction there is no reason at this stage to believe that there are any significant temporary or short term construction impacts, or impacts that cannot be carefully managed, (such as careful temporary lighting, RPA measures, hoardings and working hours) to an acceptable level of landscape and visual disturbance in accordance with a responsible and considerate contracting code.
- 5.1.3 Accordingly no significant temporary adverse construction impacts are anticipated.

5.2 Operational Impacts

Taking into account the proposed design and layout of the deliverable scheme, which aims to reduce some impacts at source, such as the retention of existing trees along all boundaries, the remaining potential permanent effects on landscape character and on landscape features are anticipated to be as follows:

5.2.1 Impacts on Landscape Features:

5.2.1.1 *Topography and Landform:*

There will be some change to the topography of the Site due to the nature of building houses and it associated infrastructure on a sloping field, particularly on the southern lower levels. However, as illustrated by the cross sections within the DAS, the proposals are following the site levels with minimal earthworks.

It is therefore considered that the magnitude of change will be Low to Medium. The site is considered Medium sensitivity to change resulting in a **Moderate to Minor adverse landscape effect**.

5.2.1.2 *Existing Hedgerows and Trees:*

All of the orchard trees are to be removed except two small areas within the lower / southern area of Site– one close to the west boundary, and one close to the east.

The development retains parts of the Silver Birch line on the upper levels to help provide instant screening until succession planting establishes.

Separate to the majority of the existing orchard trees and the Silver Birch, the development will result in some tree and hedgerow removal. This is mainly the result of the new access road into the Site from Albion Road through to the other field parcels.

As noted in the Arboriculture Impact Assessment (AIA)

The proposed residential development of the site would require the removal of 12 individual trees and 16 groups (or parts of groups), all but one of which are BS category C or U. As such these should not limit the proposals, with the vast majority of the key boundary features retained.

Apart from these, the development proposal retains all other existing trees and hedgerows around the boundaries of the site. Including those that have higher value within the Tree Survey.

Overall and on balance, the magnitude of change on existing hedgerows and trees is considered low resulting in a **Minor adverse effect on existing trees and hedgerow.**

Worth noting and as described within the DAS, the OLEMP and further below, the proposals include a commitment to plant and maintain extensive new native trees and hedgerows throughout the development. This brings a moderate to minor magnitude of change in relation to vegetation within the Site, resulting in a **minor beneficial landscape effect.**

5.2.1.3 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

As noted in the BNG Briefing Note by Ecology Solutions: “In summary, it is considered that the losses of ecological assets on site will be compensated for in full with the additional mitigation providing increased levels of biodiversity and species richness when compared to the present baseline”.

The Biodiversity Metric returns the following headlines results for the Site:

		DEFRA BNG Metric Categories	
		Area	Linear Hedge
Baseline results (onsite)	Units	13.11	6.41
Post development results (onsite)	Units	16.75	10.22
	Unit Change	+3.64	+3.81
	% Change	+27.77%	+59.36%

5.3 Impacts on Landscape Character

Character Area A – The Site

Quite clearly the change from the character of the current fields as commercial orchards, to a residential development will be substantial, largely regardless of density and landscape mitigation.

However, the proposal includes measures to limit the major effects of change and focus development on less sensitive areas within the Site, such as the retention of existing boundary hedgerows and mature trees, the creation of a green corridor with new tree provisions and limiting housing on the lower, south side, of the Site.

Development will bring minor beneficial landscape and townscape benefits to the Site through the enhancement of hedgerows, tree planting and creation of new habits for wildlife.

The Site is considered to have Medium to High Landscape Sensitivity, the change from fields to housing is considered to be high resulting in a **Major adverse landscape effect** for the Site itself. This is tempered by the inherent mitigation, including limiting housing on the southern part of the Site and protecting the field boundaries, retaining parts of the existing orchards and other valued landscape features.

Given time for the new landscape features to mature, the landscape effect is reduced to a **Moderate adverse landscape effect.**

Character Area B – The edge of settlement to the north and to the west of the Site

This character area is considered to have medium sensitivity to change.

The change in character will come from the creation of the new access road into the development and the change to the current edge to the settlement.

The proposed buildings are set back from Albion Road to provide an adequate buffer with new soft landscape elements.

