

BURFORD GRANGE,
ICKLEFORD

LANDSCAPE AND
VISUAL IMPACT
ASSESSMENT

For



ACD
ENVIRONMENTAL

Ecology
Archaeology
Arboriculture
Landscape Architecture

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1.0 Non-Technical Summary

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to provide an assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects of a proposed development upon the receiving landscape, in line with current legislation and guidance. It comprises two separate, but closely related and interlinked assessments, the first for landscape and the second for visual effects.
- 1.2 The assessment has been conducted in line with published best practice guidelines and includes a desk study (data trawl of local plan policies, published landscape character assessment and production of a computer generated Zone of Theoretical visibility) and onsite observations.
- 1.3 The site and its surrounding landscape were assessed during July 2016.
- 1.4 The proposed site comprises one paddock field outbuildings and an existing residential property, which is proposed to be demolished. The site lies in green belt land on the existing settlement boundary of Ickleford, which runs along the northern and eastern boundaries. The existing property lies within the eastern section of the site and includes various outbuildings and hardstanding, set within a number of mature trees.
- 1.5 The proposed site is heavily contained by mature tree belts and woodland on all sides, including some mature trees and boundary vegetation within existing property curtilage to the north. The landform is gently sloping from north to south, with local high points on the north boundary at approximately 62m AOD. The landform then falls to the south towards the River Oughton, which lays at approximately 55m AOD at 100m to the south of the proposed site.
- 1.6 Given the combination of mature tree cover and descending landform variation, the site is physically and visually contained from most points, particularly to the east, south and west. It also sits at a similar offset from the River Oughton as existing residential properties to the south of the river corridor. As such it does not visually contribute to the network of open spaces along the River Oughton or the open character of the surrounding green belt

to the west. It would not therefore diminish the physical and/or visual character of the surrounding landscape or compromise the integrity of the valued characteristics.

- 1.7 The scheme will incorporate various elements within the masterplan which provide enhancement to the landscape fabric. These will be in accordance with the built development guidelines for the area produced in the North Herts Landscape Study. These will help to define and shape the edge of the settlement of Ickleford and consolidate the open space network around the settlement and along the River Oughton corridor, with enhanced access. Specific elements include vegetation enhancement and buffer planting to help enhance the nature and character of the surrounding landscape.
- 1.8 Nine viewpoints were considered and of these, just one was considered to be significant. This is representative of views from some of the residential properties, adjoining the proposed site to the north. Following mitigation measures and vegetation growth, significant visual impacts would be alleviated. For the remaining receptors the views of the development will remain largely unchanged or have only glimpsed views at such a distance that it would be difficult for the casual viewer.
- 1.9 When this development is assessed in context with the wider landscape, the visual impact would be reduced, visually blending in with the surrounding landscape on the southern fringe of Ickleford.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIA) can be defined as a mechanism by which the landscape can be assessed against its capacity to accommodate change.
- 2.2 The aim of this report is to provide an assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects of a proposed development upon the receiving landscape, in line with current legislation and guidance. It comprises two main assessments, the first for landscape and the second for visual effects. 'Landscape effects derive from changes in the physical landscape, which may give rise to changes in its character and how this is experienced. This may in turn affect the perceived value ascribed to the landscape. Due to the inherently dynamic nature of the landscape, change arising from a development may not necessarily be significant.'
- 2.3 'Visual effects relate to the changes that arise in the composition of available views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people's responses to the changes and to the overall effects with the respect of visual amenity' Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd edition published by The Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment 2013.

The proposed Development and the Basis for Assessment

- 2.4 This report provides an LVIA of the proposed allocation for up to 51 residential units with access from the A600 Bedford Road running north south to the east side of the site. The proposals also include a new access road from Bedford Road to the east and parking provision. The proposals provide for the retention of existing trees and vegetation around the boundaries and for important trees within the site around the existing property. The dwellings will be set within a sequence of open spaces and within an open layout to the north side which facilitates good separation distances to existing properties along Westmill Lane. It also maximises the retention of existing views by

aligning proposed properties / houses, away or to the side of extended views through the site.

2.5 The site extends to a developable area of approximately 2.4 hectares. It is located on green belt land on the southern side of Ickleford with the existing settlement boundary running along the northern and eastern sides of the proposed site. To the south lies the River Oughton corridor, a tributary of the River Purwell to the east. The site currently contains a large dwelling, together with various outbuildings. The site is defined in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (update 2014) as having some capability for delivering residential development subject to more detailed assessment.

2.6 This document includes an appraisal of the following:

Landscape Impacts, including:

- direct impacts upon specific landscape elements within and adjacent to the site;
- effects on the overall pattern of the landscape elements which give rise to the landscape character of the site and its surroundings; and
- impacts upon any special interests in and around the site.

Visual Impacts:

- direct impacts of the development upon views in the landscape; and
- overall impact on visual amenity.

3.0 Assessment Methodology

3.1 As a matter of best practice the assessment will be undertaken in accordance with the methods outlined in the following best practice guidance:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition), published by the Landscape Institute and the IEMA (2013) (GLVIA); and
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, published by Natural England (2014)

3.2 In accordance with the GLVIA and other best practice guidance noted above, both the landscape and visual assessments will include baseline studies that describe, classify and evaluate the existing landscape and visual resources, focusing on their sensitivity and ability to accommodate change.

3.3 The assessment has been based on a desk-based review of relevant published guidance, including legislation and policy, baseline information production, and information followed by a number of detailed site appraisals.

3.4 The principal objectives of the LVIA are:

- to identify and classify the existing landscape likely to be affected by the construction and operation of the proposal and ancillary works;
- to identify the 'visual receptors' with views of the proposed development; and
- to assess the significance of effects on the prevailing landscape character and visual amenity, taking into account the measures proposed to mitigate any impacts identified

3.5 The prediction and extent of effect cannot always be absolute. It is for each assessment to determine the assessment criteria and the significance thresholds, using informed and well-reasoned professional judgement supported by thorough justification for their selection, and explanation as to

how the conclusions about significance for each effect assessed have been derived, as noted in GLVIA 3rd edition para 2.23-2.26 and 3.32-36.

4.0 Legislation and Policy Context

Landscape Planning Policies

4.1 Guidelines, legislation and planning policy documents provide the framework for the protection and conservation of landscape within the study area, the most relevant of which are outlined below.

4.2 Of these, statutes exist to ensure both direct and indirect protection of our most valued and important landscapes, their intrinsic visual qualities and the individual elements and components that constitute their appeal. Those with direct relevance to the assessment comprise the following:

- The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000;
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981;
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990;
- Hedgerow Regulations 1997;
- Environment Act 1995;
- Countryside Act 1968; and
- The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

4.3 At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.

Local Planning Policy

4.4 Current local planning policy is described in the following adopted documents:

- Saved policies of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No2 – adopted 2012
- Draft Local Plan 2011-2031

Landscape Designations

- 4.5 There are no national or regional landscape designations within the immediate study area, inside 2km. The eastern fringes of the nearest area, the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) stretches beyond 2km, with limited potential for effect on views and special qualities which are focused away from the proposed site. However, the site does lie within the fringes of the green belt. Green Belt seeks to safeguard open character and minimise potential visual impact effects. The relevant planning policy for this area and other local guidance documents are included in the appendices of this document.

5.0 Defining the Baseline Study

- 5.1 Both the landscape and visual assessment include baseline studies that describe, classify and evaluate the existing landscape and visual resources, focusing on their sensitivity and ability to accommodate change. The initial study area was set to a radius of approximately 2.5km from the centre of the site on the basis that, at this distance, this form of development, when seen by the human eye, would be hardly discernible or not legible.
- 5.2 Following an initial desk based assessment of aerial photography, Ordnance Survey mapping a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) was prepared.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

- 5.3 In order to assist in the assessment of the potential visual effects of any development, a computer-generated ZTV is normally modelled. The computer ZTV is used as a working tool to inform the assessment team of the extent of the zone within which the proposed development may have an influence or effect on landscape character and visual amenity and the areas within which the study area together with site survey work should be concentrated. It should be noted that this is a topographical information based exercise with no account being taken of the visual barrier effects of vegetation or buildings.
- 5.4 A computer generated ZTV was established and a study area together with a number of representative viewpoints determined. All these viewpoints are at various distances from the scheme and cover all main points of the compass.
- 5.5 The extent of study area and viewpoints chosen were selected as being representative and having the potential to offer significant landscape and visual effects.

6.0 Method of Assessment

- 6.1 The landscape and visual impact assessments have been based on an evaluation of the sensitivity of the receiving landscape and visual receptors, and the magnitude of change associated with the introduction of the proposed scheme into the landscape and visual context of the study area.

