Land South of A507, West of A10, Buntingford
Landscape Proof of Evidence

of Natasha Jones BA(Hons) BLA CMLI

LPA Planning Application Ref: 3/24/1255/OUT

PINS Ref: 6009644

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Prepared for:
Hallam Land Management

Prepared by:
Stantec

Project Number:
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Appeal against the Refusal of Outline Permission for:

Land South Of A507, West Of A10, Buntingford: Outline planning application for development of employment land (flexible use B2, B8, E(c), and E(g)), informal open space, associated works and infrastructure including a new access from A507, with all matters reserved except for access.

Landscape Proof of Evidence of Natasha Jones, Director of Landscape Architecture at Stantec.

LPA Planning Reference: 3/24/1255/OUT

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Prepared on behalf of Hallam Land Management.

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1 Introduction and Scope of Evidence

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 My name is Natasha Jones, and I am a Director of Landscape Architecture at Stantec UK Limited. I have been Director since 2021 and am a leader of the UK Landscape Architecture team. I joined Stantec (formerly known as PBA) in 2013. Prior to that, I was Associate Director at Cooper Partnership Limited.

1.1.2 I hold a Bachelor of Arts with Honours degree in Landscape Design and a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture Post-graduate degree, both from Manchester Metropolitan University. I have been a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) since 1998.

1.1.3 I have over 27 years' post-chartership professional experience in landscape planning, landscape architecture and environmental matters. I have provided professional advice on townscape, landscape and visual impact assessment and for the strategic design, green infrastructure and landscape strategies of a wide variety of developments throughout the UK. These include small and strategic-scale residential, mixed-use, commercial, industrial, infrastructure, energy and renewable energy, and recreation proposals for local authorities, public and private companies. I have dealt with sites within and adjacent to National Parks, National Landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), Strategic and Local Gaps and other local landscape designations. My professional experience includes the preparation of evidence and acting as an expert witness in relation to landscape matters at public inquiries, Development Consent Order (DCO) examinations, and local plan hearings.

1.1.4 I was the landscape expert witness for the Appellant at the appeal for residential development at Land North of A507, West of A10, Buntingford (Appeal Reference 6008238). The appeal was allowed as set out in the Appeal Decision CD 7.1.

1.2 Scope of Proof of Evidence

1.2.1 I am familiar with the Appeal Site and its surroundings having overseen the production of the landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) and landscape strategy associated with the Proposed Development. I have most recently visited the Appeal Site on 19th May 2026.

1.2.2 This Proof of Evidence addresses specifically the following landscape Reason for Refusal (RfR):

"***2. The proposals by reason of scale, form, visual impact and siting on the west side of the A10 outside of the Buntingford Settlement Boundary, would intrude upon and have a significantly harmful urbanising impact upon the 'Cherry Green Arable Plateau' (LCA 141) character area within the East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment (2007). The development would also fail to preserve and value the Rib Valley setting of the Buntingford Community Area by virtue of the substantial presence of built form at the elevated parts of the landscape. As such the proposals comprise a substantial urban extension outside of and adjacent to Buntingford which encroaches into the rural area beyond the Green Belt. The development would therefore result in significant harm to the rural landscape character and would fail to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, conflicting with Policies GBR2 and DES2 of the District Plan (2018), Policies ES1 and BE2 of the Buntingford Community Neighbourhood Plan (2017) and paragraph 187(b) of the National Planning policy Framework."*** [sic]

1.2.3 My Proof of Evidence should be read in conjunction with the proof prepared by Gary Stephens, Marrons, the Main Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) (CD 12.1), and the proof prepared by Peter Blair, Tetra Tech.

1.2.4 Since the Appeal Decision CD 7.1 was issued on 24th September 2026, in relation to residential development at Land North of A507, West of A10, Buntingford (Appeal Reference 6008238), the Council has confirmed that in applying the new presumption in favour of sustainable development in the NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 (Policies S3 and S5), it now considers the Proposed Development to constitute sustainable development and the remaining harm to landscape character and appearance does not substantially outweigh the benefits of the Proposed Development, such that the Council's view is that planning permission should be granted for the Appeal Scheme. The Council has also confirmed that it will not be submitting further evidence or statements seeking to defend the second Reason for Refusal, which is the landscape RfR.

1.3 Structure of Evidence

1.3.1 Firstly, I describe the characteristics of the Appeal Site and its context. I then summarise the key points relating to landscape matters in the Appeal Decision CD 7.1 in so far as they are pertinent to the Appeal Site and Proposed Development. I then summarise the LVIA landscape assessment methodology and the findings of the landscape assessment for the receptor LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau. I then describe pertinent landscape policy in relation to the landscape Reason for Refusal. I then provide my consideration and response to the landscape Reason for Refusal. Finally, I set out my conclusions.

1.3.2 I was instructed by Hallam Land Management to fill the role of landscape expert witness (the Appellants) in 2026. All conclusions are my own and based on my own professional opinion and experience.

1.3.3 The evidence that I have prepared and provide for this Inquiry in this Proof of Evidence is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution, the Landscape Institute, irrespective of by whom I am instructed. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

2 Appeal Site Context and Appeal Site Appraisal

2.1 Context

2.1.1 The Appeal Site adjoins the western edge of the existing market town of Buntingford, and lies adjacent to the A10 to the east, and to the A507 is at the northern edge of the Appeal Site. The Appeal Site is located within the Buntingford Community Area (BCA), which includes Buntingford and several villages, including Aspenden, Buckland & Chipping, Cottered, Hormead and Wyddial. These settlements are noted in the foreword of the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan (2014-2031) (BCANP) (CD 5.2) as being, "…*located within and overlooking the Rib Valley…*" and are set within a surrounding agricultural landscape. Buntingford is the largest of the settlements.

2.1.2 The Appeal Site does not lie within a Protected Landscape designation as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework 2026 (NPPF 2026) CD 5.11, or a local landscape designation. It lies within the area which policy GBR2 Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt of the East Herts District Plan 2018 (CD 5.1) applies to. Paragraph 2.4 of the Main Statement of Common Ground (CD 12.1) sets out the parties' agreement that the Appeal Site does not comprise a valued landscape for the purposes of 187(a) of the former NPPF. I note that the NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 does not carry forward a specific reference to valued landscapes.

2.1.3 The A10 runs to the west of most of the existing built-up area of Buntingford and to the east of residential development that was consented as per the Appeal Decision dated 24th September 2026 (Appeal Reference: 6008238) CD 7.1 and the existing Buntingford Business Park, providing an arterial transport route between Royston and Ware. The A507 Baldock Road provides an east-to-west connection from Buntingford High Street to Cottered and onwards to Baldock.

2.1.4 The River Rib flows through its associated river valley at around 90m AOD and through Buntingford. To both sides of the valley floor, sloping landform is gently undulating and complex, rising to higher levels. The valley floor is at its narrowest to the north of Buntingford, around Chipping, and extends and widens to the south to south-southeast of Buntingford. The river valley is enclosed by a spur of land which is around 120m+ AOD to the east of

Buntingford; by a higher ridgeline at around 130m AOD to the north-northeast; and to the west and northwest by spurs and slopes rising to a plateau reaching up to 150m+ AOD height. See Figure NJ1, Appendix A. The settlement of Buntingford, the residential development consented in Appeal Decision CD 7.1, and the Appeal Site are all set within the 'Rib valley landscape cell', which I describe in more detail at section 5.4 of this proof.

2.1.5 Thistley Vale Brook lies to the west of the Appeal Site and is an open channel with no PROW or structural vegetation along the watercourse.

2.1.6 Outside of the settlements, the agricultural landscape pattern comprises arable and pasture fields, delineated by field boundary hedgerows of varying thickness and quality, some of which contain hedgerow trees. In the wider area, there are several small, scattered blocks and belts of woodland; however, these woodlands exhibit limited connectivity.

2.1.7 There is a good network of Public Rights of Way (PROWs) in the countryside, including the Hertfordshire Chain Walk, a recreational route of linked circular walks. Local PROWs connect Buntingford with the surrounding villages.

2.1.8 The Buntingford Conservation Area is located within 1km of the Appeal Site to the east. The intervening development within the western part of Buntingford physically and visually separates the Appeal Site from the Conservation Area. There is no intervisibility between the Buntingford Conservation Area and the Appeal Site. A Conservation Area also encompasses the village of Aspenden and its setting, around 0.53km to the south of the Appeal Site. This is physically and visually separated from the Appeal Site by structural field boundary vegetation, 'The Thicket' a triangular area of woodland and landform, within the intervening agricultural landscape.

2.1.9 The Appeal Site is located within National Character Area (NCA) 86: South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland (Natural England NCA profiles) (CD 9.7). The East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (CD 9.1) was published in 2007; the Appeal Site is situated within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 141: Cherry Green Arable Plateau and abuts LCA 142: High Rib Valley, which is situated to the east and south of the Appeal Site.

2.2 Appeal Site Appraisal

2.2.1 The Appeal Site comprises circa 13 hectares (ha) of arable land and a section of the A507 Baldock Road. It is located to the south of Buntingford Business Park, west of the A10 and to the east of the Thistley Vale Brook. Power lines cross the north-western corner of the Site in a north-east/south-west direction. The boundaries of the Appeal Site are formed by hedgerows, trees and hedgerow trees, and the dense woodland block of the Thicket.

2.2.2 The Appeal Site is on undulating topography; rising from around 122m AOD at the lowest point of the western boundary, to 125m AOD at the highest area of the Appeal Site and descending gradually eastwards towards Buntingford to circa 115m AOD on the eastern boundary. To the west and northwest, the landform undulates and rises gently towards Cottered, with the wider rural contextual landform in the west sitting at higher levels above the Appeal Site.

2.2.3 The Appeal Site is unremarkable, but exhibits a character typical of LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau, set within an area adjacent to the settlement edge and which has some intervisibility with existing settlement. The surrounding landscape to the west is agricultural and exhibits the "*open arable, large scale fields*" and "*limited woodland cover*" characteristic of the LCA. Other characteristics, however, such as a "*remote and isolated feel*" and "*open views to the valley of the Rib*" are not strongly reflected within the Appeal Site, which is subject to a degree of enclosure resulting from the structural boundary vegetation. Some characteristics of LCA 142 High Rib Valley are apparent within the Site, such as the "*small to medium scale landscape in contrast to open arable areas to the adjacent plateaux*". This demonstrates that the Appeal Site is part of a transient landscape at the edges of settlement and character areas LCA 141 and LCA 142.