The other change relates to the extension of the settlement edge in this location from higher ground to lower ground. Noting that this is not necessarily out of context with existing residential properties following the sloping ground of Thorn Road.

The retention of the existing boundary vegetation and the integration of new areas of open space and green and blue infrastructure help provides a new transition and softer edge to the settlement.

Area B is considered to have Medium Landscape Sensitivity. The proposed development will result in medium to low change in character of this area.

On balance, the effect is considered a **Moderate to Minor adverse landscape effect**.

Character Area C – The countryside to the south and east of the Site

The development will bring some small change to the character of the countryside to the south and east. This is considered to be fairly localised to the Site and not significant to the wider countryside.

The layout includes the retention of existing Site boundaries with scope for enhancements on the east and south sides.

This character area has Medium to High sensitivity to change. The potential magnitude of change caused by the development is considered low, resulting in a **Minor adverse landscape effect**.

Table 2: Summary of Landscape Impacts

LANDSCAPE IMPACTS					
	Context	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change / Impact	Effect (at 1 year)	Effect over time (at year 15) with mitigation
<i>Landscape Features</i>					
Topography & landform	On ridgeline and south sloping land at similar gradient to Thorn Road	Medium	Low to Medium	Minor adverse	Minor adverse
Hedgerows	Most retained New hedgerows included within the proposals.	Medium to High	Low	Minor adverse through the removal of some. However the proposals include new hedgerows through the development resulting in a beneficial change	Minor beneficial

Trees	<p>Almost all Orchard trees removed bar two areas.</p> <p>Most other trees retained</p> <p>Commitment to plant new trees throughout development.</p>	Medium to High	Low	<p>Minor adverse.</p> <p>However the proposals include new trees throughout the development resulting in a beneficial change.</p>	Minor beneficial
<i>Landscape Character</i>					
A: The Site	<p>Majority of the existing fields and land parcels replaced with residential development. With swathes of open space and a large area of open space retained at the southern / lowest part of the site.</p>	Varies slightly across the Site but generally Medium to High	High	Major adverse	Reducing to moderate to major due to minor benefits brought by additional vegetation as it matures
B: Edge of settlement	<p>New development on edge of Marden adjoining Site.</p> <p>Residential homes along Albion/Thorn road on the outskirts of Marden.</p> <p>New pedestrian connections through the Site.</p> <p>New transitional and verdant edge to settlement created by the development.</p>	Medium	Medium to low	Moderate to Minor adverse	Moderate to Minor adverse.
C: Countryside	<p>Open fields, vegetated boundaries rural character, country lanes on lower ground to development.</p>	Medium to High	Low	Minor adverse	Minor adverse

5.4 Identification of Potential Impacts – Visual

Figures 6.1 - 6.7

- 5.4.1 This section reviews the viewpoints described in sections above, from which there may be more than one type of user or receptor and where context is most important. Whilst impacts are noted the reader should be aware that these are also individually assessed in the following section and hence avoid 'double counting' the same impact. In the impact description, where pertinent, a distinction is also made between winter and summer although a period of growth and maturity for new mitigation planting of 10-15 years should be allowed for where relevant.

Viewpoints 1: This view has been taken from Albion Road opposite the Site and its proposed access road.

Nearby views from along Albion Road outside the Site are considered to be of medium sensitivity to change. Receptors using vehicles are less so.

Receptors using Albion Road will experience a level of change. The most significant change will be from the new access road and those new properties within the north western parcel. However this is quite contained and not necessarily out of context at this edge of settlement location. The proposed development has limited proposed dwellings in this area and allowed areas for new planting and the retention of existing boundary as far as possible.

The magnitude of change in local views from along Albion Road and from PRoW KH281 where it joins Albion Road are considered to be medium to low. It is also considered that the change in views will be limited to views very close to the Site and the new access road.

The immediate visual effect is likely to be **Moderate to Minor adverse effect**.

Over time, say 10 to 15 years following the establishment of the proposed new hedge and new trees, it is considered that the development will 'bed in' to its surrounding and views towards the development from Albion Road would not be adverse or cause a perceptible deterioration in current views.

Private views from nearby properties along Albion Road will experience some change, mainly because of the new access road into the development. It is considered that this will result in a **Minor adverse effect** for these private views.

Viewpoints 2: This view has been taken from along Plain Road.