7.0 Landscape Character Assessment Criteria

- 7.1 Description and classification of existing landscape character has involved a review of published regional and sub-regional landscape character assessment information.
- 7.2 Local landscape character and landscape sensitivity has been defined by taking account of landform, hydrology, vegetation, settlement, land use pattern, and cultural and historic features and associations, consequently the landscape character has been categorised as follows.

Quality

- 7.3 Quality or condition relates to the physical state of the landscape and its intactness from the visual, functional and ecological perspectives, together with the state of repair of its constituent features or elements (e.g. hedgerows, woodlands, field pattern etc.). Local landscape quality within the study area has been considered based on the criteria described in the following table.

Table 1. Landscape Quality (or Condition)

Landscape Quality (or Condition)	Typical Indicators
Very High	All landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. Buildings are in local vernacular and materials. No detracting elements are evident
High	Most landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. Most buildings are in local vernacular and materials. Few detracting elements are evident
Medium	Some landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. Some buildings are in local vernacular and materials and some detracting elements are evident
Low	Few landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. Few buildings are in local vernacular and materials. Many detracting or incongruous elements are evident
Very Low	No landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. Buildings are not in local vernacular and materials. Detracting or incongruous elements are much in evidence

Value

7.4 The value attributed to an area of landscape reflects communal perception at a local, regional, national or, occasionally, international scale. It is informed by a number of factors including landscape quality / condition, scenic beauty, rarity wildness, tranquillity and particular cultural associations. Cultural associations may be widely held at a national scale or more local in nature. Landscapes considered to be of the highest value would generally be formally designated at the national level, whereas those considered of lowest value would generally be undesignated, degraded landscapes, perhaps identified as being in poor condition and requiring either restoration or re-creation. Although value is largely determined by reference to statutory and planning policy designations, an absence of such designation does not necessarily imply the absence of value, as other factors such as scarcity or cultural associations can establish an area of otherwise unremarkable landscape as a valued local resource. The value of landscape character areas and designations has been determined using the criteria described in the following table.

Table 2. Landscape Value

Landscape Value	Typical Indicators
Very High	Areas comprising a clear composition of valued landscape components in robust form and health, free of disruptive visual detractors and with a strong sense of place. Areas containing a strong, balanced structure with distinct features worthy of conservation. Such areas would generally be internationally or nationally recognised designations, e.g. National Parks
High	Areas primarily containing valued landscape components combined in an aesthetically pleasing composition and lacking prominent disruptive visual detractors. Areas containing a strong structure with noteworthy features or elements, exhibiting a sense of place. Such areas would generally be national statutorily designated areas, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Such areas may also relate to the setting of internationally or nationally statutory designated areas, e.g. National Parks.
Medium	Areas primarily of valued landscape components combined in an aesthetically pleasing composition with low levels of disruptive visual detractors, exhibiting a recognisable landscape structure. Such areas would generally be non-statutory locally designated areas such as Areas of Great Landscape Value. Such areas may also relate to the setting of national statutorily designated areas, such as AONB.
Low	Areas containing some features of landscape value but lacking a coherent and aesthetically pleasing composition with frequent detracting visual elements, exhibiting a distinguishable structure often concealed by mixed land uses or development. Such areas would be commonplace at the local level and would generally be undesignated, offering scope for improvement.
Very Low	Areas lacking valued landscape components or comprising degraded, disturbed or derelict features, lacking any aesthetically pleasing composition with a dominance of visually detracting elements, exhibiting mixed land uses which conceal the baseline structure. Such areas would generally be restricted to the local level and identified as requiring recovery.

Landscape Receptor sensitivity

7.5 Each landscape character area or designation is assessed for the sensitivity of its character to the introduction of the proposed development, taking into account its key characteristics, landscape elements, composition and cultural associations. Certain aspects of landscape character are particularly important indicators of the degree to which a landscape is likely to be able to successfully accommodate development. These include the general scale and complexity of its landforms and elements; the degree of enclosure or openness; the degree and nature of manmade influences upon it; and whether it offers particular experiences such as remoteness or tranquillity. The criteria used to determine the sensitivity of landscape character are set out in the following table.

Table 3. Character Sensitivity

Character Sensitivity	Typical Indicators
Very High	<p>Landscape elements: Important elements of the landscape susceptible to change and of high quality and condition.</p> <p>Scale and Enclosure: Small-scale landform/land cover/ development, human scale indicators, fine grained, enclosed with narrow views, sheltered.</p> <p>Manmade influence: Absence of manmade elements, traditional or historic settlements, natural features and 'natural' forms of amenity parkland, perceived as natural 'wild land' lacking in man-made features, land use elements and detractors</p> <p>Remoteness and Tranquillity: Sense of peace, isolation or wildness, remote and empty, no evident movement.</p>
High	Where, on the whole, indicators do not meet the Very High criteria but exceed those for Medium
Medium	<p>Landscape elements: Important elements of the landscape of moderate susceptibility to change and of medium quality and condition.</p> <p>Scale and Enclosure: Medium-scale landform/land cover/ development, textured, semi-enclosed with middle distance views.</p> <p>Manmade influence: Some presence of man-made elements, which may be partially out of scale with the landscape and be of only partially consistent with vernacular styles.</p> <p>Remoteness and Tranquillity: some noise, evident, but not dominant human activity and development, noticeable movement.</p>
Low	Where, on the whole, indicators do not meet the Medium criteria but exceed those for Very Low.
Very Low	<p>Landscape elements: Important elements of the landscape insusceptible to change and of low quality and condition.</p> <p>Scale and Enclosure: Large-scale landform/land cover/ development, Featureless, coarse grained, open with broad views.</p> <p>Manmade influence: Frequent presence of utility, infrastructure or industrial elements, contemporary structures e.g. masts, pylons, cranes, silos, industrial sheds with vertical emphasis, functional man-made land-use patterns and engineered aspects.</p> <p>Remoteness and Tranquillity: Busy and noisy, human activity and development, prominent movement.</p>

Visual Sensitivity of Landscape Areas:

- 7.6 The visual sensitivity of an area of landscape relates to its general level of openness, the nature and number of visual receptors present within a landscape, and the probability of change in visual amenity due to the development being visible. It should be noted that landscape visual sensitivity refers to the visual sensitivity of the entire landscape that is being assessed, rather than an assessment of the visual effects of a specific, individual development.
- 7.7 The following table provides an overview of the typical indicators of visual sensitivity, which can be used to give a transparent, reasoned judgement regarding landscape visual sensitivity.

Table 4. Landscape Visual Sensitivity

Landscape Sensitivity	Visual	Typical Indicators
Very High		Visual interruption: Flat or gently undulating topography, few if any vegetative or built features. Nature of views: Densely populated, dispersed pattern of small settlements, outward looking settlement, landscape focused recreation routes and/or visitor facilities, distinctive settings, gateways or public viewpoints.
High		Where, on the whole, indicators do not meet the Very High criteria but exceed those for Medium.
Medium		Visual interruption: Undulating or gently rolling topography, some vegetative and built features. Nature of views: Moderate density of population, settlements of moderate size with some views outwards, routes with some degree of focus on the landscape.
Low		Where, on the whole, indicators do not meet the Medium criteria but exceed those for Very Low.
Very Low		Visual interruption: Rolling topography, frequent vegetative or built features. Nature of views: Unpopulated or sparsely populated, concentrated pattern of large settlements, introspective settlement, inaccessible, indistinctive or industrial settings.

- 7.8 The overall landscape sensitivity is derived by combining the assessed values attributed to landscape condition, landscape value, character sensitivity and effects on landscape elements and landscape visual sensitivity, to define an overall value within the range of Very High, High, Medium, Low and Very Low.

7.9 Since each criterion has a varying weight in its contribution to sensitivity the overall value is determined by professional judgement.

7.10 For the purposes of this assessment greater weight is attributed to Landscape Value and Landscape Character Sensitivity since these factors have greater defining criteria in the description of the landscape characterisation.

Magnitude of Change

7.11 Magnitude of change has been predicted by considering the anticipated loss or disruption to character forming landscape elements (e.g. tree planting, landform, buildings, and watercourses etc.), which would arise through introduction of the proposed scheme.

Table 5: Definition of Magnitude of Landscape Impacts

Magnitude	Description
Large	Total loss of or major alteration to key valued elements, features, and characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements considered being prominent and totally uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Would be at a considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape. Would cause a high quality landscape to be permanently changed and its quality diminished.
Medium	Partial loss of or alteration to one or more key elements, features, characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Would be out of scale with the landscape, and at odds with the local pattern and landform. Will leave an adverse impact on a landscape of recognised quality.
Small	Minor loss or alteration to one or more key elements, features, characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not be uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. May not quite fit into the landform and scale of the landscape. Affect an area of recognised landscape character
Negligible	Very minor loss or alteration to one or more key elements, features, and characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Maintain existing landscape quality, and maybe slightly at odds to the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape.