2.2.4 The linear tree-lines of the A10 and A507 provide a perceptual enclosure to the east and northeast. Hedgerows along the north-eastern boundary of the Site, combined with mature hedgerows and trees along the opposite verge of the A507, provide a degree of separation from the development of Buntingford Business Park.

2.2.5 Overall, the Site does not exhibit a particularly high landscape quality or condition, as although typical character is represented and it has a moderate level of intactness, the condition of individual elements is highly variable.

2.2.6 Most of the Appeal Site does not itself exhibit a particularly high scenic quality, albeit there are medium to long distance panoramic views available across the wider landscape from within it. The rarity of the Appeal Site is low, as it does not contain elements or features that are rare within the wider landscape. The Appeal Site is representative of the wider agricultural landscape, but does not contain characteristics, features or elements that are considered particularly important examples. There are no notable features of wildlife, earth science, archaeological, historical or cultural interest present within the Appeal Site, and therefore the Appeal Site is not of any particular conservation interest. There is no evidence that the landscape of the Appeal Site is valued for recreational activity, as it is not publicly accessible, albeit it forms part of views experienced from PROWs within its context. The perceptual aspects of the Appeal Site do not lend it any particular value, as it does not exhibit any wildness, being an intensively managed agricultural landscape. Whilst there is some limited sense of tranquillity within the Site, particularly toward the south-western extents away from the audible and visual intrusion of traffic on the A10 and A507, this is not a notable feature of the Appeal Site considered as a whole. This limited sense of tranquillity is likely to be further diminished should the BUNT 3 employment allocation, the recently consented employment development at Buntingford Business Park, and the recently consented residential development to the north of the Appeal Site be built out. The Appeal Site does not have any known associations with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.

2.2.7 The visibility of the Appeal Site is predominantly influenced by landform and the extent and type of vegetation cover and built elements within the surrounding landscape.

2.2.8 Open views of the Appeal Site are available from PROW Cottered 40 as it crosses the elevated land to the north of the Appeal Site. However, due to the undulating pattern of the topography, there are no locations on PROWs from which the entirety of the Appeal Site is visible.

2.2.9 Surrounding built development and road infrastructure, together with the wooded vegetation associated with the A10 and A507, provide a degree of enclosure to the east and northeast. Should the consented residential development north of the Appeal Site and A507 be built out, it would add to the degree of enclosure of the Appeal Site. Whilst the Appeal Site is adjacent to the western built edge of Buntingford, it is nevertheless subject to some degree of visual separation from the settlement due to the presence of structural vegetation along parts of the A10.

2.2.10 The gently rising topography of the arable landscape to the west and northwest in conjunction with the sparse woodland and hedgerow cover results in a strong visual relationship between the west-facing slopes of the Site and the immediate landscape context to the northwest, and to a lesser extent to the west.

2.2.11 The area of woodland, The Thicket, adjacent to the Appeal Site's southern boundary, combines with the field boundary vegetation to provide physical and visual enclosure, limiting its visual relationship with its immediate landscape context to the south and southwest.

2.2.12 Transient and oblique views of the Appeal Site are available to users of the A507, including oblique views into the agricultural field of the Appeal Site where there is gappy boundary vegetation. Glimpsed and partial views are available from the PROW network to the west of the Site, as well as from elevated land within the wider landscape context, although fragmented vegetation has a filtering effect. Where views are available, the upper parts of existing built form within the more elevated areas of Buntingford form part of the view compositions.

2.2.13 As for the adjacent consented residential development (Appeal Reference 6008238), the Appeal Site forms part of a transitional landscape which was agreed to be of medium value.

3 Appeal Decision (CD 7.1) for Appeal 6008238

3.1 Summary of Landscape Matters Pertinent to the Appeal Site and Proposed Development

Settlement boundary and policy S5(1)(j) of the NPPF 2026

3.1.1 Paragraph 14 of the Appeal Decision CD 7.1 notes that the appeal site is outside of the settlement of Buntingford and the Inspector applied the definition of settlement as set out in Annex B of the NPPF 2026 (CD 5.11)

3.1.2 Paragraph 17 of the Appeal Decision notes the main parties' agreement that the proposed development should be considered against policy S5(1)(j) of the NPPF 2026 CD 5.11, including the requirement for the development to be physically well-related to an existing settlement.

3.1.3 Paragraph 21 of the Appeal Decision sets out the Inspector's judgement regarding the residential development being physically well-related to the settlement of Buntingford, including the following landscape-related points, which I consider can equally be applied to the employment Appeal Site and Proposed Development:

- Active travel links
- Intervisibility between the site and existing residential/other development (including some consented development which has not yet been constructed)
- That there would be no intervening countryside between the settlement edge and the proposed development
- Proximity of and intervisibility with Buntingford Business Park
- Avoidance of isolated development; and
- Proximity of the development to the edge of the existing settlement boundary of Buntingford.

3.1.4 Paragraph 22 of the Appeal Decision CD 7.1 acknowledges that the A10 provides some physical separation between the appeal site and land to the east, which falls within the settlement boundary. The Inspector notes that the parties agreed that the appeal site is adjacent to the settlement of Buntingford. The Inspector also notes his judgement that the A10 is a, "*...soft connection bridging the settlement of Buntingford with the proposed development rather than being perceived as being a hard boundary, or a prominent landscape break.*"

3.1.5 At paragraph 24 of the Appeal Decision CD 7.1, the Inspector reiterates reasons why he considers the proposed development would be physically well-related to the settlement of Buntingford, including the following points, which I consider can also be applied to the employment Appeal Site:

- The A10 is not very wide as it passes the appeal site
- Part of the A10 is experienced as being visually within cutting
- When travelling along the A10 near to the appeal site, the motorist is obliquely aware of existing residential development
- Overall proximity of the appeal site to the defined settlement boundary
- Overall pattern of development within the locality
- Land topography; and
- Presence of existing and proposed urban influences.

Character and appearance (including landscape character)

3.1.6 At paragraph 103 of the Appeal Decision CD 7.1, the Inspector notes that, "*The appeal site forms part of a transitional landscape and there is no dispute between the main parties that it is of medium value.*" I consider that the same can be applied to the employment Appeal Site. The Inspector also highlighted that the strategy for the Cherry Green Arable Plateau includes a strategy for reducing visual impact of development on upper slopes.

3.1.7 In paragraph 106 of CD 7.1, the Inspector notes the wording of policy ES1 of the Neighbourhood Plan and thus that not all development in the area would automatically cause harm to the character and appearance of the area.

3.1.8 At paragraph 109 of CD 7.1, the Inspector notes that whilst the proposed development would cause change, it "*does not automatically equate to significant harm*".

3.1.9 The Inspector found 'limited localised adverse harm' would arise from the proposed residential development to the overall character and appearance of the countryside, as referenced in the Appeal Decision CD 7.1 paragraphs 113, 114, 115, 117, 119 and 120 and concluded in paragraphs 126 and 164. The Inspector's conclusions were in keeping with the findings of the LVIA, that the adverse effects are localised. The LVIA for the employment Appeal Site similarly found that the adverse effects of the Proposed Development are localised.

3.1.10 The Inspector noted in CD 7.1 that the parameter plans would control the location and heights of proposed built form within the residential development, and that the proposed built development would be confined within the Rib valley landscape cell and avoid higher ground. Accordingly, the Inspector found that the proposed development would not be in conflict with the Neighbourhood Plan and notes in paragraph 120 of CD 7.1, "…*I recognise that efforts have been made to keep the proposed development confined to the valley slopes and, in this regard, there would be suitable compliance with policy ES1 of the NP.*" The same approach has been taken for the Proposed Development at the employment Appeal Site.

3.1.11 The Inspector afforded moderate positive weight to the proposed development for hedgerow benefits, BNG benefits and provision of country park open space (paragraphs 140 and 142 of the Appeal Decision CD 7.1). Similarly, the Proposed Development would provide net gain of hedgerows and tree canopy, as well as the provision of a new area of informal open space for recreation, woodland planting and tree planting.

4 The LVIA and Effects on Landscape Character

4.1 LVIA and Landscape Effects on Landscape Character

4.1.1 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) (CD 1.18) prepared by Stantec was submitted with the planning application and mitigation measures were taken into account when considering the effect of development on landscape character.

4.1.2 The methodology used for the LVIA is set out in LVIA Appendix A (CD 1.18) and is drawn from guidelines set out in Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (GLVIA 3), 2013 (CD 9.2).

4.1.3 As noted in the Main SoCG (CD 12.1), both parties agree there is no methodological dispute about the LVIA. I also note that the Inspector for Appeal Reference 6008238 CD 7.1 found no issues with the LVIA methodology that was used for the residential development. That same methodology was used for the LVIA for this Appeal Site.

4.1.4 I summarise the landscape assessment methodology of the LVIA and the LVIA findings for the LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau, below.

Summary of Landscape Assessment Methodology

4.1.5 The sensitivity of landscape receptors was determined by a combination of the value of the landscape receptor and the susceptibility of the landscape receptor to the type of change proposed, using professional judgement. Landscape value was determined through a combination of the importance of landscape-related planning designations and the attributes that are set out a paragraph A.2.4 of the LVIA (CD 1.18); these including landscape quality, scenic quality, perceptual aspects, rarity, representativeness, recreation and association. Landscape value categories are High, Medium and Low, and the criteria for these are provided in Table A.2.1 of the LVIA (CD 1.18). The assessment of the susceptibility of landscape character considers criteria of: landform, pattern / complexity, composition, landcover, relationship of a given landscape area to existing settlements or developments, and potential for appropriate mitigation within the context of existing character and guidelines.

The assessment of susceptibility of landscape features relates to the potential for loss/retention of the relevant features in relation to the type of development proposed, and the ease with which such elements may be replaced, where appropriate. Susceptibility of landscape character/ features is categorised as High, Medium or Low, as set out in Table A.2.2 of the LVIA (CD 1.18). Landscape susceptibility categories are High, Medium or Low, and the criteria for those is summarised in Table A.2.2 of the LVIA (CD 1.18). Based on the combination of value and susceptibility, an assessment of landscape sensitivity was reached and was defined as High, Medium or Low. Typically, a high value and high susceptibility receptor would result in a receptor of High sensitivity; and a low value and low susceptibility receptor would result in a receptor of Low sensitivity.