Views towards the Site across the intersection between Thorn and Albion Road with neighbouring field and its boundary vegetation providing some distance and screening.

Views towards the Site by those using Plain Road are considered to have medium to low sensitivity to change. Some top of the roofs to the proposed housing may be visible through the existing vegetation. However, the magnitude of change from here is considered low resulting in a **Minor visual effect**.

Private views from nearby houses share similar views and are considered to medium to low sensitivity to change with low change and therefore resulting in a **Minor visual effect**.

Similar to viewpoint 1, it is considered that the development will 'bed in' to its surroundings would not cause a perceptible deterioration in current views towards the Site and the sense of arrival / departure from Marden.

Viewpoints 3: This view has been taken from along Thorn Road south west of the Site.

Views towards the Site by those receptors using Thorn Road are considered to have Medium sensitivity to change. Whilst the vegetation along the southern boundary of the north west part of the Site and some of the vegetation along the western boundary of the sloping field, the Site is not on direct view. Existing residential properties on Thorn Road are visible. There are also glimpsed views of the Russet Grove development on higher ground through the vegetation.

The magnitude of change in views from here is considered low mainly due to the existing boundary vegetation, the neighbouring field and also because of the existing residential housing and the Site being on the end of the settlement. This results in a **Minor adverse visual effect**.

Private views from nearby houses share similar views and are considered to medium to low sensitivity to change with low change and therefore resulting in a **Minor adverse visual effect**.

Similar to viewpoint 1, it is considered that the development will 'bed in' to its surroundings would not cause a perceptible deterioration in current views towards the Site and the sense of arrival / departure from Marden.

Viewpoint 4: This is taken from along Copper Lane at the existing access gate looking north across the Site.

This photo represents those direct views from receptors standing on Copper Lane looking across the Site from gaps in the existing hedgerows. Existing views are towards the Site's sloping ground, fruit orchards and the ponds. Housing within Russet Grove is also visible.

The magnitude of change brought by the development is considered medium to high resulting in **Moderate to Major visual effect**. This is limited to those direct views across the Site from the access gate and from gaps along the existing boundary vegetation. The visual effect on views from along Copper Lane is considered to be less so and borderline significant.

The change and the significance of the effect would be far greater if the residential housing be closer to Copper Lane and / or if the scheme didn't include the retention of parts of the orchards, the ponds and internal hedgerows.

The view also provides a retrospective view of some of those properties within Russet Grove that have views across the Site.

Private views from those residential properties that experience views across the Site are considered to have Medium to High sensitivity to change. The magnitude of change to these private views brought by the developments is considered high resulting in a **Moderate to Major adverse visual effect**.

Viewpoint 5: This is taken where PRoW KM278.

Views from along this part of the PRoW network are considered to have Medium sensitivity to change. The magnitude of change is considered to be low due to the retention of existing vegetation and the inclusion of new vegetation / enhancements to the eastern boundary.

The visual effect is considered to be **Minor adverse** and potentially negligible during summer months and as the proposed vegetation establishes.

It is likely that private views from neighbouring fields and farmhouses will experience some change in views. This is tempered by the retention and enhancement of boundary vegetation within the proposed development. The effect on private views is likely to be **Minor adverse**. Perhaps slightly higher during winter months.

Viewpoint 6: Taken from along Thorn Road, south of the Site looking north towards Marden.

Views are considered to have Medium sensitivity to change for receptors using Thorn Road. The change is likely to be brought by viewing new housing from lower ground. This is likely to limited the views rooflines and it is likely to be screened by existing vegetation and the new vegetation throughout the development.

The proposed development includes single storey / one and half storey properties on the lowers levels of the Site. These are likely to be screen by the existing vegetation along the intervening field parcels.

In the context of the existing settlement edge and the inherent mitigation, the magnitude of change in views for these receptors is likely to be low resulting in a **Minor adverse visual effect**. This may increase during the winter months or at night with potential filtered light spill from housing.

Private views from this area are considered to have Medium to low sensitivity to change and the change is similar to those public views.

Viewpoint 7: Taken from PRoW KM278 southeast of the Site looking back towards Marden.

The viewpoint represents views for receptors using this part of the PRoW network. Existing residential housing on Thorn Road is visible, as is the mature vegetation along Copper Lane. The Site is not visible because of the existing mature vegetation along Copper Lane and within neighbouring farms. Although there may be some very small change during winter months and perhaps at night the visual effect is considered **negligible**.