Significance of Landscape Effects

- 7.12 The significance of the landscape character effects is determined by the assessment of landscape sensitivity set against the magnitude of change as indicated by the matrix in Table 5.
- 7.13 For the purposes of this assessment and with reference to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2015, ‘Significant’ landscape effects would be those effects assessed to be severe, major or major/moderate and are indicated by shading in the following table.

Table 6: Significance of Landscape Effects

Magnitude	Sensitivity			
	Very High	High	Medium	Low
Large	Major	Major	Major/moderate	Moderate
Medium	Major	Major/moderate	Moderate	Moderate/minor
Small	Moderate	Moderate/minor	Minor	Negligible
Negligible	Minor/moderate	Minor	Minor/ Negligible	Negligible

8.0 Visual Assessment Criteria

8.1 In conjunction with the landscape character impact assessment, a visual impact assessment has been undertaken in order to assess any potential visual impact arising as a result of the proposed development.

8.2 In order to evaluate what the visual impact of the development will be and, if appropriate, what can be done, to ameliorate the impact, it is necessary to describe the existing situation to provide a basis against which any change can be assessed. The assessment of visual impact from any one location takes into account the:

- Sensitivity of the views and viewers (visual receptor) affected;
- Nature, scale or magnitude and duration of the change
- Extent of the proposed development that will be visible;
- Degree of visual intrusion or obstruction that will occur;
- Distance of the view;
- Change in character or quality of the view compared to the existing;
- The activity of the receptor and the expectation of the view this brings
- The importance of the view with respect to the number of people affected.
- The popularity of the view – whether it appeals to locals, visitors, or whether it is cited in books, guides and maps
- Their susceptibility to change, which is mainly a function of the occupation or activity of people experiencing the view, and the extent to which their attention or interest may be focused on the view.

Visual Receptors

- 8.3 Visual impact assessment considers the sensitivity to change of visual receptors within the study area, and the magnitude of change associated with the introduction of the proposed development into the existing visual context.
- 8.4 A range of fixed visual receptors were initially considered, with emphasis placed on identification and selection of locations with a clear relationship to the proposed scheme where potential visual implications were deemed to be greatest. The key visual receptors normally include statutory and non-statutory designated or protected areas, cultural heritage resources, residential properties and farmsteads, recreational/tourist resources, panoramic hilltop views, focused or directed views, and cumulative views.
- 8.5 A number of representative viewpoints have been selected to represent these visual receptor types. These representative viewpoints are used as 'samples' on which to base judgements on visual amenity in the area.
- 8.6 These preliminary viewpoints locations were assessed in terms of visibility during field investigation resulting in some preliminary viewpoints either being repositioned to locations offering improved visual representation or discounted as not offering any views. In addition, field investigation identified a number of other closer viewpoints.
- 8.7 For the field assessment, a Canon EOS 600D camera with an 18-55mm lens was used, set at 35mm focal length. This is in line with best practice as shown in the Photography and photomontage in landscape and visual impact assessment advice notes issued by the Landscape Institute (Advice note 01/11).
- 8.8 Field investigation from the preliminary viewpoints was used to assess the actual visibility of the proposed development within the study area, taking into account the visual barrier effect of vegetation and buildings.

Site Appraisal/ Photographic Studies

- 8.9 The initial photographic study was undertaken in July 2016. Viewpoints at varying close distance from the site were selected to represent the typical views of the site. ACD Figure 4 shows the location of these viewpoints. In determining the viewpoints, whether in the immediate locality or further away, the main public highways, sections of public footpaths, and some of the publicly available spaces within the study area were visited. It is acknowledged that from public places, more viewers are likely to be affected thereby adding to the significance of the impact upon receptors in those locations.
- 8.10 The locations from which the proposed development will be visible are known as visual receptors. In accordance with the “Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition”, for the purposes of the visual assessment the visual receptors have been graded according to their sensitivity to change.
- 8.11 From the results of the initial desk study and site appraisal it is clear that the proposed development will be visible from a limited number of locations, at varying but close distances, and from both public and private areas.
- 8.12 In order to evaluate what the visual impact of the development will be and, if appropriate, what can be done to ameliorate the impact, it is necessary to describe the existing situation to provide a basis against which any change can be assessed. Each assessment of visual impact has therefore been made taking into consideration the character and quality of the existing view. The assessment of the significance of effect is a result of the assessment of magnitude of the impact related to the assessment of sensitivity of the receptor.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

- 8.13 The assessment of visual receptor sensitivity considers both the category of visual receptor and the nature of their existing view. It takes account of the location of the receptor or viewpoint; the expectations, occupation or activity of the people present; the quality of the existing visual context; and the importance or value likely to be attributed by them to the available view. It is therefore the case that not all receptors within a given category are deemed to display equal sensitivity.
- 8.14 In accordance with the GLVIA, for the purposes of the visual assessment, the visual receptors have been graded according to their sensitivity to change against criteria set out in the table below.

Table 7: Visual Receptor sensitivity

Receptor Sensitivity	Description
High	Occupiers of residential properties. Users of outdoor recreational facilities, including public rights of way, whose attention or interest may be focused on the landscape Communities where the development results in changes in the landscape setting or valued views enjoyed by the community.
Medium	People travelling through or past the affected landscape in cars, on trains or other transport routes where higher speeds are involved and views sporadic and short-lived. People engaged in outdoor recreation where enjoyment of the landscape is incidental rather than the main interest.
Low	People at their place of work, Industrial facilities.

- 8.15 The number of people likely to be present and the duration of time that a view is likely to be experienced may also influence the visual sensitivity of a particular location.
- 8.16 It is sometimes the case that different categories of visual receptor might be present at a selected representative viewpoint (e.g. a selected location may include both residential properties and workplaces suggesting different levels of sensitivity). In such cases the primary receptor category is identified (usually the more sensitive).

Visual Magnitude of Change

8.17 The visibility of the proposals and the magnitude of their change upon a view and the resulting significance of visual effect are dependent on the range of factors already outlined, together with, the angle of the sun, the time of year and weather conditions. Of equal importance will be whether the site is seen completely, or in part; whether the site appears on the skyline; whether it is viewed with a backcloth of land or vegetation; or with a complex foreground; and whether the site forms part of an expansive landscape or is visible within a restricted view. The aspect of dwellings and whether the view is from a main window or a secondary window, which may be used less frequently, is also a consideration. From highways, the direction and speed of travel are also a consideration. In the assessment magnitude of change is ranked in accordance with the following table 8.

Table 8: Definition of Magnitude of Visual Impact

Magnitude	Examples
Very Large	<p>The development would result in a dramatic change in the existing view and/or would cause a dramatic change in the quality and/or character of the view. The development would appear large scale and/or form the dominant elements within the overall view and/or may be in full view the observer or receptor.</p> <p>Commanding, controlling the view.</p>
Large	<p>The development would result in a prominent change in the existing view and/or would cause a prominent change in the quality and/or character of the view. The development would form prominent elements within the overall view and/or may be easily noticed by the observer or receptor.</p> <p>Standing out, striking, sharp, unmistakable, easily seen.</p>
Medium	<p>The development would result in a noticeable change in the existing view and/or would cause a noticeable change in the quality and/or character of the view. The development would form a conspicuous element within the overall view and/or may be readily noticed by the observer or receptor.</p> <p>Noticeable, distinct, catching the eye or attention, clearly visible, well defined.</p>
Small	<p>The development would result in a perceptible change in the existing view, and/or without affecting the overall quality and/or character of the view. The development would form an apparent small element in the wider landscape that may be missed by the observer or receptor.</p> <p>Visible, evident, obvious.</p>
Very Small	<p>The development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view, and/or without affecting the overall quality and/or would form an inconspicuous minor element in the wider landscape that may be missed by the observer or receptor.</p> <p>Lacking sharpness of definition, not obvious, indistinct, not clear, obscure, blurred, indefinite.</p>
Negligible	<p>Only a small part of the development would be discernible and/or it is at such a distance that no change to the existing view can be appreciated.</p> <p>Weak, not legible, near limit of acuity of human eye.</p>

Significance of Visual Effect

- 8.18 The significance of the visual effects is determined by the assessment of receptor sensitivity set against the magnitude of change as indicated by the matrix in Table 9.
- 8.19 For the purposes of this assessment and with reference to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011, 'Significant' landscape effects would be those effects assessed to be severe, major or major/moderate and are indicated by shading in the following table.