4.1.6 The landscape magnitude of change is informed by judgements about the precise nature of the change which arises from the Proposed Development. Table A.2.3 of the LVIA (CD 1.18) sets out the categories of magnitude, ranging from None to Large, and the associated criteria for each category; this is shown at Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Landscape Magnitude of Change, extract from LVIA Appendix A (CD 1.18)

Table A.2.3: Landscape Magnitude of Change

Magnitude	Criteria
Large	Pronounced change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect an extensive area. The change may be long-term or may be irreversible.
Medium	Partial change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect a relatively extensive area. The change may be medium-term or may be irreversible.
Small	Limited change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect a relatively limited area. The change may be short-term or reversible.
Very Small	Very slight change to the existing landscape receptor that may affect a limited area. The alteration may be short-term or reversible.
None	No change to the existing landscape receptor.

4.1.7 The method for the determination of significance of landscape effects is set out in the LVIA at Section A.4 Significance of Effects (CD 1.18). To draw conclusions about the significance of landscape or visual effects, the combination of the sensitivity of the receptors and the magnitude of change were considered for the Proposed Development at the assessment periods. The significance of effects is rated on a scale of Neutral to Major. The assessment of significance of effects is subject to professional judgement but, in broad terms, where a receptor of High sensitivity experiences a Large magnitude of change as a result of the

Proposed Development, the significance of effect is likely to be Major. Conversely, where a receptor of Low sensitivity experiences a Very Small magnitude of change as a result of the Proposed Development, the significance of effect is likely to be Negligible. Where it is considered that there is potential for both beneficial and adverse changes, these magnitudes of change are noted and the balance of these considerations used to inform conclusions on the significance of effect. LVIA Table A.4.1 (CD 1.18) provides the criteria for the significance of landscape effects and is replicated below in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Significance of Landscape Effects, extract from LVIA Appendix A (CD 1.18)

Table A.4.1: Significance of Landscape Effects – Criteria

Significance of Landscape Effect	Criteria
Major Beneficial	Alterations that would be substantially characteristic and result in a pronounced improvement of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be restored or reintroduced as part of the Proposed Development.
Moderate Beneficial	Alterations that result in a partial improvement of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be partially restored or reintroduced.
Minor Beneficial	Alterations that result in a limited improvement of the existing landscape resource. Characteristic features would be restored to a limited degree.
Negligible Beneficial	Alterations that result in a very slight improvement to the existing landscape resource, not uncharacteristic within the receiving landscape.
Neutral	Neither beneficial nor adverse effects on the existing landscape resource.
Negligible Adverse	Alterations that result in a very slight deterioration to the existing landscape resource, not uncharacteristic within the receiving landscape.
Minor Adverse	Alterations that result in a limited deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Characteristic features would be lost to a limited degree.
Moderate Adverse	Alterations that result in a partial deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be partially lost.
Major Adverse	Alterations that would be substantially uncharacteristic and result in a pronounced deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be wholly lost.

LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau

4.1.8 LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau is a published landscape character area in the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (September, 2007) (CD 9.1 and Appendix C of this proof). Landscape character areas (LCAs) are shown at Figure NJ2: L3 Landscape Character Plan, Appendix A. This plan accompanied the planning application for the Appeal Site.

4.1.9 The key characteristics of LCA 141 are listed on page 218, East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1)as:

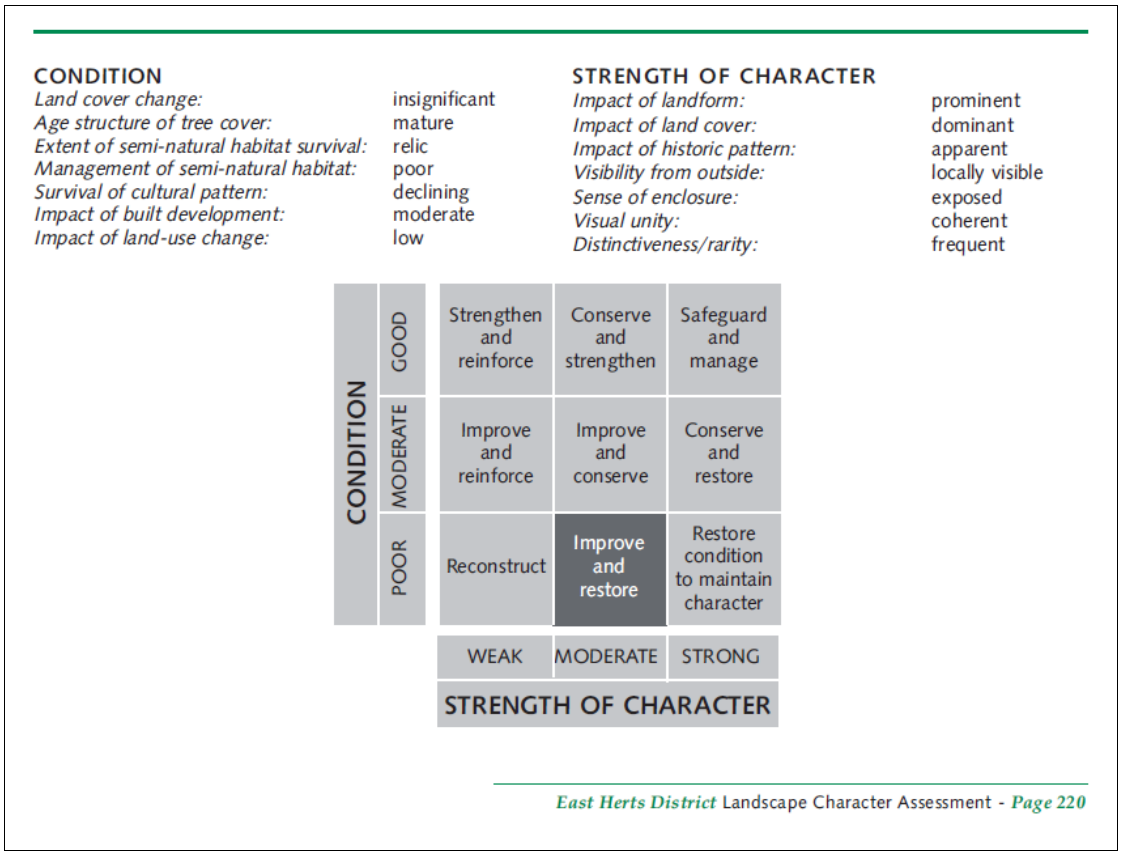
- "*open arable plateau with some very large field units*
- *minimal settlement, restricted to individual farmhouses*
- *remote and isolated feel*
- *minimal woodland cover*
- *degraded landscape pattern with few hedgerows and associated trees*
- *organic winding lanes with few direct connections across the plateau, (except for A507)*
- *water towers, LV, electricity cables and aerial masts locally prominent features due to open landscape*
- *open views across plateau and to valley of the Rib*"

4.1.10 The distinctive features of LCA 141 are also listed on page 218, East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1):

- "*deserted medieval village of Wakeley*
- *Sainsbury's distribution depot (outside area)*
- *Throcking Church (outside area)*"

4.1.11 The evaluation section for LCA 141 identifies it as Poor condition and Moderate strength of character, resulting in the strategy and guidelines for managing change to be Improve and Restore. The impact of built development on LCA 141 is noted as being moderate, and the impact of land-use change noted as low, as shown in Figure 4.3 below.

Figure 4.3: Extract of Evaluation of Cherry Green Arable Plateau – Area 141, page 220 (Landscape Character Assessment SPD, East Herts Council) (CD 9.1):



CONDITION

Land cover change:	insignificant
Age structure of tree cover:	mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	relic
Management of semi-natural habitat:	poor
Survival of cultural pattern:	declining
Impact of built development:	moderate
Impact of land-use change:	low

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform:	prominent
Impact of land cover:	dominant
Impact of historic pattern:	apparent
Visibility from outside:	locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	exposed
Visual unity:	coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	frequent

CONDITION	STRENGTH OF CHARACTER: WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character

East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment - *Page 220*

4.1.12 Page 221 (Landscape Character Assessment SPD, East Herts Council) (CD 9.1) sets out the strategy and guidelines for managing change. The Proposed Development would contribute to these through the creation of new woodland, hedgerows, and ponds.

4.1.13 The detailed assessment of landscape sensitivity of LCA 141 is provided in LVIA (CD 1.20) Appendix C – Landscape Effects Table and is summarised below:

- **Landscape value of LCA 141: High**, noting that it is a fairly frequent landscape type within the county, with no major distinctive characteristics. There is a moderate to sparse network of Public Rights of Way (PROW), with several of these providing links between the Rib Valley and the Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau. However, it is also noted that the local community regards LCA 141 as very distinctive and the LCA as a whole contains features and areas designated for landscape and scenic beauty. LCA 141 is a landscape area of common components and characteristics, some of which are designated locally for

their landscape and visual qualities. The assessment noted that LCA 141 makes a strong positive contribution to the landscape character of the region.

- **Landscape susceptibility of LCA 141: High**, recognising that LCA 141 is visible from the neighbouring plateaux and the upper slopes of the Rib Valley. The scale of LCA 141 is noted as being large with extensive exposed views and being mainly quiet and remote apart from where locally closer to the A507 and the A10 corridor. LCA 141 was appraised as likely to have little scope to accommodate commercial development without undue consequences upon its overall integrity.

- **Landscape sensitivity of LCA 141: High**

4.1.14 The detailed assessment of landscape magnitude of change to LCA 141 is provided in LVIA (CD 1.20) Appendix C – Landscape Effects Table and is summarised below for the assessed periods:

- **During Construction: Magnitude - Very Small, Significance – Minor Adverse**, noting that there would be a very slight change to the LCA 141 which directly affects a very limited proportion of the receptor and that the construction works would be short-term. The judgement of significance as Minor Adverse is made because the negative changes to the character of LCA 141 during the construction phase would include the introduction of the construction equipment, structures and activity; the alterations resulting in a limited deterioration of LCA 141, and that it's characteristic features will be lost to a limited degree.