5.4.2 This section summarises the individual or groups of receptors identified in the baseline, along with any other receptors and effects arising as part of the assessment from the viewpoints.

Table 3: Summary of Visual Impacts

VISUAL IMPACTS:					
	Context	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Effect (at year 1)	Effect over time (at year 15) with mitigation
<i>Users of open space / PRoWs etc</i>					
Albion Road	The new access joins Albion Road.	Medium	Medium to low	Moderate to Minor adverse	Minor adverse as vegetation matures and development 'settles' in.
Plain Road	Views towards the Site across the intersection between Thorn and Albion Road. Existing boundary vegetation. Neighbouring field and its boundary vegetation provides some distance and screening.	Medium to Low	Low	Minor adverse	Minor adverse to Negligible as vegetation matures
Thorn Road	West of site beyond neighbouring field	Medium	Low	Minor adverse	Minor adverse to Negligible as vegetation matures
PRoW KM281	West of Site, opposite proposed entrance	Medium to High	Medium to Low	Moderate to Minor adverse	Minor adverse as vegetation matures and development bed in
PRoW KM278	Southeast of Site across Copper Lane within neighbouring field	Medium	Low	Minor adverse.	Minor / negligible

PRoW KM279	Southeast of Site, adjoins KM278	Medium to Low	Low	Minor adverse to Negligible	Minor / negligible
Copper Lane	South of Site. Links to proposed pedestrian access. View through gaps in hedgerow and gate access.	Medium to High	Medium to high	Moderate to Major adverse. Mainly during winter months and through gaps in hedgerows.	Moderate to Minor adverse as vegetation matures and development bed in
<i>Residents</i>					
The Howlands	Directly adjacent to the northwest corner of the Site. Proposed access road cuts through land	Medium	medium	Moderate adverse	Moderate to Minor adverse
Dwellings along Albion Road	Opposite new access road.	Medium	Medium to low	Moderate to Minor adverse	Minor adverse as vegetation matures and development 'settles' in.
Dwellings along Thorn Road	Direct windows have views directly towards the west side of the Site	Medium	Medium to low	Moderate to Minor adverse	Minor adverse as vegetation matures and development 'settles' in.
Dwellings to the North within Russet Grove	Rear gardens about the northern boundary	Medium to High	Medium to High	Moderate to Major adverse	Moderate adverse as new vegetation matures.
Listed Building – Bishop House Jewel House	Potential views	Medium	Low	Minor adverse	Negligible

6.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

6.1 The primary aim of mitigation is to reduce the number of significant adverse impacts identified and the inherent mitigation has been taken into account. Some reduction in impacts comes with time as new development becomes more bedded in and new planting matures.

The sections below are arranged to reflect the 'inherent' mitigation that has been incorporated as part of the scheme design mitigation which strives to further reduce specific impacts identified and to off-set negative effects by improving the overall package of landscape and townscape benefits in accordance with the management aims of the LCAs.

6.2 *Inherent Mitigation*

The 'significant' effects are those identified as being either a major or moderate adverse impact. The reduction of other minor adverse impacts and design enhancements are all desirable but it is the significant effects that are the focus of attention for mitigation. These can be summarised as:

Table 4: The Significant Effects and Principles of Mitigation

Significant Landscape Effects	Mitigation
<p>The loss of the Orchard fields within the Site to housing development and the resulting change in landscape character.</p>	<p>This is a permanent effect and one that cannot be mitigated although is one essentially the same for any other greenfield site.</p> <p>A scheme which is of a local scale and seeks to knit it to its context helps to minimise wider effects outside of the Site itself. Such that beyond the immediately adjoining areas there is little impact on wider landscape character.</p> <p>The development includes several landscape enhancements which will help to mitigate this loss including a new trees, hedgerow and open space through the Site. Two areas of the existing orchard are to be retained along with many of the existing hedgerows and mature trees, with scope to be enhanced over time.</p> <p>A network of pedestrian footpaths connect the Site internally as well as to the external network of PRoWs and countryside beyond.</p> <p>The development also illustrates substantial space for meaningful street tree planting, swales and other landscape features which will help to mitigate the landscape effects, which will become even more minimal over time as these features mature and embed the development within its context.</p>