Table 9: Significance of Visual Effects

Magnitude	Sensitivity		
	High	Medium	Low
Very large	Major	Major	Major/moderate
Large	Major	Major/moderate	Moderate
Medium	Major/moderate	Moderate	Moderate/minor
Small	Moderate	Moderate/minor	Minor
Very Small	Minor	Minor	Negligible
Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

Representative Viewpoint Assessment

8.20 Viewpoint selection has been chosen by a review of visual receptors within the vicinity of the site as well as the presence of landscape designations. The choice of representative viewpoints has been limited due to the location of the scheme and surrounding landuses. The baseline description of each view is contained within the visual impact assessment.

8.21 The following viewpoints in Table 10 were selected and submitted as part of the scoping process as being representative of the potential visual issues associated with the proposed development.

Table 10: Submitted Viewpoint Details

No	Location	Distance (km) and direction of view	Northing	Easting	Rationale for selection
1	A600 Bedford Road	0.02km, SW	51°58'00	00°17'12	Road Users within ZTV
2	PRoW within Oughthonhead Common	0.15km, NE	51°57'50	00°17'25	Users of PRoW within ZTV
3	PRoW within Oughthonhead Common, off A600	0.1km, NW	51°57'52	00°17'13	Users of PRoW within ZTV
4	Recreation ground, Burford Way, Hitchin	0.2km, N	51°57'50	00°17'15	Users of recreation in the landscape within ZTV
5	PRoW on Westmill Lane, north of Swinburne Avenue	0.5km, NE	51°57'43	00°17'43	Users of PRoW within ZTV
6	PRoW, north side of Westmill Lane	0.3km, S	51°58'02	00°17'32	Users of PRoW within ZTV
7	A600 Bedford Road	0.01km, NW	51°57'55	00°17'11	Road Users within ZTV
8	PRoW on Westmill Lane/Icknield Way, north of Westmill Farm	0.5km, E	51°57'51	00°17'52	Users of PRoW within ZTV
9	PRoW, Westmill Lane / Icknield Way	0.02km, S	51°57'59	00°17'27	Users of PRoW within ZTV

Limitations of Assessment

- 8.22 The initial field study and photographic appraisal was undertaken during March 2016 at a time when views do not have the benefit of vegetation in full leaf. In summer months when deciduous species have their foliage, less views of the landscape will be available due to vegetation forming visual barriers. Photographs from each viewpoint indicate the general outlook for receptors.
- 8.23 In determining the viewpoints, the main public highways, sections of public footpaths, edge of settlements and some of the publicly available spaces within the study area were visited. It is acknowledged that from public places, more viewers are likely to be affected, thereby adding to the significance of the impact upon receptors in those location. In some instances, it may be appropriate to consider private viewpoints. These are frequently dealt with in a separate residential amenity assessment (GLVIA, 3rd edition. Paragraph 6.17). However, they can also be used to supplement visual effects for example to illustrate the nature of the viewing experience from settlements (GLVIA, 3rd edition. Paragraph 6.20). Importantly, viewpoints should be selected “to cover as wide a range of situations as is possible, reasonable and necessary to cover the likely significant effects (GLVIA, 3rd edition. Paragraph 6.21).
- 8.24 For the purposes of this report, the assessment has been based on development proposals illustrated in Figure 6. The proposals will include a series of elevations and sections for the various heights of buildings and a series of detailed development plans.

9.0 Establishment of Baseline Environment

9.1 This section provides a review of the key local guidance documents and identifies those landscape and visual receptors which merit detailed consideration in the assessment of effects, and those which are 'scoped out' from further assessment as effects "have been judged unlikely to occur or so insignificant that it is not essential to consider them further" (GLVIA, 3rd edition, para 3.19).

Landscape Character Baseline

'Countryside Character Initiative' – Natural England

9.2 Natural England has published a study on its website entitled 'Countryside Character Initiative'. This initiative is concerned with the management of England's countryside through an understanding of its character. It aims to guide policy developments, national decision making, and give a context to local planning, action and development. This initiative is based on 'The Character of England: landscape, wildlife and natural features' map, first published in 1997, which divides England into National Character Areas (NCA's). These character areas were updated and republished in April 2014.

The NCA of relevance to the study area, the site and its vicinity is NCA 110 – The Chilterns.

9.3 The key characteristics of this area are:

- The chalk plateau is incised by parallel branching valleys gently shelving to the south-east into the London Basin. The large chalk aquifer is abstracted for water to supply London and its surrounds and also supports flows of springs, chalk streams and the River Thames.

- There are several chalk streams. Features associated with a history of modification include historic mills, watercress beds, culverts and habitat enhancements.
- The north-west-facing escarpment is an abrupt relief feature beside low-lying vales, breached notably by the Thames at the Goring Gap. The escarpment lowers northwards, terminating as distinct hills. The Chiltern ridge offers panoramic views.
- Within the Chilterns, views are enclosed within branching valleys, sunken routeways and extensive woodland and hedgerow-enclosed fields. There are hidden, tranquil pockets along single track lanes and rights of way.
- A mixture of arable, grassland and woodland and the numerous commons reflects the dominance of Grade 3 agricultural land. Ancient woodland has remained on extensive clay-with-flint deposits, while very steep slopes are rarely cultivated. There are, however, not inconsiderable areas of Grade 1 and 2 land that are associated with lower-lying areas and river valleys
- The Chilterns are one of the most wooded lowland landscapes in England. The area is particularly renowned for its extensive native beechwoods, several of which are designated as part of the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Other distinctive features include rare box woods, 'hanging' woods on steep slopes and rare yew woods, including Hartslock Wood SAC.
- Pre-18th-century fields defined by ancient, often sinuous hedged boundaries are scattered throughout, including co-axial fields. Parliamentary enclosure fields are limited. Large modern fields, usually with ancient boundaries, cover the better agricultural land, most notably in the north-east.
- Remnants of various historic land use types can combine rich and diverse habitats and archaeology. Many key places are publicly accessible, including Registered Parks and Gardens, historic

downland and common land. Traditional flood plain landscapes and orchards are the most restricted in extent. Historic routeways, hedged boundaries and watercourses provide connectivity.

- Historic downland preserves prehistoric archaeology and supports high numbers of rare and scarce chalk grassland vascular plants, mosses and liverworts. Diversity is enhanced by a mosaic of chalk grassland, scrub and woodland, with Hartslock Wood SAC being one example.
- Species strongly associated with the Chilterns include the red kite, pasque flower, stag beetle, Chiltern gentian, shepherd's needle, chalkhill blue butterfly and native box. Aston Rowant SAC protects an internationally important juniper scrub population. Farmland birds and deer are a feature of the wider countryside.
- Nucleated settlements of medieval origin and land farmed since prehistory are found alongside watercourses and springs in the through-valleys and at the foot of the scarp. Elsewhere, dispersed farmsteads dating from the medieval period and mid-19th-century development around commons are characteristic of the plateau.
- The River Thames and its flood plain mark a distinctive area in the south. The river is a focus for settlement, abstraction and recreation.
- Major transport routes, including motorways, radiate from adjacent Greater London, associated with significant 20th-century development and extensive urban fringe areas.
- Brick and flint are the dominant traditional building materials, with Totternhoe Stone (clunch) being less common, but still a distinctive
- Numerous parkland landscapes define large, historic estates. Designs by Humphry Repton and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown are represented, and the houses, follies and wooded features provide local landmarks.

- Extensive rights of way, commons, open access downland, woodland and some parklands provide access to the countryside. The Thames Path, the Ridgeway and the Grand Union Canal are high-profile recreation routes; locally promoted routes include the Chilterns Cycleway. Private leisure land uses, including golf courses and horse paddocks, are common near urban centres.

Sub-Regional Character

North Herts Landscape Study

9.4 The North Herts Landscape Study (NHLS) was commissioned by North Hertfordshire district council (NHDC) and Stevenage Borough Council and published in 2002 and adopted as the councils agreed Landscape Character Assessment for the district in 2005. It is the most recent assessment for the area.