- **Operational Phase (Completion) Year 1: Magnitude – Very Small, Significance – Minor Adverse**. The description of change noted the Proposed Development would occupy an area of undeveloped land adjacent to an existing settlement, which would represent a small increase in the built form and recreational opportunity within LCA 141. The changes to the perceptual aspects of the LCA would be appreciable from only a small proportion of its area. It was judged there would be a very slight change to LCA 141 which would directly affect a very limited proportion of the receptor as a long-term and partially reversible. The judgement of significance as Minor Adverse was made because at Year 1

the negative changes to the landscape character of LCA 141 resulting from the Proposed Development would include the introduction of commercial built form into an area that is currently open, whilst the positive changes would include the new recreational access; the alterations would result in a limited deterioration of LCA 141, and characteristic features would be lost to a limited degree.

- **Operational Phase Year 15: Magnitude – Very Small, Significance – Neutral**. The description of change noted at Year 15 the built form would be softened and integrated into the landscape of LCA 141 by the planting, including that which is located at the highest point of the Appeal Site, and which would have become established, with the assumption made that it would include the landscape strategy, as well as the improved management of the existing retained vegetation to improve its condition and longevity. At Year 15, there would be a very slight change to LCA 141, which would directly affect a very limited proportion of the receptor as a long-term and partially reversible change. The judgement of significance as Neutral was made because at Year 15, the negative changes to the landscape character of LCA 141 resulting from the Proposed Development would include the introduction of commercial built form into an area that is currently open. The positive changes would include the new provision of publicly accessible open space and thus recreational access, the improvements to the management of the existing vegetation, and the establishment of the planting which would contribute to improvement of the landscape and scenic qualities of the character of the LCA. As a result of factoring in these positive changes to the consideration of the landscape effect, the balance of the effect was considered to become neutral. It was determined that at Year 15, the alterations would result in effects on LCA 141 that are neither beneficial nor adverse, and therefore the significance of effect would be Neutral.

4.2 LVIA Addendum and Landscape Effects on Landscape Character

4.2.1 Following a meeting with the Council's Landscape Officer (Place Services), additional visual assessments at three specified locations were requested. Visual effects for receptors at the three additional agreed-upon view locations (A-C) were assessed in the LVIA Addendum CD 2.15, which was submitted as part of the Revised Planning Application.At Section 3.3 of the

LVIA Addendum (CD 2.15), the revised scheme of the Proposed Development as per the Revised Application was assessed and new or amended landscape and visual effects for the LVIA receptors in the Application LVIA (CD 1.18) were discussed, for the revised scheme including clarification of building heights on the Building Heights Plan (HLM082/038), adjustment to the development area, visibility splays and highways design, and additional proposed tree and hedgerow planting along the Appeal Site's boundary with the A10 and A10 / A507 Baldock Road roundabout junction. The revised scheme was not considered to alter the findings of the landscape and visual assessments.

5 Landscape Policy Context

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Planning policy is dealt with in the Planning Proof of Evidence. In this section, I set out relevant landscape policies as cited in the landscape Reason for Refusal (RfR).

5.2 National Planning Policy Framework

NPPF (2026) CD 5.11

5.2.1 I consider the relevant references and policies in NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 to be:

- Chapter 4 Achieving sustainable development – the boxed text at the start of the chapter notes the objectives of the sustainable development policies, including, "…*and limiting development away from settlements to help safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.*" However, I note that NPPF 2026 paragraph 10 states, "*Short objectives are included in boxed text at the start of chapters for context only and should not be applied as either plan-making or decision-making policy*."

- Policy S5 (1j): Principle of development outside settlements, criteria (i), where the development would "*Be physically well-related to an existing settlement (unless the nature of the development would make this inappropriate) and be of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure…*"

- Policy N2 (1a): Improving the natural environment – "*Consider the environmental qualities of land proposed for development, including habitats, landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside, and identify opportunities for those qualities to be conserved or enhanced (including through requirements for biodiversity net gain where these apply).*"

- Policy N2 (1d): Improving the natural environment – "*Conserve and enhance existing natural features of visual historic or nature conservation value (such as trees and hedgerows) where possible; and use appropriate landscaping to help create a well-designed place and integrate development into its surroundings.*"

5.3 District Policy

East Hertfordshire District Plan 2011 - 2033 (2018) (CD 5.1)

5.3.1 The policies cited in the landscape RfR area GBR2 and DES2. These are set out below.

"***Policy GBR2 Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt***

I. In order to maintain the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt as a valued countryside resource, the following types of development will be permitted, provided that they are compatible with the character and appearance of the rural area:

(a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;

(b) facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, including equine development in accordance with CFLR6 (Equine Development), and for cemeteries;

(c) new employment generating uses where they are sustainably located, in accordance with Policy ED2 (Rural Economy);

(d) the replacement, extension or alteration of a building, provided the size, scale, mass, form, siting, design and materials of construction are appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or surrounding areas;

(e) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings) in sustainable locations, where appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or surrounding area;

(f) rural exception housing in accordance with Policy HOU4 (Rural Exception Affordable Housing Sites);

(g) accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in accordance with Policy HOU9 (Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople) or Non-Nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, in accordance with Policy HOU10 (New Park Home Sites for Non-Nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople); (h) development identified in an adopted Neighbourhood Plan."

"***DES2 Landscape Character***

I. Development proposals must demonstrate how they conserve, enhance or strengthen the character and distinctive features of the district's landscape. For major applications, or applications where there is a potential adverse impact on landscape character, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and/or Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment should be provided to ensure that impacts, mitigation and enhancement opportunities are appropriately addressed.

II. Appropriate mitigation measures will be taken into account when considering the effect of development on landscape character/landscaping.

III. Where relevant, development proposals will have regard to the District Council's currently adopted Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document."

5.4 Neighbourhood Plan Policy

Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan 2014 - 2031 (2017) (CD 5.2)

5.4.1 The policies cited in the landscape RfR are ES1 and BE2. These are set out below.

"***ES1: Development proposals should be appropriate to and maintain the Rib Valley setting of the BCA.***

Development on the fringes of Buntingford which extends on to the higher ground surrounding the Rib Valley could have a harmful effect on the landscape of this area and parts of the Cherry Green Arable and Wyddial Plateaux.

Policy HD2 provides guidance on the ridge heights of housing required to maintain the rural setting of the BCA within the Rib Valley and policy HD4 refers to specific design guidance that maintains a rural feel to new housing within the BCA.

The landscape value of this area is clearly stated in the East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment SPD of 2007 and in East Herts Draft District Plan January 2014 supporting documents. In discussing the strategy for managing change, the Landscape Assessment suggests that EHDC should "promote a strategy for reducing the visual impact of development on the upper slopes of Buntingford including the Sainsbury's warehouses".

"***BE2: Proposals to upgrade, intensify or extend the following main industrial sites listed below and shown on the maps on pages 30 and 31***

1 The Watermill Industrial Estate
2 Park Farm Industrial Estate
3 Buntingford Business Park
4 Silkmead Farm, Hare Street (Great Hormead Parish)
5 Buttermilk Farm Agricultural Industry (Aspenden Parish)

and other smaller employment sites will be permitted where they do not conflict with other policies in this Plan and provided that all the following criteria are met so that proposals:

1 Do not involve the loss of dwellings
2 Contribute to the character and vitality of the local area
3 Are well integrated into and complement existing clusters of activity
4 Protect residential amenity
5 Do not adversely impact upon road safety
6 Enhance the development and provision of employment and self-employment
7 Do not adversely affect the attractiveness of the local countryside"

6 Responses to the Landscape Reason for Refusal

6.1 Landscape Reason for Refusal

6.1.1 The landscape related RfR states:

"***2. The proposals by reason of scale, form, visual impact and siting on the west side of the A10 outside of the Buntingford Settlement Boundary, would intrude upon and have a significantly harmful urbanising impact upon the 'Cherry Green Arable Plateau' (LCA 141) character area within the East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment (2007). The development would also fail to preserve and value the Rib Valley setting of the Buntingford Community Area by virtue of the substantial presence of built form at the elevated parts of the landscape. As such the proposals comprise a substantial urban extension outside of and adjacent to Buntingford which encroaches into the rural area beyond the Green Belt. The development would therefore result in significant harm to the rural landscape character and would fail to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, conflicting with Policies GBR2 and DES2 of the District Plan (2018), Policies ES1 and BE2 of the Buntingford Community Neighbourhood Plan (2017) and paragraph 187(b) of the National Planning policy Framework.***" [sic]

6.2 Settlement Form and the A10

6.2.1 To understand the historic evolution of the settlement form of Buntingford, I have reviewed historic maps, copies of which are set out at Appendix B, and I set out my descriptions and key points below.

6.2.2 The 1883-1884 map (see Figure 6.1) shows the form of Buntingford as ribbon settlement pattern along both sides of Ermine Street with rectilinear small fields set off the rear of dwellings. The settlement spans in a northerly direction from the point that Ermine Street crosses the River Rib. Ermine Street is an ancient and straight Roman road between London and York.

6.2.3 A cluster of buildings was located around River Green near to the River Rib. A workhouse was located to the southeastern edge of the settlement, and a vicarage, the railway station and

Railway Inn, a gas works, and watermill were located to the south of the settlement, around Ermine Steet and to the east of the River Rib. These functional buildings and uses appear set apart from the residential area of the market town. To the west, and west of How Green, a well is notated on the map. Aspenden Hall and the village of Aspenden are to the southwest of Buntingford, and The Thicket woodland is included within the parkland of Aspenden Hall.