Significant Visual Effects	Mitigation
Private views from nearby residential properties that face onto the Site.	<p>The proposed layout includes a number of measures to help minimise the potential visual impact of development for those receptors who have views towards the Site from private residential housing. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retained boundary vegetation where possible • Careful consideration of the proposed orientation of windows / aspect of new buildings • Opportunity for new tree planting

Although borderline significant: Views from Albion Road	<p>The proposed layout includes a number of measures to help minimise the potential visual impact of development for those receptors using Albion Road. This broadly follows those measures to mitigate any potential impact on the wider landscape character, but also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting the new buildings back from the boundary • Providing space for extra tree planting along the access road • Enhanced / additional planting of the existing hedgerow <p>With these measures in place, and given the context of existing nearby houses and the new development of Russet Grove, views towards the Site from Albion Road will not be out of context and not necessarily adverse. Particularly in time (say 10 to 15 years) when the new vegetation has time to establish / mature.</p>
--	---

Although remaining effects are minor or negligible, additional enhancement mitigation will assist in further reducing or negating them.

6.3 Further Improvements

Other committed improvement mitigation considerations include:

- As committed to within the application, no internal lighting to the access road to maintain, as far as practical, a darker edge to the new development and the settlement as a whole and to limit light spill into surrounding areas, especially to the south.
- As committed to within the application, the range and type of hard materials, boundary treatments and associated works are to reflect local rural edge distinctiveness.

Although there will always be some landscape and visual effects from new development this potential range of mitigation measures limits their significance and ensures they are maintained well within the range that is normally associated with new housing / mixed use.

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1. This assessment identifies the potential landscape and visual effects of a mixed use development of 117 dwellings on land east of Albion Road and north of Copper Lane, Marden.
- 7.2. The Site is an irregular shaped area that adjoins residential and settlement edge to the North, an open field to the west, a farm house and paddocks to the east and a rural lane (Copper Lane) to the south.
- 7.3. The Site falls within Local Character Area (LCA) 44 – Staplehurst Low Weald.
- 7.4. The Site falls within Country Council's Character Area Low Weald Fruit Belt
- 7.5. The Site falls within Natural England's National Character Area No 121 Low Weald.
- 7.6. The Site and its context is of rural / settlement edge character.
- 7.7. The Site is sloping from north to south, broadly following the sloping ground to Thorne Road.
- 7.8. The majority of the Site is used as commercial plum and apple Orchards. There is also a parcel of overgrown land with dilapidated buildings to the north west that connects to Albion Road.
- 7.9. The Site is generally contained by hedgerows with mature trees interspersed within, however gaps between the trees still allow for long distance views across the open countryside and lower land to the south and east.
- 7.10. The southern parts of the Site comprises of ponds and existing vegetation.
- 7.11. The proposed development layout has been influenced by a landscape appraisal and in consideration of other Site assessments such as Ecology, Heritage and Arboriculture.
- 7.12. The proposed development seeks to protect and enhance the majority of landscape features within and around the Site.
- 7.13. The proposals also include a commitment to further landscape enhancements such as the creation of a new network of accessible open spaces, establishment and ongoing maintenance of new tree planting, taking a SuDS approach throughout the development, and enabling green and blue infrastructure to be multifunctional.
- 7.14. As noted in the BNG Briefing note by Ecology Solutions: "The results of the BNG analysis work have confirmed that the site can deliver significant net-gains to biodiversity of 27.77%. This is in excess of what would be required when the requirement of the Environment Act come into force (i.e. +10% BNG). As such, the proposals are therefore in-alignment with the relevant development plan.
- 7.15. The design development of the proposed layout has been influenced by and responded to The Maidstone Borough Council edition of Building For Life 12.
- 7.16. The design development also responding to the public engagement resulting in migrating the overall proposals southwards, providing a widened landscape buffer to the north has repositioned the community village green concept more centrally.
- 7.17. The "greenway" within the proposals interconnects the site access with the village green and southern areas of the site, retaining the watercourse alignment, and the historic field alignments in a series of smaller pockets of development to the south, set within and overlooking an extensive pond parkland.
- 7.18. The scale of the proposed buildings is reduced in the southern area with single and one and half storey properties providing natural surveillance to the parkland. The boardwalk through the parkland is an attractive feature which has educational and leisure benefits for the wider community, providing space for walking and exercise.
- 7.19. The proposals are set in a natural environment nestled next to the existing development with integrated amenity and pedestrian linkages reflecting the historic field boundaries north - south and maintaining and integrating parts of the existing orchards.