9.5 The proposed site lies on the transition between two Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). It lies on the north boundary of the River Oughton and Purwell Valley LCA (217) where it adjoins the Pirton Lowlands LCA (218). The key characteristics of these sub-regional LCAs relevant to the study area are reproduced below:

9.6 River Oughton and Purwell Valley LCA (217)

Key Characteristics

- Grazed water meadows
- Meandering water course with associated ponds and water bodies
- Linear woodland belts following the water course

Distinctive Features

- Mainline railway on embankment
- Public parkland at Ickleford
- Oughtonhead Common Nature Reserve

- Purwell Mill Nature Reserve

The NHLS notes Overall Character as;

“Traditionally cattle grazed water meadows with poplar, willow and ash trees along the watercourses. Self seeded mature hawthorn also randomly distributed. Mature landscape character well defined by urban development (Hitchin). Trees restrict views. General change of land use adjacent to Ickleford where land is predominantly used for horse grazing and stabling. Paddocks are defined by post and barbed wire fencing. Character Area is crossed, in several locations, by the mainline railway which runs on embankment. Oughtonhead Common, to the west, managed as a local nature reserve”

The NHLS goes on to note Visual and Sensory Perception as;

“A mature water meadow landscape enclosed over part of its length by urban development. North of Hitchin the river flows across an open large scale arable landscape. The tree cover and pastureland provide a welcome contrast with the surrounding landscape. Railway noise is an issue”

As a result, views are restricted along the river corridor by well-established blocks of vegetation. The urban fringe dominates/intrudes where tree cover is less well established. The overall evaluation notes that the LCA is of moderate condition and robustness, with a conclusion of *“moderate low landscape value”* and recommendation to *“Improve and conserve”*.

With regard to defined capacities to accommodate change the NHLS notes a low capacity for smaller urban extensions (<5ha) *“due to the rivers”*, but then notes for Incremental small scale development that *“there may be some very limited capacity for carefully located and designed individual properties”*, noting the key issue is where *“the floodplain restricts the landscape capacity for such development”*.

NHLS Built development Guidelines for LCA (217)

- Avoid any development in the floodplain of the rivers

- Retain the character of the River Oughton and Purwell Valleys, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the character area
- Planting should reflect existing patterns to mitigate buildings
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the character area
- Manage and enhance the river valley as a corridor for green infrastructure proposals and habitat creation
- Create new and enhanced landscapes in visually prominent urban fringes softening the interface between urban and rural landscapes

9.7 Pirton Lowlands LCA (218)

Key Characteristics

- Large scale open flat farmland landscape
- Arable production
- Remnant hedgerows
- Woodland shelter around settlements

Distinctive features

- Hexton Manor and Gardens
- A600 Bedford Road

The NHLS notes Overall Character as;

“Large scale open, flat farming landscape given over predominantly to arable production. Long distance views of features such as water towers, churches and the chalk scarp. Remnant hedges, gappy and predominantly hawthorn but with occasional mature trees. Hedges generally well trimmed. Very little woodland cover except adjacent to settlements.

Settlement pattern is nucleated with older settlements maintaining the use of local vernacular materials. Occasional farmsteads are less well integrated in terms of materials and general scale of farm buildings. Additionally the A600, Bedford Road, is quite prominent in the east"

The NHLS goes on to note Visual and Sensory Perception as;

"Bland, featureless, vast scale landscape with remnant hedges. Farmsteads tend to be large scale and dominant features not integrated in to the landscape. Vehicles on the A600 prominent in the landscape."

Expansive views are possible throughout this area. The overall evaluation notes that the LCA is of poor condition and weak robustness, with a conclusion of low values and recommendation to "reconstruct".

LOCAL CHARACTER AREA

The character of the site is as follows:

The site does not fall within any areas of designation.

The site topography broadly runs from its highest points at the northern boundary to the lower southern boundary.

There are few landscape features within the site other than mature trees located around most parts of the sites boundary. Due to the vegetation in close proximity to the site and in the wider landscape, the site is relatively visually enclosed. The site is currently in use as grassland.

The site sits within the wider landscape of Ickleford and the effects of the existing local residential development can be felt within the site. Human movement from the surrounding area has an effect on the site, but it is for the most part, rural in feel.

Assessed Landscape Sensitivity of Local Character Area		
Criteria	Indicator Description	Assessed Result
Quality	Some landscape elements remain intact and in good repair. Some detracting elements are evident.	Medium
Value	Contains some features of landscape value at site boundaries, commonplace at a local level and undesignated, offering scope for improvement.	Low
Character sensitivity	Elements of the landscape of moderate susceptibility to change, semi-enclosed, some presence of man-made elements, evident but not dominant human activity and development.	Medium
Landscape visual sensitivity	Gently undulating topography, moderate density of population, settlements of medium size with some views outwards.	Medium
	Overall, Weighted Landscape Sensitivity.	MEDIUM

Landscape Character of the Site and Its Surroundings

- 9.8 This section describes in detail, the site and its surroundings. The section also discusses in brief the issue of visual amenity from certain areas within the landscape.

Land to the North of the site

- 9.9 To the north of the site, the topography rises slightly towards Westfield Lane which lies within 100m and to the boundary with the flatter Pirton Lowlands. This minor road is contained by high hedgerows on either side. A series of large detached residential properties, orientated north to south, lie on the north boundary, most of which have mature boundary vegetation in medium sized gardens which filter and restrict clear views south. Further north the land is defined by large scale open arable farmland. There are number of PRow running across this area to the north. This combination of landform, built form and land cover form a visual barrier to views of the site from most publicly accessible points.

Land to the East of the site

- 9.10 The site is bound to the east by Bedford Road and by mature hedgerow and tree cover either side of the road for most of its length. These form a visual barrier to views of the site from the east.

Land to the South of the site

- 9.11 The site is bound to the south by a mature hedgerow and tree belt. To the south side lies a paddock field, which is also bound by mature hedgerows, trees and woodland. On the south side of the paddock further woodland defines the River Oughton corridor. These features form a strong visual barrier to views to the site, from points to the south. To the south side of the River Oughton, heavily wooded sections of the Oughtonhead Nature Reserve and areas of linear open space exist on rising ground with sports pitches and allotments present.

- 9.12 Further south the northern residential fringes of Hitchin provide an urban fringe feel. This existing urban fringe lies at a similar distance from the River Oughton, as the southern boundary of the site.

Land to the West of the site

- 9.13 The western boundary is formed by mature hedgerows and trees. The area to the west is defined by open farmland, with gently sloping arable fields and Linear woodland belts, which restrict views to the east. At approximately 0.6km west lies Old Westmill Farm and the site of a historic working corn mill. At this point PRow's run along and across the River Oughton.

Identification and Assessment of Potential Impacts

- 9.14 This section aims to identify the Landscape and Visual effects of the proposed development during construction and operation.
- 9.15 For the purposes of this report the assessment is based on the effects encompassed by the ZTV within the extent of the 2.5km radius study area.
- 9.16 For the purposes of this report and as 'worst case', the construction and operational stages are assessed at peak construction and fully operational periods.
- 9.17 The characteristics of the proposed development that have been considered as part of this assessment are described below.

Characteristics of the Proposed Development

- 9.18 The proposed site runs from the south western settlement edge of Ickleford on an east to west orientation. The site consists principally of detached houses that are spaced along a new access road from the eastern boundary with the A600. To the south eastern corner, a number of detached houses and flats are arranged around a courtyard using the existing access off the A600.

9.19 The proposed height of the differing buildings and structures are expected to be up to a maximum of 2.5 storeys and 9m in height.

9.20 It can be anticipated that taller features on site, such as rooftops and eaves have the chief potential to contribute to the most significant effects.

9.21 Landscape and visual impacts may result during both the temporary construction phase and the permanent operational period of the proposed development, including:

- Site establishment works including temporary spoil mounds;
- Construction activities, including the location of site compound areas, laydown areas and the use of cranes and task lighting;
- Permanent features introduced as part of the operational stage development proposals, including the principal visual features of the phased development which are proposed to be:
 - Raised ground levels to form building platforms;
 - Amended road infrastructure and associated car parking together with external lighting;
 - Development set within the consented and agreed framework of landscape structure planting;
 - Consented and agreed ecological conservation landscaping as part of the development.

10.0 Assessment of Effects

10.1 This section aims to identify the issues relating to the impacts of the proposed development during construction and operation.

10.2 The characteristics of the proposed development that have been considered as part of this assessment are described below. The potential visual impact of the proposed development is assessed from the photographic viewpoints (See ACD Figure 4: photo viewpoint locations).

Landscape Character Impacts during Construction

10.3 The current use of the site is given over to an existing residential property with an agricultural field and areas of rough grassland. The site itself contains some individual trees within the existing property alongside the A600 on the eastern boundary, Elsewhere, there are few significant landscape features in the way of woodland or hedges that act as visual focal points within the site, other than those forming the boundary.

10.4 The phased and gradual removal of the existing land use of open farmland, to be replaced with the storage of spoil, laydown areas full of materials, construction compounds and buildings under construction will form part of a perceived loss of localised landscape elements during construction.

10.5 While the above description explains the changes to the localised site landscape features, the assessment of landscape character impacts must be seen in the wider context of landscape elements that contribute and make up the character areas within the study area.

10.6 Landscape quality, value, character sensitivity and visual sensitivity as it relates to the individual LCA's have been determined. Taking into account the perceived alteration to landscape character that the scheme will bring, it is assessed that the study area overall, will have a medium landscape character sensitivity to this form of development.