Figure 6.1: 1883-1884 County Series Map



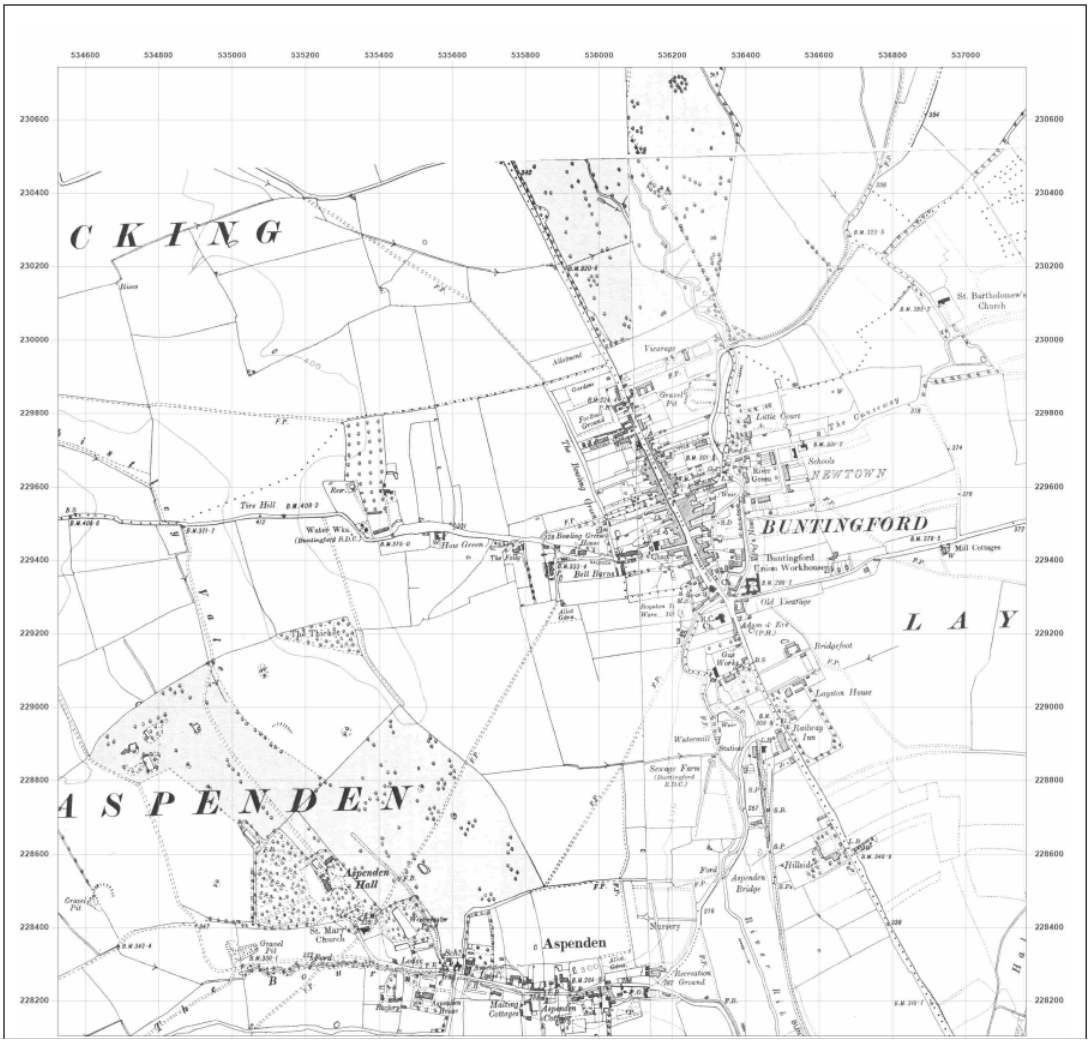
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6.2.4 The 1896-1899 map indicates little change to the settlement pattern.

6.2.5 The 1919-1924 map (see Figure 6.2) also shows little change to the overall settlement pattern, although a new street, Norfolk Road, and housing form a new spur from the west of the High

Street (Ermine Street). The small rectilinear fields behind the housing on the western side of the High Street are shown to have changed into gardens, a football ground, and to the north an allotment area. To the west and between How Green and Tire Hill, is a water works and reservoir.

Figure 6.2: 1919-1924 County Series Map

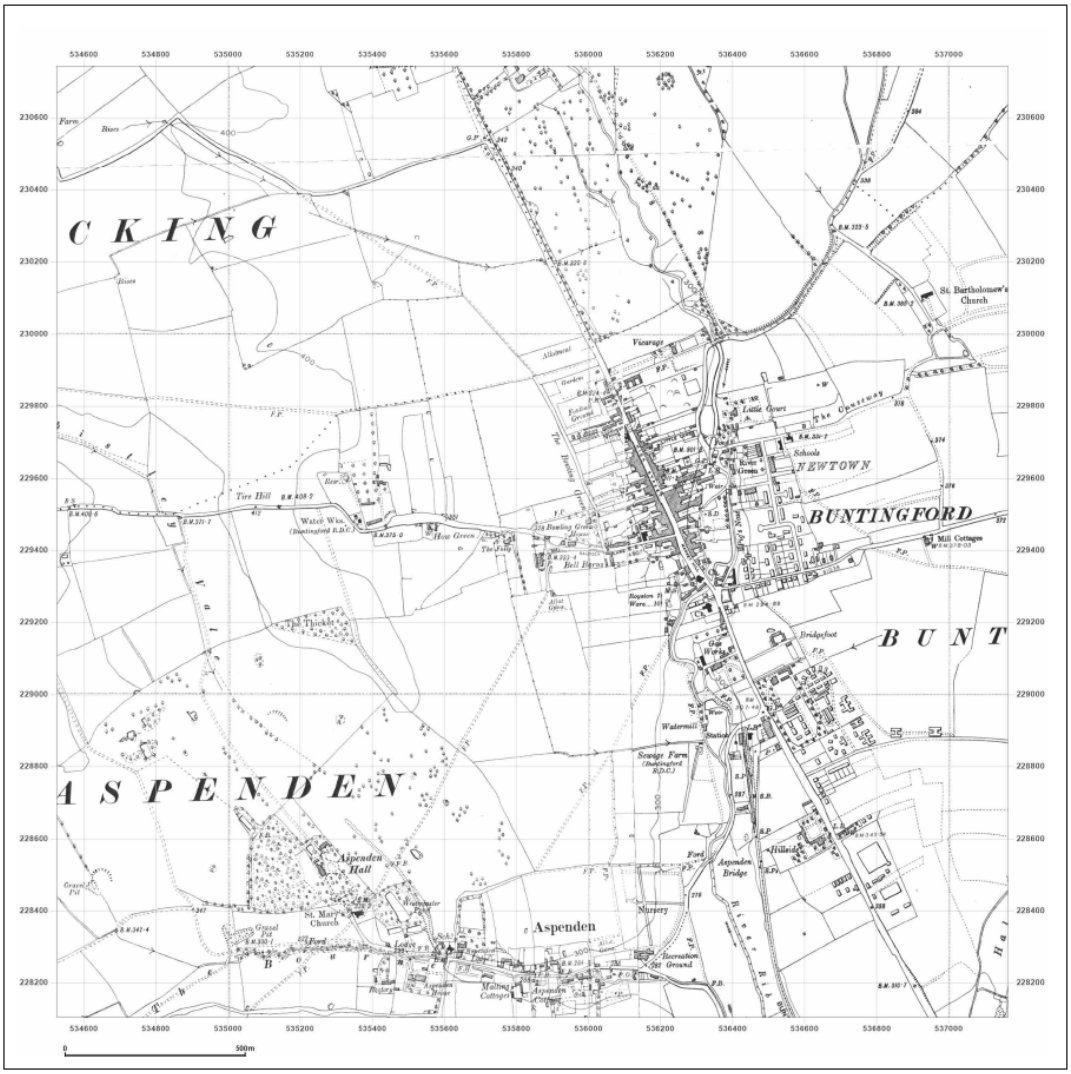


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6.2.6 The 1948-1950 map (see Figure 6.3) labels the High Street and Market Hill (Ermine Street) as the A10, and post-war housing has emerged to the southeast of Buntingford, around River Green and Pig's Nose to Newtown, extending southwards to the B1035 and including the location of the former workhouse. This starts to change the fundamental settlement form of Buntingford from a ribbon development to a cluster development pattern around the High Street and River Rib. Post-war housing is also mapped to the south of Buntingford and

Bridgefoot, on the eastern side of the A10, though this appears to maintain some sense of separation from the southern edge of Buntingford. The railway and station remain on the western side of the A10 and to the east of the River Rib.

Figure 6.3: 1948-1950 County Series Map



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6.2.7 The 1951-1952 map shows the housing located to the south of Bridgefoot to be less and of a simpler geometric design than was shown on the earlier map. A school is located at The Bowling Green to the west of a new road which runs parallel to the A10 High Street (Ermine Street), and to the west of that school parcel and north of How Green an area of housing is plotted.

6.2.8 The 1978-1981 National Grid map (see Figure 6.4) shows a step change in the form of the settlement, which appears as a clustered development around the A10 London Road / Station Road / High Street (Ermine Street). Housing areas have expanded to the south of the A507 Baldock Road, and new ribbon development extends southwards along the A10, infilling the historical gap. Housing has also extended northwards, out to the east of the A10. North of How Green Farm and the A507 Baldock Road, to the east of the reservoir, is Sunnyside Nursery. Buildings at Suncrest, north of Throcking Lane, appear on the plan for the first time.

Figure 6.4: 1978-1981 National Grid Map



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6.2.9 The 1988-1992 National Grid map (see Figure 6.5) shows the new A10 trunk road which sweeps northwest from the A10 London Road (Ermine Street) at the south of Buntingford,

south of a sewage works and north of Aspenden, in a northerly direction to cross the A507 Baldock Road at what was formerly labelled as How Green Farm and the Sunnyside Nursery, and eventually ties back into the High Street's A10 (Ermine Street) alignment to the north of Buntingford. Infill housing has occurred between roads within the town, for example on the former football ground in the north of the settlement, the area around the former Layston Lodge and at Dell Springs. A new industrial estate has been created adjacent to the sewage works at near Aspenden Bridge.

Figure 6.5: 1988-1992 National Grid Map


Buntingford
Newtown
Aspenden
BU
Tine Hill
Monks Walk
Greenways
Playing Field
School
Recreation Ground
Sewage Works
Wastermill Industrial Estate
Aspenden Bridge
Home Farm
Depot
Hill Cottages
Allen Gdns
The Causeway
Grave Yard
Tudor Stud
Aspenden Hall
Waterhunster Pond
The Bourne
Old Rectory
Reservoir (covered)
Tennis Courts
Park Farm
Ind Est
Little Court
Recreation Ground
Pav
Pond
Sch
Pp
Pg
Ch
Gdns
Cott
Ind Est
Rec

6.2.11 The 2024 map shows additional housing areas to the north of Buntingford, between the eastern side of the A10 trunk road and the west of the High Street, and to the south of Buntingford infilling the area between Aspenden Road / Aspenden Bridge, the London Road and the A10 trunk road, as well as to the east of the London Road on the area formerly notated as a depot.