Assessment of effects on Character:

- 7.20. The Site is considered to be sensitive to change and the proposed development will give a clear change in character from the existing commercial orchards to residential development regardless of density and mitigation. This landscape effect on the Site is considered to be **Major adverse**.

- 7.21 However, this effect is well contained to the Site and effects on the landscape character of wider open countryside is considered to have a medium to low adverse effect.
- 7.22 The proposals will change the edge of the settlement regardless of density and mitigation. However, the development layout has responded to the sensitivities of the Site and the edge of the settlement to reduce the negative effects.
- 7.23 The proposed layout includes areas of open space and corridors to allow establishment of new tree planting and vegetated swales to help soften the development character and set the buildings within a verdant landscape framework.

Assessment of effects on Views:

- 7.24 Views towards the Site will change as a result of development.
- 7.25 There will be a change in views caused by the new access road along Albion Road. This is likely to be very localised to those residents adjacent, and users of this part of Albion Road. The visual effect is considered not to be substantial.
- 7.26 Although there may be a change in some localised public views from nearby PRowS because of the proposed development. The change is not considered out of context and are not considered to be a substantial effect. However, it is noted that the development will be more noticeable during winter months, particularly from Copper Lane.
- 7.27 Far-reaching views from countryside to the south and the east will have some minor change. The effect on these wider views is considered to be minor and in some cases negligible in the context of the existing built edge already being visible and the inherent new vegetation helping screen and 'sit' the new housing within a verdant landscape.
- 7.28 The development will change the nature of existing views for some residents in the immediate vicinity, for example on Thorn Road and within Russet Grove. The proposed development seeks to limit these effects whereby much of the existing landscape features are retained and the perception of negative change is minimised. Nonetheless, the effects on some private views will be **Moderate to Major adverse**.
- 7.29 It is considered that over time as the development and landscape features mature, the significance of these effects will reduce.

In Conclusion:

- 7.30 Whilst a couple of significant effects have been identified, these are all contained locally and are not considered to be detrimental to the wider landscape character.
- 7.31 Whilst it is acknowledged that development will change the nature of existing views for some residents in the immediate vicinity and potentially users of Copper Lane during winter months, the considered layout seeks to limit these effects such that most of the existing landscape features are retained and the perception of negative change is minimised. It is also considered that, given time, the significance of these effects will reduce.
- 7.32 With careful detailed design and a commitment to ongoing establishment of proposed vegetation, the proposals include measures that will help temper the identified significant effects and reinforce the valued landscape characteristic and value features, such as:
- the benefits brought by the new network of open spaces, with its access from Copper Lane and linking through to Albion Road;
 - substantial new native tree planting throughout the development;
 - enhanced wetland / pond areas to the south with accessible boardwalks and opportunities for interpretation / information about local wildlife and the local area;
 - carefully selected materials that reflect the valued local architectural vernacular; and
 - gradual, verdant and positive transition between the edge of the settlement and the open countryside.

- 7.33 The principles represented by the proposals and the measures they include are considered to be comprehensive and aimed at securing a good fit with the environment. The proposed housing development is immediately adjacent to the existing settlement and seeks to be in keeping with the valued characteristics of the settlement and wider countryside. They should be taken forward at the detailed stage and opportunities for other associated enhancements and improvements such as biodiversity and natural play incorporated at the appropriate time.

APPENDIX A

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Guidance

Although an informal assessment at this stage the approach reflects guidance in The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's (2013) publication – *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition*.

Baseline Data Collection

The assessment was carried out using available OS mapping and a visit to the site and its surrounding area to verify and assess likely effects combined with a review of associated documents. The following documents were of particular relevance and were used to aid the assessment:

- The Proposed Layout by OSP Architects.
- Design and Access Statement by OSP Architects.
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment by Broadoak.
- Ecological Assessment by Ecology Solutions.
- BNG Briefing Note by Ecology Solutions.
- Heritage Impact Assessment by Orion.
- MBC Local Plan 2017.
- MBC Draft Local Plan Reg 19.
- Natural England: National Character Area Profile 121: Low Weald.
- Kent Country Council: Landscape Assessment of Kent 2004.
- MBC Landscape Character Assessment 2013.