- 10.7 When seen as part of an addition to an existing residential area, with manmade influences and the settlement boundary bordering the site to the north and east and with some important landscape elements along the river corridor to the south, the character for this part of the study area's character will continue to have medium sensitivity during the construction period.
- 10.8 In summary, both the proposed site itself and the local landscape in general, are assessed as having medium landscape sensitivity. For the proposed site itself, it is assessed to be subject to a small magnitude of change, due to the minor loss or alteration to key elements or features, and the introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not be uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Consequently, the significance of landscape effect for the construction period is assessed to be Minor. This assessment of landscape effect is not classified as 'significant'.

Visual Impacts during Construction

- 10.9 The potential for visual impact will fluctuate throughout the period of construction, particularly during specific construction operations relating to rooftops. As construction progresses on these elements there will be a gradual change in the visual 'environment' as the working height increases.
- 10.10 The intermittent but temporary introduction of prominent tall features such as cranes used during the construction phases would have some short term, temporary visual effects on the visual amenity of both nearby and to a lesser degree longer distance sensitive receptors. In particular, for short distance visual receptors such as at viewpoints, 1, 7 and 9, the taller cranes will be obvious, distinct and clearly visible (temporary) features within the landscape that may be readily noticed by the receptors.

- 10.11 Additional temporary visual effects will be caused as a result of construction vehicle movements to and from the construction site and for general construction operations.
- 10.12 During the construction phases, some temporary lighting will be required. It is not anticipated that there will be any activities requiring work on a 24-hour basis, however, the use of lighting to ensure safe working will probably be required particularly during the winter months. For the highest structures lighting at higher elevations will be required, consequently the greatest potential for visual impact from construction lighting for receptors will result primarily, (but not solely from), from the construction of these particular structures.
- 10.13 With the introduction of all these construction activities, given that the scheme would occur over a relatively short period, it would result in a perceptible change in the existing view, and would form an apparent small element in the wider landscape that may be missed by the observer or receptor. This would result in a small magnitude of change.
- 10.14 The sensitivity of the large majority of visual receptors in closest proximity to the proposed construction activities can be classified as high (users of PRoW and residents). Consequently, with a high receptor sensitivity set against a small magnitude of visual change, the temporary visual effect during the construction period would, as a worst case, result in a significance of effect that can be assessed as Moderate (i.e. 'not significant'). This will be limited to points on the north boundary of the site and elsewhere they are not considered to be significant, given the presence of mature trees, hedgerows and woodland acting as a visual barrier to potential views.

Operation Stage Impacts

Landscape Effects

- 10.15 The introduction of residential development within a substantial existing landscape framework will not be uncharacteristic when set within the

existing attributes of the local receiving landscape. It can be determined that the introduction of new residential units at this point, with a similar offset from the river Oughton as existing residential development to the south of the river would not be uncharacteristic. Given the extent of mature boundary enclosure visual intrusion would be low and the character of the River Oughton would be retained. The magnitude of change on landscape character is determined to be medium – (partial loss or alteration to one or more key elements, or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape).

10.16 Based on a medium landscape sensitivity of both the local and wider landscape rather than of the site itself, the significance of effect on the landscape character resulting from the proposed development is therefore assessed to be moderate.

10.17 Given the substantial existing landscape framework and nature of local landform, the proposed site is very contained visually and physically. As a result, the potential for clear views from surrounding landscape will be limited and consequently the potential for visibility and effect on the locally defined network of local green spaces, including Oughtenhead Nature Reserve and the green belt land to the south and west, will also be limited. The proposed development will also incorporate green infrastructure proposals. These will include proposed footways and recreational open spaces. This could involve the creation of public rights of way or the extension to and/or joining up of footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways. This is in line with council policy for these areas reinforce the pattern of landscape features and open spaces to manage and enhance the river valley as a corridor for green infrastructure proposals and habitat creation.

Visual Effects

10.18 The introduction of residential development within the existing landscape framework would not be considered out of character when considered as part of the wider setting. This includes the physical and visual containment

of the site and location on the existing settlement boundary where it is defined by the local road network, existing development and infrastructure to the east and north.

Viewpoint Analysis

10.19 The viewpoints have been selected to be representative of the types of views experienced by a range of sensitive receptors such as those listed in Table 10 and should be read in conjunction with ACD figure 4. The original fieldwork was undertaken during July 2016.

10.20 A full list of viewpoints, are listed in Table 11 as follows;

Table 11: Viewpoint Locations

No	Viewpoint	Direction of view	Distance to site (Km)	Receptor sensitivity at viewpoint
1	A600 Bedford Road	SW	0.02km	Road Users
2	PRoW within Oughthonhead Common	NE	0.15km	Users of PRoW
3	PRoW within Oughthonhead Common, off A600	NW	0.1km	Users of PRoW
4	Recreation ground, Burford Way, Hitchin	N	0.2km	Users of recreation in the landscape
5	PRoW on Westmill Lane, north of Swinburne Avenue	NE	0.5km	Users of PRoW
6	PRoW, north side of Westmill Lane	S	0.3km	Users of PRoW
7	A600 Bedford Road	NW	0.01km	Road Users
8	PRoW on Westmill Lane/Icknield Way, north of Westmill Farm	E	0.5km	Users of PRoW
9	PRoW, Westmill Lane / Icknield Way	S	0.02km	Residents / Users of PRoW

Viewpoint 1: View from A600 Bedford Road



Vp1	Panoramic View	(Distance 0.2km looking southwest)
Baseline Description	This is a view from the A600 Bedford road looking southwest. This view is representative of the potential views of road users in the local area. The view is defined and enclosed by mature roadside vegetation on both sides of the road. Settlement is also evident in the wider view to the west and north. The landform is descending to the south.	
Predicted change	From this viewpoint the proposals will be set to the rear of existing mature vegetation. As such the scheme would not be clearly visible from this point. At the site entrance, while there would be a glimpsed view, the nature of the view would remain similar being characterised by residential buildings.	
Type of Effect	The introduction of the proposed building types would be barely perceptible in the view and would not interrupt the scale and balance of elements within the view.	
Magnitude of Change	The development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view, and/or without affecting the overall quality and/or would form an inconspicuous minor element in the wider landscape that may be missed by the observer or receptor.	
Assessment	Sensitivity Magnitude	Road Users - Medium Very small
Significance of Effect	Minor – Not significant	

Viewpoint 2: View from PRow within Oughthonhead Common



Vp2	Panoramic View	(Distance 0.15km looking northeast)
Baseline Description	This is a view from the PRow within the Oughthonhead Common Local Nature Reserve looking northeast towards the site. This view is representative of the potential views of users of the PRow along the river corridor between Ickleford and Histon. The landscape is defined by mature tree cover along the river, grazing meadows and further field boundary tree planting and existing residential properties to the rear of the view. This is set in an undulating landscape with mature field boundaries and woodland providing strong containment.	
Predicted change	From this viewpoint the proposals will be set to the rear of the mature field boundaries to the north of the river corridor which curtail views across the proposed site to the north east. As such the scheme would not be clearly visible from this point on the PRow. This would also be the case for other points on the PRow to the east and west.	
Magnitude of Change	The introduction of the proposed building types would be barely perceptible in the view and would not interrupt the scale and balance of elements within the view.	
Type of Effect	The development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view, and/or without affecting the overall quality and/or would form an inconspicuous minor element in the wider landscape that may be missed by the observer or receptor.	
Assessment	Sensitivity	Users of PRow - High
	Magnitude	Very small
Significance of Effect	Minor – Not significant	

Viewpoint 3: View from PRow within Oughthonhead Common, off A600



Vp3	Panoramic View (Distance 0.1km looking northwest)	
Baseline Description	This is a view from the PRow within the Oughthonhead Common Local Nature Reserve, accessed from the A600, looking northwest towards the site. This view is representative of the potential views of users of the PRow along the river corridor between Ickleford and Histon. The landscape is rural in feel. It is defined by extensive woodland cover which continues along the PRow to the west. This provides a visual barrier to further views north. During winter some heavily filtered views would be gained to the adjacent field and ascending landform but would be enclosed further by mature field boundaries and tree belts.	
Predicted change	From this viewpoint the proposals will be set to the rear of the woodland area and further mature field boundaries. As such the scheme would not be visible from this point.	
Type of Effect	The introduction of the proposed building types would not be legible in the view or interrupt the scale and balance of elements within the view across the River Oughton corridor and the Oughthonhead Common Local Nature Reserve.	
Magnitude of Change	The development would not result in a legible change in the existing view.	
Assessment	Sensitivity	Users of PRow - High
	Magnitude	Negligible
Significance of Effect	Negligible – Not significant	