6.2.12 Since the 2024 map, housing and commercial developments have been consented in the following locations (see Appendix A, Figure NJ1: Landform and Settlement Analysis Plan):

- 3/23/1447/OUT Land off Luynes Rise – 350 dwellings
- 3/24/0294/OUT Land North of Hare Street Road – 200 dwellings
- 3/23/1390/FUL Land off London Road – 68 dwellings (67 net)
- 3/22/1030/OUT Land off Neale Drive – 58 dwellings
- 3/25/1986/FUL Buntingford Business Park – west of A10, 4 industrial units (use classes E(g), B2 and B8), with associated parking and external works
- 3/24/0966/OUT Land North of A507, West of A10, Buntingford – 600 dwellings, 60 units of elderly accommodation, mixed use local centre, first school, informal and formal open space, associated works and infrastructure, including a new access from A507 and pedestrian bridges over the A10 (Appeal Reference 6008238, Appeal Decision CD 7.1 24th September, 2026).

6.2.13 From this analysis of historical growth of Buntingford, I note that the settlement has evolved considerably from its original form of ribbon development along both sides of the main thoroughfare of Ermine Street Roman road, from where Ermine Street crossed the River Rib. Post-war and 1970s-80s housing broke out from the historic ribbon settlement that aligned the Ermine Street Roman road, extending the settlement initially to the west, and later to the east and south to form a cluster settlement pattern. This change as a result of modern housing over the last 50 years has notably altered the character of the settlement.

6.2.14 I note that in paragraph 14 of the Appeal Decision CD 7.1 for the adjacent residential development, the Inspector applied the definition of a settlement as set out in Annex B of the NPPF 2026 CD 5.11. The definition is:

"***Settlement:*** *Includes cities, towns, villages and other predominantly built up areas, including land which is allocated or has permission for development which will form part of the built-up area once the development is complete. This includes areas defined as settlement in the development plan (whether using defined settlement boundaries or equivalent terms, or criteria for identifying settlement extents where boundaries have yet to be defined).*"

6.2.15 Whilst currently there is relatively little existing built development on the west side of the A10, the allocated BUNT 3 employment site, and the recent consents for industrial units (3/25/1986/FUL) and residential development (3/24/0966/OUT, Appeal Reference 6008238) are all on the west side of the A10 and thus would be considered as settlement under the definition of Annex B of the NPPF 2026.

A10 Trunk Road

6.2.16 The A10 trunk road was opened in June 1987 as part of the main trunk road programme that ran from 1984 onwards. The A10 trunk road was constructed to ease traffic pressure on the High Street (Ermine Street) through the centre of Buntingford. After the A10 trunk road had opened, traffic calming and road narrowing measures were then put in place on the High Street, which remain today. As a result, the High Street is no longer a primary movement route for vehicles passing beyond the settlement. However, parked motor vehicles still dominate the roadside within the centre of the settlement.

6.2.17 Despite an extensive search for the original reasons for the design and positioning of the alignment of the A10 trunk road by my team, we have not found any pertinent information, nor has any information been discovered to suggest that the original function of the A10 trunk road was to limit future development or growth of Buntingford. Mindful of transport policy at the time, it can reasonably be inferred that the intended function of the new trunk road was to divert traffic away from what would have been a highly congested High Street in the centre of the market town.

6.2.18 Reviewing historic maps dated between 1978 to 1992, (see Figures 6.4 and 6.5 above) it is seen that south of Buntingford, the A10 trunk road route diverts off the London Road (Ermine Street) historic route to the west, cutting across fields to a location between the village of Aspenden and development at Aspenden Bridge, sewage works and Watermill Industrial Estate. The A10 trunk road then continues north, continuing to dissect historic fields and aligning the westernmost edge of built form of the town; from which point it continues in a northerly direction to tie back into the historic A10 (Ermine Street) route. Historic maps are in Appendix B.

6.2.19 As can be seen on Figure NJ1, Appendix A, the A10 trunk road partially cuts across and partially follows along landform contours, with no obvious landform influence on the route's alignment, other than to accommodate the highway engineering requirements.

6.2.20 Reviewing the A10 trunk road route against the published LCA information (CD 9.1), it is noted that the LCAs were assessed with the A10 trunk road already in place and that the LCA boundaries do not fully align with it (see Figure NJ2, Appendix A). The A10 trunk road crosses through parts of LCA 142 High Rib Valley and LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau, and the remainder of the A10 trunk road roughly aligns with the boundary between LCA 142 High Rib Valley and LCA 140 Ardeley / Cottered Settle.

6.2.21 LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau crosses over the A10 trunk road into the existing western edge of Buntingford. The southern section of the LCA 142 High Rib Valley also crosses over the A10 trunk road into the southwestern and southern edges of Buntingford, and includes Aspenden, Thistley Vale and The Thicket woodland, which was once part of the former Aspenden Hall parkland, and Westmill south of Buntingford.

6.2.22 The A10 trunk road reads in the landscape as a highly engineered, partly straight and partly curved road. Whilst there are variable levels of vegetation aligning the road corridor, the A10 trunk road does not obviously respond to landform or the historic pattern of landscape fields and field boundary vegetation.

6.2.23 Whilst historically there has been some perception of the A10 trunk road acting as a boundary to Buntingford, this is a mis-guided ex post facto construct which, for the reasons described

above, bears little to no relation to landform, published landscape character areas or the historic landscape pattern. The intended function of the A10 trunk road was to remove traffic from the historic High Street (Ermine Street) in the centre of the market town, not to act as a future barrier to the growth of the settlement.

6.2.24 At Paragraph 22 of the Appeal Decision CD 7.1 for residential development to the west of the A10, the Inspector notes:

"*I acknowledge that the A10 does physically separate the appeal site from land immediately to the east of it and which falls within the defined settlement boundary. Even accounting for the view expressed by the Council's landscape witness that the A10 itself is a 'landscape break', there is common ground that the site is adjacent to the settlement of Buntingford. It is noteworthy that large parts of the A10 which are close to the appeal site are confined to land within a cutting. Hence, it is my judgement that in this location it constitutes a soft connection bridging the settlement of Buntingford with the proposed development rather than being perceived as a hard boundary, or a prominent landscape break*."

6.2.25 Additionally, at Paragraph 24 of the Appeal Decision CD 7.1, the Inspector found that:

"*The A10 is not very wide as it passes the appeal site: it is not four lanes and a verge as can be seen along other parts of the A10 further afield. Part of it is experienced as being visually within a cutting. When travelling along part of the A10 and near to the appeal site (e.g., just after or before Neale Drive), the motorist is obliquely aware of existing residential development. Such development is also experienced from parts of public rights of way (PROW) Nos. 40 and 41. I also consider that owing to the proximity of the appeal site to the defined settlement boundary, the overall pattern of development within the locality, land topography, and the presence of existing and proposed urban influences, the proposed development would be physically well related to the settlement of Buntingford for the purposes of applying national decision-making policy S5(j) of the Framework*."

6.2.26 In regards to the A10 and the employment Appeal Site, there are similarities to the residential development site as follows:

- The Appeal Site is adjacent to the settlement of Buntingford
- The parts of the A10 which are close to the Appeal Site are within slight cutting and lower than the Appeal Site
- The A10 is not very wide as it passes the Appeal Site, comprising two lanes
- When travelling along part of the A10 and near to the Appeal Site, near to the approaches to the A10 / A507 roundabout, the motorist is obliquely aware of existing residential development, petrol station and veterinary practice, and upper rooflines of the Buntingford Business Park.

6.2.27 I therefore conclude that, as for the residential development, the A10 is a 'soft connection' bridging the Proposed Development of the employment Appeal Site and the settlement of Buntingford, and it is not perceived as a 'hard boundary' or 'prominent landscape break'.

6.2.28 In the East Hertfordshire District Plan 2011 – 2033 (CD 5.1), Buntingford Settlement Boundary is mostly drawn around the town's built limits, aside from part of the western Settlement Boundary which extends up to the edge of the A10 trunk road. That Settlement Boundary is now not up to date, due to planning consents for new housing and commercial developments around the town since the District Plan was published, including those which are located outside of the 2018 Settlement Boundary and those to the west of the A10. I also note the 2018 Settlement Boundary does not include Buntingford Business Park, which is situated west of the A10 and north of A507 Baldock Road, and the buildings of which can be partially seen from the A10 through vegetation. Therefore, in my opinion, the A10 does not in reality contain all of what is considered to be Buntingford.

6.2.29 The Appeal Site is located to the west of the A10 trunk road and published Buntingford Settlement Boundary and has been identified in the landscape RfR as intruding upon and urbanising the LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau character area and forming a substantial urban extension outside of Buntingford. As I have described above, the historic growth of Buntingford evolved through organic development expansion to both sides of the original A10 (Ermine Street) Roman road, such that the market town's settlement pattern

changed from ribbon settlement to cluster settlement. Development at the Appeal Site would simply be absorbed as a continuation of Buntingford's past growth in what has become a cluster settlement form, and the route of the A10 trunk road would be perceived as within the extended settlement area and crossed at appropriate points to help foster community integration.

6.3 LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau

6.3.1 The key characteristics and distinctive features that are identified for LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau in the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) are set out at Paragraphs 4.1.10 and 4.1.11 of this proof.

6.3.2 I note that the LCA is described as being, "*…located on the elevated plateau between the valley of the River Rib to the east and the more settled plateau to the west…" (*page 218, East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD, CD 9.1), and the section about topography *(*page 219, East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD, CD 9.1) of the LCA notes, *"…There is a marked break of slope to the east where the plateau meets with the High Rib Valley…"*

6.3.3 On page 220 (Landscape Character Assessment SPD, East Herts Council (CD 9.1)), under the visual and sensory perception section, the text states, "*The plateau landscape is visible from both the neighbouring plateaux and the upper slopes of the Rib Valley. There are extensive views within the area and the scale of the area is large with exposed views. As a result it is visually sensitive to changes in built form. The area mainly has a quiet and remote feel apart from where locally closer to the A507 and the A10 corridor.*"

6.3.4 The proposed built form within the Appeal Site does not extend right up to the Appeal Site's western red line boundary. To the contrary, the western part of the Appeal Site is proposed as open space and the proposed built form would be confined to the central and eastern parts of the Appeal Site, adjoining the A507 and adjacent to the A10; and, because of the road corridors, as noted in LCA 141 text, this part of LCA 141 has less of a quiet and remote feel than the rest of the LCA.