The following exercises have been used to aid the assessment:

- The Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) of the Site, assuming the illustrative residential development, has been assessed to determine the visual envelope within which such development is likely to be significant in views. This is defined using mapping, site visits and Viewpoints from the site visit and professional judgement. A description of the extent of the ZVI and an explanation of the determining influences which defined it is included in the visual assessment below.
- A brief assessment of the likely type, numbers and sensitivity of visual receptors (i.e. people who might be affected by views of the site) within the ZVI.
- Viewpoints from various representative viewpoints.
- Photographs were taken in February 2021, April 2021, July 2022 and July 2023.
- The preparation of an Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (OLEMP).

Criteria for Defining the 'Sensitivity' of Landscape and Visual Receptors

In defining the Baseline Conditions an assessment of the sensitivity of each of the landscape or townscape features and visual receptors is assessed in order to provide a basis for judging the likely effects. 'Sensitivity' assessment is made up of judgements of the 'susceptibility to change' of the resource or receptor arising from the specific proposal, in this case a residential scheme on the edge of an existing settlement, and the 'value' attached to the resource, receptor or view. The highest value is usually only associated with heritage assets or designated landscapes.

The criteria used are based on policy and designations, the relevant Landscape Character Area(s), the site visit assessment and the type of development change:

High Sensitivity - Landscape/townscape or features of distinctive character in good condition/high quality perceived as being of interest at the regional/national level. A highly valued landscape considered susceptible to even very small changes.

High-Medium Sensitivity - Landscape/townscape or features of distinctive character, in good condition/high-moderate quality that may be of importance at a local level and susceptible to change.

Medium Sensitivity - Landscape/townscape or features of moderate strength of character/visual interest, and moderate condition/quality considered to be reasonably tolerant to some change.

Low Sensitivity - Landscape/townscape or features in generally poor condition/quality, often including visual detractors such as power lines, industrial or derelict land or inappropriate built forms with low aesthetic value, visual interest or sense of cohesion, and low value and considered potentially tolerant of substantial change.

The criteria used to determine the relative sensitivity of visual receptors are as follows:

High Sensitivity - local residents with direct, close or widespread views and recreational users of the Public Rights of Ways (PRoWS) and public open spaces (walkers, cyclists, horse riders etc.) who are orientated towards the Site and likely to be in the location to enjoy the view, particularly in high value/designated landscapes.

Medium Sensitivity - local residents with oblique and longer distance views and recreational users of the PRoWS and public open spaces who are not primarily orientated towards the development.

Low Sensitivity – local residents and recreational users of the PRoWS and public open spaces with far views or partially obstructed views in which the Site would form a minor component. Motorists and public transport users generally likely to be travelling for purposes other than to enjoy the view and employees who are usually undertaking activities other than to enjoy views.

Effects and their Magnitude of Change

The landscape and visual effects are considered separately. Landscape effects are created by changes to the character and quality of the landscape and townscape, and visual effects are changes experienced by the receptors of views. As the design and layout of the development is not yet known this informal assessment identifies landscape 'sensitivities' and recommends a range of mitigation measures such as the orientation, scale, mass and height of development in order for it to respect the landscape features and so to relate to its surroundings. Where pertinent (such as in relation to residual effects) a distinction is made between Year 1 of the scheme and Year 15 after implementation of key landscapes and planting to account for a period of growth and maturity.

The magnitude of change on landscape/townscape and visual amenity is classified as follows:

High: total and permanent loss or considerable alteration to key features of the landscape and townscape and introduction of elements entirely incongruous with the surrounding landscape/townscape character; or where the proposed scheme or elements of the scheme would dominate the view.

Medium: moderate changes to key features of the landscape or townscape, introduction of elements that are prominent but not substantially incongruous with the surrounding character, partial obstruction of important views.

Low: minor loss or alteration to the landscape, introduction of elements not entirely incongruous with the surrounding townscape; or where the proposed scheme or elements of the scheme would cause only a minor change in the overall view.