Viewpoint 4: View from the recreation ground, Burford Way, Hitchin



Vp4	Panoramic View (Distance 0.2km looking north)	
Baseline Description	This is a view from an open space to the south side of the River Oughton corridor and on the northern fringe of Histon. This view looks north across the river corridor and is representative of the potential views of users of the recreation area. The landscape is defined by the woodland associated with the lower River Oughton corridor. Topography is relatively flat across the playing field, before it descends slightly to the wooded area along the river. This woodland provides a visual barrier to further views north.	
Predicted change	From this viewpoint the proposals will be set to the rear of the woodland and beyond further mature wooded field boundaries to the north of the river corridor and as such the scheme would not be that visible from this point. During winter there may be some potential for views of some rooftops, heavily filtered by vegetation.	
Type of Effect	The introduction of the proposed building types would be barely perceptible in the view and would not interrupt the scale and balance of elements within the view.	
Magnitude of Change	The development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view, and no change to the existing view would be appreciated.	
Assessment	Sensitivity	Users of the Recreation ground - High
	Magnitude	Very small
Significance of Effect	Minor – Not significant	

Viewpoint 5: View from PRow on Westmill Lane, north of Swinburne Avenue



Vp5	Panoramic View (Distance 0.5km looking northeast)	
Baseline Description	<p>This is a view from a PRow on Westmill Lane, looking northeast towards the proposed site. This is representative of the potential views of users of the PRow to the southwest of the proposed site.</p> <p>The view is defined by a number of strong landscape elements and has a rural feel across much of the central view, with some built urban fringe elements to the south and north. The immediate view stretches across the sloping meadows associated with the River Oughton. These are enclosed by extensive woodland areas and mature field boundaries. The view to the northeast is channelled across the fields and along the river corridor with higher ground to the north and south restricting views. The extensive woodland cover also provides a visual barrier to further views northeast.</p>	
Predicted change	<p>From this viewpoint the proposals will be set to the rear of the mature tree, woodland and hedgerow cover along the river corridor. During winter there may be some potential for views of some rooftops, but these would be in heavily filtered views. At most other times the scheme would not be very perceptible from this point.</p>	
Type of Effect	<p>The introduction of the proposed building types would be barely perceptible in the view and would not interrupt the scale and balance of elements within the view. During winter with increased visibility through vegetation cover, they would also be comparable to the type and scale of development that already exists in the wider landscape at higher points to the north and south side of the river corridor.</p>	
Magnitude of Change	<p>The development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view, and/or without affecting the overall quality and/or would form an inconspicuous minor element in the wider landscape that may be missed by the observer or receptor.</p>	
Assessment	Sensitivity	Users of the PRow – High
	Magnitude	Very small
Significance of Effect		Minor – Not significant

Viewpoint 6: View from PRow, north side of Westmill Lane



Vp6	Panoramic View (Distance 0.3km looking south)	
Baseline Description	This is a view from a PRow looking south to the edge of the Settlement boundary of Ickleford and to the proposed site beyond. This view is representative of the potential views of users of the PRow. At this point, the landscape is defined by open arable fields. Topography is relatively flat. The view is defined in the mid distance by a wooded skyline, with a number of detached residential properties present, set within the trees. This woodland provides a visual barrier to further views south.	
Predicted change	From this viewpoint the proposals will be set to the rear of the wooded skyline and at a lower point in the wider view. As such the scheme would not be that evident from this point. During winter there may be some potential for views of some rooftops, but these would be in heavily filtered views and would be seen to the rear of existing residential properties.	
Type of Effect	The introduction of the proposed building types would not be legible in the view or interrupt the scale and balance of elements within the view across the fringes of the settlement.	
Magnitude of Change	The development would not result in a legible change in the existing view.	
Assessment	Sensitivity	Users of the PRow - High
	Magnitude	Negligible
Significance of Effect	Negligible – Not significant	

Viewpoint 7: View from View from A600 Bedford Road



Vp7	Panoramic View	(Distance 0.01km looking northwest)
Baseline Description	This is a view from the A600 Bedford road looking northwest as it ascends past the proposed site entrance. This view is representative of the potential views of road users in the local area. The view is defined and enclosed by mature roadside vegetation on both sides of the road. The settlement is also evident in the wider view to the north and east.	
Predicted change	From this viewpoint the proposals will be set to the rear of existing mature vegetation alongside the road. As such the scheme would not be clearly visible from this point and most other points on the A600 to the south as it passes the proposed site. At the site entrance, while there would be a glimpsed view the nature of the view would remain similar being characterised by residential buildings.	
Type of Effect	The introduction of the proposed building types would be barely perceptible in the view and would not interrupt the scale and balance of elements within the view.	
Magnitude of Change	The development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view, and/or without affecting the overall quality and/or would form an inconspicuous minor element in the wider landscape that may be missed by the observer or receptor.	
Assessment	Sensitivity	Road users – Medium
	Magnitude	Very small
Significance of Effect	Minor – Not significant	

Viewpoint 8: View from PRow on Westmill Lane/Ickniel Way, north of Westmill Farm



Vp8	Panoramic View	(Distance 0.5km looking east)
Baseline Description	<p>This is a view from a northern section of the PRow on Westmill Lane, looking east towards the proposed site. This view is representative of the potential views of users of the PRow to the southwest of the proposed site.</p> <p>The view is defined by a mix of natural and built elements, but has a rural feel. The immediate view stretches across farm outbuildings and sloping fields on the north side of the River Oughton. These are enclosed by mature field boundaries. The view to the east is channelled across the fields. It extends to the settlement edge of Ickleford, which is defined by a number of residential properties and a mix of tree cover types. Mature field boundaries then enclose the view at other points to the north and south.</p>	
Predicted change	<p>From this viewpoint the proposals will be set to the rear of mature field boundary vegetation and to the south side of existing residential properties. There exists the potential for users of the PRow to see isolated sections of the rooftops of the proposals in the distant view, but they will be in heavily filtered views through existing mature field boundaries and tree belts.</p>	
Type of Effect	<p>The introduction of the proposed building types would be barely perceptible in the view and would not interrupt the scale and balance of elements within the view.</p>	
Magnitude of Change	<p>The development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view and may be missed by the observer.</p>	
Assessment	Sensitivity	Users of the PRow - High
	Magnitude	Very small
Significance of Effect	<p><i>Minor – Not significant</i></p>	

Viewpoint 9: View from PRow, Westmill Lane / Icknield Way



Vp9	Panoramic View	(Distance 0.02km looking south)
Baseline Description	<p>This is a view from the PRow along Westmill Lane to the west side of detached residential properties on the south side of the road. The view looks south to the western fringes of the site and is representative of potential views of residents and users of the PRow/long distance path and minor road.</p> <p>The view from this point is defined by formal hedgerows and mature tree planting, which defines residential curtilages alongside the road. These elements provide visual barriers to filter and curtail further extended views south from the road. Where views are available they stretch over descending topography, with mature field boundaries, linear tree belts, woodland providing strong field pattern enclosure.</p>	
Predicted change	<p>From this viewpoint the proposals will be set behind the mature tree belt vegetation and other mature trees and vegetation associated with the residential property curtilage. The proposed scheme would alter a small section of the view to the rear of the residential property, through the vegetation, and would provide a noticeable change. It would, however, relate to other residential building types and land uses within the site setting and be of comparable scale and character.</p>	
Type of Effect	<p>The introduction of the proposed building types on the north western corner of the site would be clearly visible behind existing vegetation, especially during winter months, but boundary vegetation and landform variations would prevent views to the remaining sections of the site.</p>	
Magnitude of Change	<p>The development would result in a noticeable change in the existing view and would be noticeable to an observer but would not be out of place with the surrounding setting on the fringes of Ickleford, with other residential properties along the road.</p>	
Assessment	Sensitivity	Residents – High
	Magnitude	Medium
Significance of Effect	Major / Moderate – significant	

Summary of Visual Impacts and Significance

Table 12 Summary of Visual Significance of Effect for Operational Stage

No	Viewpoints	Receptor Type	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Visual Effect
1	A600 Bedford Road	Road Users	Medium	Very small	Minor
2	PRoW within Oughthonhead Common	Users of PRoW	High	Very small	Minor
3	PRoW within Oughthonhead Common, off A600	Users of PRoW	High	Negligible	Negligible
4	Recreation ground, Burford Way, Hitchin	Users of recreation in the landscape	High	Very small	Minor
5	PRoW on Westmill Lane, north of Swinburne Avenue	Users of PRoW	High	Very small	Minor
6	PRoW, north side of Westmill Lane	Users of PRoW	High	Negligible	Negligible
7	A600 Bedford Road	Road Users	Medium	Very small	Minor
8	PRoW on Westmill Lane/Icknield Way, north of Westmill Farm	Users of PRoW	High	Very small	Minor
9	PRoW, Westmill Lane / Icknield Way	Residents / Users of PRoW	High	medium	Major/ Moderate