6.3.5 The LCA 141 evaluation goes on to describe rarity and distinctiveness, stating "*The landscape is a fairly frequent landscape type within the county with no major distinctive characteristics*."

6.3.6 Visual impact upon LCA 141 is described, stating "*The major visual impact on the area comes from the perimeter of Buntingford with significant impact arising from both industrial and residential developments on the upper slopes of the Rib Valley*." Yet the photographic study of Appendix 1 of the BCANP (CD 5.2) notes that Buntingford "…*has impinged very little on the highly valued local landscape…*" (Appendix 1 of the BACNP (CD 5.2), page 65, paragraph 6.)

6.3.7 The evaluation section of the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) identifies LCA 141 as Poor condition and Moderate strength of character, resulting in the strategy and guidelines for managing change to be Improve and Restore. The impact of built development on LCA 141 is noted in the evaluation section of the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) as being 'moderate', and the impact of land-use change noted as 'low', as shown in Figure 4.3 of this proof.

6.3.8 Page 221 of the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) sets out the strategy and guidelines for managing change. The Proposed Development would contribute to these through creation of new woodland, hedgerows, and ponds.

6.3.9 Figure NJ3: Zone of Theoretical Visibility Plan, Appendix A, indicates theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development, this being without the benefit of the landscape strategy and mitigation planting for the Proposed Development. Theoretical visibility of the proposed built form extends over part of LCA 141, but as the development would be on east to northeast facing slopes, most of the proposed built form would not be visible or perceptible from the areas of LCA 141 indicated on Figure NJ3. There is a greater extent of the LCA 141 area that would not have visibility of the Proposed Development, than would. Once the landscape strategy and mitigation planting has successfully established and is maturing, the visibility of the Proposed Development would be less than indicated on Figure NJ3.

6.3.10 The LVIA assessed LCA 141 as a landscape receptor with High sensitivity. I consider the judgement of landscape sensitivity of LCA 141 as a High sensitivity category takes the worst-case approach and is therefore a reasonable and appropriate judgement of sensitivity.

6.3.11 The assessment of change was judged as Minor Adverse significance during construction and at completion (Year 1), due to direct and adverse effects on a limited proportion of LCA 141. The LVIA assessed the landscape effect at Year 15 to be of Neutral significance. This judgement took into account negative changes arising from the introduction of commercial built form into an area that is currently open, as well as positive changes arising from new open space and recreational access where previously there was none, improved management of existing vegetation and the establishment and maturing of planting which would contribute to the LCA.

6.3.12 The Proposed Development would comprise an extension to the urban area within a small part of the northeastern area of LCA 141, and this would be at odds with the settlement characteristics of LCA 141. However, the proposed built form at the Appeal Site would be located where there is existing influence from the A507 and A10 road corridors and where there is some intervisibility with parts of the existing settlement of Buntingford. Additionally, I note that LCA 141 is described as a large-scale character area, which is not rare or distinctive.

6.3.13 Therefore, I consider that the Proposed Development's urbanising effect upon LCA 141 would be limited and would not substantially change or redefine the key characteristics of the LCA or affect the integrity of the distinctive features of LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau. I consider the findings of the landscape effects assessment to be as set out in the LVIA.

6.4 Rib Valley Setting

6.4.1 Figure NJ1: Landform and Settlement Analysis Plan, Appendix A, illustrates the valley floor around the River Rib between 90m to 100m AOD. Contours have been produced for this plan at 10m intervals using LiDAR data (LiDAR Composite DTM 1m grid 2022). Additionally, the highest levels between 130m to 150m+ AOD are highlighted to illustrate the elevated, gently undulating dissected plateau. Ridgelines along the highest points of landform and spurs projecting outwards and down from the ridgelines are also marked on the plan.

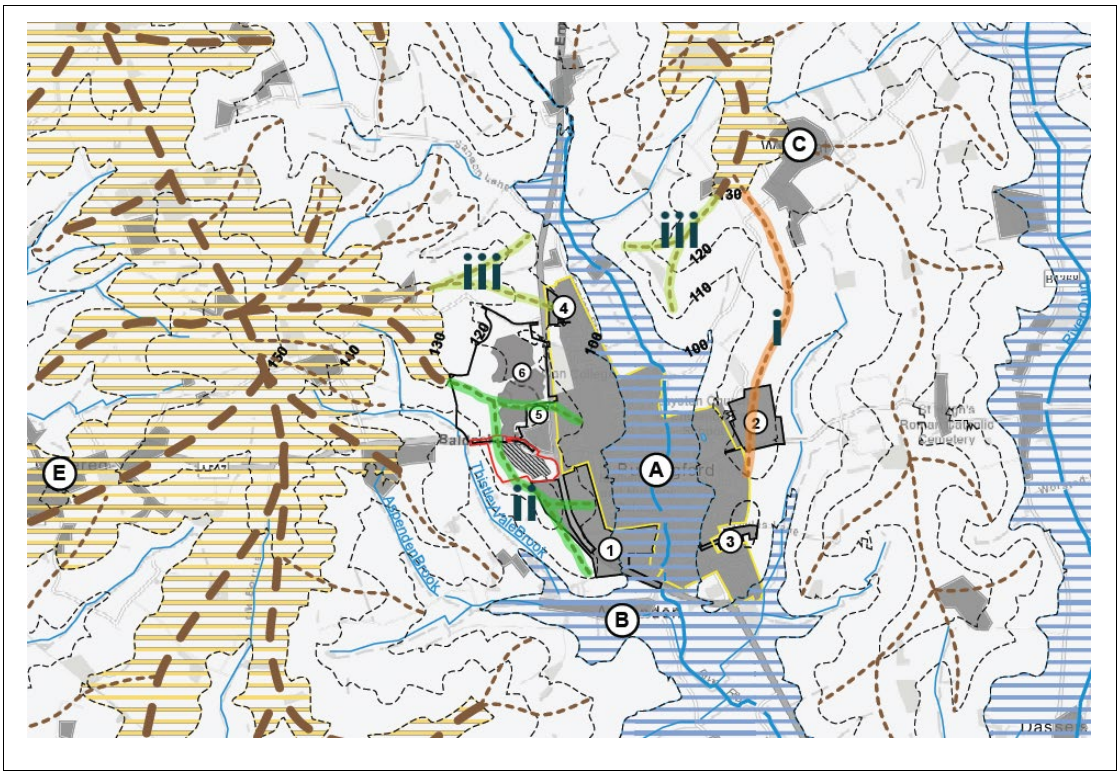
6.4.2 The plan also identifies the locations of settlements. The area of Buntingford which is shown on the plan includes the existing town as per the current map base, with the addition of recently consented developments as listed at paragraph 6.2.12 of this proof, and includes

Buntingford Business Park. The Buntingford Settlement Boundary, identified in the East Herts District Plan 2011 – 2033 (2018) (CD 5.1), is also shown on Figure NJ1 for context.

6.4.3 As previously described in Section 6.2 above, Buntingford has evolved from its original form of ribbon settlement that aligned the Roman road in the valley floor into a cluster settlement pattern. As shown on Figure NJ1, Appendix A and Figure 6.7 below, the settlement, including the recently consented developments, has grown over time across the valley floor and then up onto the valley slopes, including extending up to the highest parts of a spur of landform. The exception relates to very recent development on the eastern spur of landform, which projects in a southerly to southwesterly direction (see orange highlight line, labelled **i**, in Figure 6.7 below) from a ridgeline that is located to the north-northeast of Buntingford. This recently consented development, 3/24/0294/OUT Land North of Hare Street Road comprises 200 dwellings and extends over the crest of the eastern spur, onto east to southeast facing slopes.

6.4.4 To the west, beyond the existing built edge of Buntingford, including the Buntingford Business Park, is a spur of landform (hereafter referred to as 'the western spur' – see dark green highlight line **ii** on Figure 6.7 below) which projects in a southeasterly direction from a ridgeline that extends from the elevated and gently undulating plateau situated further to the west (yellow hatching on Figure 6.7 below). That western dissected plateau contains several small settlements and the larger settlement area of Cottered (labelled E in Figure 6.7 below) which is located at the top of the elevated plateau landscape, all of which are part of the Buntingford Community Area. The western spur which wraps around Buntingford has shorter spurs extending eastwards over the A10 and into the Buntingford urban area. To the north of Buntingford, there are spurs of landform situated to the northeast and northwest (pale green highlight lines **iii** in Figure 6.7 below), which project from plateau ridgelines. Buntingford Business Park is to the south of label 5 in Figure 6.7 below.

Figure 6.7: Extract of Figure NJ1: Landform and Settlement Analysis with Landform Spurs Highlighted



6.4.5 This series of landform spurs form a topographical landscape cell which wraps around and contains the River Rib valley slopes, the valley floor, and Buntingford (hereafter referred to as the 'Rib valley landscape cell').

6.4.6 The BCANP (CD 5.2), at page 17, states,

"*Buntingford, situated in the Rib valley, provides many of the amenities for the Community: most of these amenities are only just sufficient for current needs.*

Post war development has mainly followed the valley setting, especially to the east, ensuring the eastern skyline still reflects the town's rural setting. Developments of the late 20th century (60's to 90's) namely Vicarage Road, Monks Walk, Downhall Ley, Fairfield, Snells Mead and Luynes Rise are generally well laid out and incorporate mature trees and some green spaces. Later developments give an impression of over-crowding. The Causeway, a road from the River Rib past Layston School leading to Layston Church (St Bartholomew's), is of particular interest as it is lined both sides with mature trees. There is concern that any development adjacent to this roadway may impact on its natural beauty and will spoil the eastern skyline.

The villages within the BCA are mainly residential with property sited along or just off their main street. They are surrounded by significant areas of agricultural land and were originally based within the farming community. All are provided with open green spaces and mature trees but there are certain types of green space that are underprovided in the area."