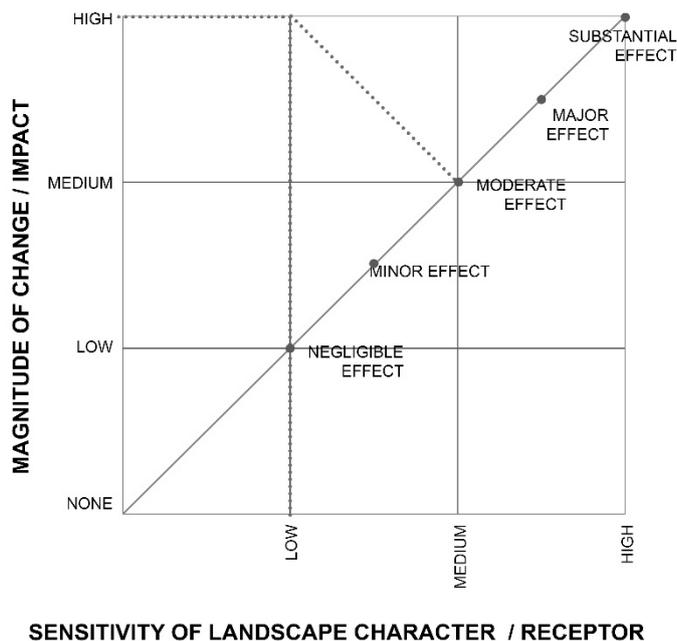
None: virtually imperceptible change in landscape and townscape character, or a visual change that is likely to be a very minor element of the view and virtually imperceptible.

The magnitude of changes to landscape character and features depends upon the nature and scale of change. The magnitude of changes to visual amenity depends upon the extent of the view affected, the distance away and the likely level of integration of the development in the view.

Significance of Effects Criteria

Distinction is made between temporary and permanent effects where relevant. The level of significance of effects is determined by correlating the ‘sensitivity’ with the ‘magnitude of change’ of the landscape or the visual receptors, as set out below.

Table A1: Effect Significance based upon the Sensitivity of the landscape/receptor and the Magnitude of Change



The above table is only a framework to aid consistency of reporting and provide an initial indication of the likely significance of effect arising. Given the criteria represent a continuum or continuous gradation the use of this framework also requires the application of professional judgement and awareness of the relative balance of importance between sensitivity and magnitude.

The landscape and visual significance criteria have been defined as follows using a common terminology consistent with a formal LVIA and/or ES:

Table A2: Effect Significance based on Sensitivity and the Magnitude of Change

Impact Category	Typical Description / example	Significant effect?
Major adverse	A large and detrimental change, likely or apparent exceeding of accepted (often legal) threshold. The proposals may be at complete variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape/townscape and are likely to damage, degrade or destroy characteristic features and their setting; or would cause a very noticeable deterioration in existing views.	Yes
Moderate adverse	A medium scale change which, although not beyond an accepted threshold, is still considered to be significant (due to scale, duration etc.). The proposals may be out of scale with the landscape/townscape, or at odds with the local landform or settlement pattern or would cause a noticeable deterioration in the existing view.	Yes
Minor adverse	A small change that, whilst adverse, is not significant and does not exceed legal or guideline standards. The proposals may not quite fit with the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape / townscape; or where the scheme would cause a perceptible deterioration in the existing view.	No
Negligible adverse	A very small change that is so small and unimportant that it is considered acceptable to disregard. The proposals fit with the scale, landform and settlement pattern of the landscape/townscape; or would cause a very slight noticeable change in existing views.	No
Neutral	No appreciable or material change.	No
Minor beneficial	A small positive change, but not one that is likely to be a key factor in the overall balance of issues. The proposals fit with the landscape/townscape and may improve the quality of it as a resource; or improve existing views that may currently be influenced by poor townscape / dereliction.	No
Moderate beneficial	A medium scale change that is significant in that the baseline conditions are improved to the extent that guideline targets are contributed to. The proposals bring clear benefits to the quality of the landscape/townscape; or clearly improve existing views influenced by poor townscape / dereliction.	Yes
Major beneficial	A large and beneficial change, whereby the improvements to the baseline are significant and previously poor conditions are replaced by new legal compliance or a major contribution is made to national targets. The proposals bring substantial benefits to the quality of the landscape/townscape; or substantially improve existing views influenced by poor townscape / dereliction.	Yes