Significance of Effects indicated in bold are considered Significant' in Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2015

11.0 Mitigation and Recommendations for Development

- 11.1 The scale of the development should be limited to 2.5 storey to retain the same skyline to views from the local landscape.
- 11.2 Development should be kept back from the site boundaries, principally to the north, to allow for existing boundary vegetation to mature and new visual barrier elements to establish to minimise the potential impact of built form. At this point the development layout should also be spaced out and limited in height to maximise existing views from adjacent residential properties to the north. This can be achieved by offsetting the units from central parts of the property curtilage where more extended views are possible and aligning them with the north south axial boundaries of these properties where more vegetative visual barriers exist.
- 11.3 Materials that form the external envelope and roof of the buildings should match the surrounding existing palette, for example, the brick and dark brown roof tiles. These colours will also have a subtler impact on the landscape.
- 11.4 Existing boundaries should be managed to maintain a good structure in the vegetation cover. The boundaries will also be supplemented with new planting to gap up and provide a consistent visual barrier. This will reduce the impact of vehicular lighting and ground floor lighting within the local area and retain the character of the River Oughton and Purwell Valleys.
- 11.5 The proposed scheme will provide new footway links within the development. Consideration should also be given to the extending these links to connect with the surrounding PRow network and provide better connection to the River Oughton on the north side of the river. This would help with wider objectives for the management and enhancement of the river valley as a corridor for green infrastructure proposals and habitat creation, in line with the NHLS Built Development Guidelines for LCA (217). It could also extend the character of the Oughtonhead Nature reserve area and help consolidate this river corridor feature within the surrounding landscape.

12.0 Summary of Residual Impacts and Significance

Summary of Residual Landscape and Visual Effects

12.1 While the visual assessment has looked, where necessary, at both the construction stage and operational stage separately the residual impacts will only cover the operational stage since:

- The construction stage is temporary;
- Any planting mitigation will take some years to become effective.

12.2 The most successful mitigation will be the development of a substantial landscape framework to reinforce the existing retained trees, hedgerows and linear tree belts. This additional visual barrier effect will reduce the visibility of the development to form either inconspicuous minor elements within the view or that no part of the development would be appreciated. The reassessment of visual impacts has been taken after this 15 year period following the start of the operational stage. In this time span any tree planting will have grown to over 8m high and any hedge planting, for example, will have now become a dense managed hedgerow.

Landscape Character

12.3 With the introduction of new residential development into this part of Ickleford and at the same time, the introduction of landscape management objectives including the introduction of further indigenous hedgerow species and green infrastructure, the overall magnitude of landscape character impact is assessed as still being medium, since in accordance with Table 5 the development would give rise to a loss or alteration to one or more key landscape elements but may not be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set against the attributes of this receiving landscape. Assessed against a landscape character that has been determined to have a medium sensitivity, and a magnitude of change assessed as medium the Significance of Effect will remain as moderate.

Visual Impact

12.4 Within a 15-year assessment period;

- New hedging, tree planting and vegetation boundaries will be well established and will have been managed at heights that provide a more effective visual barrier.
- Planting to reinforce the existing vegetation will provide denser effective winter visual barrier.
- The tree belts and occasional hedge trees will also now be 8+ metres high.
- Materials that form the external envelope and roof of the buildings will have 'weathered' and have more subdued tones.

12.5 These mitigation measures would help limit views of the development and therefore alter and reduce some of the magnitudes of visual change from the established viewpoints.

Table 13 Summary and comparison of Residual Visual Significance of Effects

No	Viewpoints	Receptor Type	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Visual Effect	Magnitude of Change	Significance of Visual Effect
				Operational Stage		Residual Stage	
1	A600 Bedford Road	Road Users	Medium	Very small	Minor	Very small	Minor
2	PRoW within Oughthonhead Common	Users of PRoW	High	Very small	Minor	Very small	Minor
3	PRoW within Oughthonhead Common, off A600	Users of PRoW	High	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
4	Recreation ground, Burford Way, Hitchin	Users of recreation in the landscape	High	Very small	Minor	Very small	Minor
5	PRoW on Westmill Lane, north of Swinburne Avenue	Users of PRoW	High	Very small	Minor	Very small	Minor
6	PRoW, north side of Westmill Lane	Users of PRoW	High	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
7	A600 Bedford Road	Road Users	Medium	Very small	Minor	Very small	Minor
8	PRoW on Westmill Lane/Icknield Way, north of Westmill Farm	Users of PRoW	High	Very small	Minor	Very small	Minor
9	PRoW, Westmill Lane / Icknield Way	Residents / Users of PRoW	High	Medium	Major/ Moderate	Small	Moderate

Significance of Effects indicated in bold are considered Significant* in Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2015

13.0 Conclusion

Landscape Character

- 13.1 The site does not fall within any statutory designations. The site falls within the national character area NCA 110 – The Chilterns (as defined by the former Countryside Commission).
- 13.2 With regard to the assessment of local character area, when seen as part of an addition to an existing residential area, with some manmade influences to the north and east and within some important landscape elements along the river corridor to the south and a medium scale land cover and field pattern, the local character is assessed as having medium sensitivity to this form of development.

Construction Stage

- 13.3 For the proposed site itself during the construction stage and with the retention of the main important landscape features such as the boundary hedgerows, trees and woodland, it is assessed to be subject to a medium magnitude of change, due to the partial loss of or alteration to one or more key elements or features, and the introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Consequently, the significance of landscape effect for the construction of the proposal is assessed to be moderate. This assessment of landscape effect is not classified as 'significant'.

Operational Stage

- 13.4 It has been assessed that a minor loss of key landscape elements and the introduction of elements that may be prominent but not uncharacteristic will occur and the subsequent landscape effects are considered not significant in planning terms.

Residual Significance of Landscape Effects

- 13.5 The introduction of new residential development into this part of Ickleford together with introduction of landscape management objectives, the overall magnitude of landscape character impact is assessed as still being medium, since the development would give rise to a loss or alteration to one or more key landscape elements but may not be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set against the attributes of this receiving landscape. Assessed against a landscape character that has been determined to have a medium sensitivity, and a magnitude of change assessed as medium the Significance of Effect will remain as moderate.

Visual Effects

- 13.6 All viewpoints have been specifically chosen to represent certain views from sensitive receptors, where some potential for significant impact can be anticipated. Viewpoints chosen include footpaths, settlements and roads that fall within the ZTV.

Construction Stage

- 13.7 With the introduction of the construction activities, given that the scheme would occur over a relatively short period, it would result in a perceptible change in the existing view, and would form an apparent small element in the wider landscape that may be missed by the observer or receptor. This would result in a small magnitude of change.
- 13.8 The sensitivity of the large majority of visual receptors in closest proximity to the proposed construction activities can be classified as high (users of PRoW and residents). Consequently, with a high receptor sensitivity set against a small magnitude of visual change, the temporary visual effect during the construction period would, as a worst case, result in a significance of effect that can be assessed as Moderate (i.e. 'not significant'). This will be limited to points on the

north boundary of the site and elsewhere they are not considered to be significant, given the presence of mature trees, hedgerows and woodland visual barriers on potential views

Operational Stage

- 13.9 The visual impact assessment has indicated a positive picture regarding the significance of effects upon visual receptors when the proposal and ancillary works are considered as a stand-alone development. In particular, it is noted that the extent of existing visual barriers around the perimeter of the proposed site created by topographical and vegetation features, positively assist in minimising potential views of the proposed development from most sensitive locations beyond the site boundaries.
- 13.10 As a result, the viewpoint assessment has identified that significant visual effects at just one location; viewpoint 9, on the north boundary.
- 13.11 For the majority of the receptors the assessment has found that while some parts of the development could be evident, such views are glimpsed and would not have significant visual effects.

Residual Significance of Visual Effects

- 13.12 With heights of these structures being up to 9m, the mitigation planting to reinforce existing site boundary vegetation, will provide strong visual barriers to the entire site. This will reduce the potential for significant effect at the closest points on the site boundaries, such as viewpoint 9. As a result, there are no viewpoints that are considered to have any 'Significant' residual effects in planning terms.

14.0 Appendices

Appendix A - Glossary of Terms

Appendix B - Sources of information

Appendix C - Policy

Appendix D - Published Landscape Character Areas

Figure 1 - Ordnance Survey Map

Figure 2 - Aerial Photography

Figure 3 – Zone of Theoretical Visibility

Figure 4 – Viewpoint Locations

Figure 5 – Statutory Designation Plan

Figure 6 – Site Proposal plan