6.4.7 Additionally, page 65 of the BCANP (CD 5.2), Appendix 1 – Buntingford and the Landscape of the East Herts Plateau, paragraph 2, states:

"*Buntingford is situated in the High Rib valley which is one of several running approximately north to south from the northern part of the area known as the East Herts Plateau (see fig.02 'Landscape Regions of Hertfordshire' in reference 1). Chapter 5 of the East Herts District Plan Supporting Document (reference 2) states in para 5.3.32 "Buntingford sits astride the River Rib on the road from London to Cambridge, halfway between Ware to the south and Royston to the north, in the rural north of the district. The town is located in a rural landscape characterised by the narrow valley of the river Rib nestling in elevated plateaus."*

6.4.8 Appendix 1 of the BACNP (CD 5.2) states at page 65, paragraph 6 that its aim is to, "…*illustrate, by reproducing a series of wide angle views, the extent to which Buntingford sits within the Rib Valley and has impinged very little on the highly valued local landscape - to the benefit of all."*

6.4.9 The paragraph continues, "…*The appendix also sets out to indicate what restrictions should be placed on new building so as to preserve the landscape setting of the Town and maintain this situation*."

6.4.10 A photographic study is set out in the BCANP Appendix 1 (CD 5.2), presenting wide-angled photographs with enlarged extracts with notations, as an appraisal of the landscape setting of Buntingford seen in a variety of views, which are presumed to be notable. There is no methodology provided for these photographs, but which does not appear to have followed published guidance for photography to appraise or assess the landscape and development within it, such as Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals (Landscape Institute, 2018). The written analysis of views provided in the BCANP Appendix 1 (CD 5.2), is simply descriptive with judgements made about impacts

of development on the views; however, there is no transparent methodology, and the analysis has not been prepared using published best practice guidance such as the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2013) or subsequent clarifications. It appears to be little more than a series of subjective judgments.

6.4.11 Paragraph 2, page 71, BCANP Appendix 1 (CD 5.2), opens discussion of the photographic study, stating:

"*The result of this photographic exercise demonstrate that Buntingford largely continues to nestle within the local landscape of the North-East Hertfordshire Plateau. Nevertheless, they also show that great care should be taken in granting further permission for more development in and around the Town if this is to remain the case…*"

6.4.12 Paragraph 4, page 71 BCANP Appendix 1 (CD 5.2), go on to discuss views D and E of the photographic study, showing an area between the then edge of Buntingford and the A10 which, at the time the BCANP was being prepared, was proposed for new housing:

"*The views from sites D and E in particular show the area between Buntingford and the A10 bypass that is being proposed by Bovis for further housing. It is quite clear from these views that such housing, which would be on land that rises to above 115 metres above sea level, would impinge significantly on the landscape to the detriment of the local area's natural beauty. Such development would be on land rising several metres higher in places than that on which the highest level of development at Longmead, which is clearly shown in the view from point C.*"

6.4.13 The area of proposed housing which Appendix 1 of the BCANP (CD 5.2) referred to has since received planning consent for 350 dwellings, and is shown on Figure NJ1 as 3/23/1447/OUT Land off Luynes Rise. I note that the proposed housing for this consented development would extend up to the western spur.

6.4.14 Paragraph 1, page 72 BCANP Appendix 1 (CD 5.2) concludes,

"*…Thus there does seem to be a degree of support for ensuring that the future development of Buntingford is carried out in such a way that the landscape views across the Town are not adversely affected. This requires that building on higher ground is limited in height and that any further housing is developed within the valley setting.*"

6.4.15 The Appeal Site is located to the west of existing housing at Buntingford and to the south of the Buntingford Business Park and area of consented housing development of Appeal Reference 6008238. Figure NJ1, Appendix A and Figure 6.7 above, show the Appeal Site's red line, and within that, the area which is proposed for new built form is identified as a grey tone with diagonal hatch.

6.4.16 This illustrates that the proposed new built form of the Appeal Site would be located to the east of and, crucially, below the western spur and thus would be contained within the Rib valley landscape cell formed by the series of spurs which wrap around and contain the River Rib valley slopes, the valley floor, and Buntingford. Therefore, the proposed new built form of the Appeal Site would be developed within the valley setting, thereby emulating the predominant character of the development of the settlement in the last 50 years. Furthermore, I consider that sensitively designed new built form contained within the Rib valley landscape cell that contains Buntingford is an appropriate approach to avoid far-reaching impacts on the wider, rural landscape and the more open and elevated plateau landscape to the west.

6.4.17 The same approach to minimising harm by proposed development, through avoiding the upper slopes of landform, was applied to the adjacent residential scheme and I note in Paragraph 114 of Appeal Decision CD 7.1, the Inspector recognised that the parameter plans would control the position and height of buildings and thus the proposed development's built form avoided the plateau or ridge top of the undulating landscape. At Paragraph 115 of Appeal Decision CD 7.1, the Inspector said,

"*In reaching a finding of limited localised harm, I nonetheless acknowledge that the proposal would avoid higher ground surrounding the Rib Valley and that built development would be confined to that within the 'Rib valley landscape cell' as named by the appellant. In other words, built development would be confined to the valley slopes below the western and*

northern spurs of landform and, in this regard, would preserve and value the Rib Valley setting of the Buntingford Community Area. In this regard, I do not find that the proposal would conflict with the NP which seeks to maintain the town's setting and which seeks the objective of 'limiting development on higher ground'."

The Inspector goes on to state at Paragraph 118 of Appeal Decision CD 7.1, "*As the built development would avoid ridge top or plateau land, it would not in this regard be highly prominent or visually overbearing. Built form would not occupy a skyline location. Therefore, it would not generally assert itself as a significantly discordant or intrusive feature that would cause very significant and lasting harm to the character and appearance of the landscape…*"

6.4.18 I consider that the same conclusions can reasonably be applied to the Proposed Development.

6.4.19 Whilst such morphological considerations to the evolution of a settlement will rarely be evident to local residents based upon a detailed consideration of the form of the surrounding landform of Buntingford; in reality it will be apparent to future residents that the location of the proposed development 'fits in with the landscape' and is therefore in keeping with the form of the settlement and its setting.

6.4.20 Were it not for the existence of the A10, it is all but inconceivable that the Council would seek to argue that the form and location of the development proposed was out of keeping with the existing settlement pattern. The issue is therefore how the A10 would be perceived once the consented developments, including the residential development Appeal Reference 6008238 and the Proposed Development have been constructed. My colleagues address the degree of integration from a transport and accessibility perspective, but from a townscape perspective, having an A road passing between two parts of a settlement of this scale would not result in an incongruent settlement form. I have previously discussed the A10 in detail at paragraphs 6.2.24 to 6.2.29 of this proof. .

6.5 Adjacent Landscape Character Areas around Buntingford

i.

6.5.1 The East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD's LCAs and the location of the Appeal Site are shown on Figure NJ2 Landscape Character, in Appendix A. The East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) includes descriptions of each LCA's rarity and distinctiveness and an evaluation of each LCA's condition and strength of character, with resulting identification of strategy and guidelines for managing change. These aspects for the LCAs which surround and abut Buntingford and which are in the Rib valley landscape cell, are summarised below:

- LCA141: Cherry Green Arable Plateau – Rarity: fairly frequent, no major distinctiveness. Poor condition, Moderate strength of character with Improve and Restore as the management strategy.

- LCA142: High Rib Valley – Rarity: fairly unusual in the county. Moderate condition, Moderate strength of character with Improve and Conserve as the management strategy.

- LCA143: Wyddial Plateau – Rarity: fairly frequent, the most distinctive feature is noted to be the immediate environment of Wyddial Hall. Moderate condition, Moderate strength of character with Improve and Conserve as the management strategy.

6.5.2 This demonstrates that the Appeal Site is within the least constrained LCA within the Rib valley landscape cell.

6.6 Policies GBR2 and DES2 of the East Hertfordshire District Plan 2011 - 2033 (CD 5.1)

GBR2 Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

6.6.1 The Appeal Site is within the 'Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt' designation on the Policies Map within the East Hertfordshire District Plan 2011 - 2033 (CD 5.1). The Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt is an area of the District noted within Policy GBR2 to comprise a valued countryside resource. The GBR2 policy applies to all land in the district which is not designated within a Settlement Boundary, and which is not Green Belt. Paragraph 4.6.1 of the District Plan (CD 5.1) notes, "*Green Belt in East Herts covers approximately one-third of the District. The remaining two-thirds of the District are located in the 'Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt*'."

6.6.2 Policy GBR2 restricts the type of development which is permitted within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, regardless of their landscape and visual impact. This matter is dealt with in the planning evidence of Gary Stephens, Marrons.

DES2 Landscape Character

6.6.3 I consider that the Proposed Development would contribute to conserving, enhancing or strengthening the character and distinctive features of the district's landscape for the reasons set out below.

6.6.4 The proposed built form within the Appeal Site would be located to the east of and, crucially, below the western spur of landform, as described at Section 6.5 above, and therefore would be contained within the Rib valley landscape cell formed by the series of spurs which wrap around and contain the River Rib valley slopes, the valley floor, and Buntingford. This positioning of proposed built form was acknowledged as being an appropriate approach in the Council's Landscape Officer (Place Services) consultation response dated 14/10/2024 (see Appendix D of this proof) which states, "*The submitted Opportunities and Constraints Plan concentrates the tallest built development to the east on lower ground, and closer to the existing urban edge of Buntingford. The proposed open space is located on the western edge which is most suitable, considering its elevated position and distance from the urban edge...*" (2nd bullet, page 4 of consultation response). In addition, the summary of the Design South East Design Review Panel report (CD 9.9) dated 09/10/2024 states, "*The masterplan has many positive features, including proposed public realm improvements, the provision of additional facilities for Buntingford and a good response to topography*".

6.6.5 The proposed area of built form within the Proposed Development avoids slopes which face outwards into the adjacent landscape cell to the west and avoids the more elevated land of the open plateau landscape and the ridgeline which Cottered is situated upon, as can be seen on Figure NJ1, Appendix A.

6.6.6 The proposed area of built form within the Appeal Site avoids building on the higher ground of LCA 141 and would be located within the Rib valley setting.

6.6.7 The Proposed Development would not fundamentally alter or redefine the published LCA 141 key characteristics, although I acknowledge it would be at odds with the settlement characteristics of LCA 141 as previously noted. It also would not alter the published distinctive features of LCA 141.

6.6.8 The Proposed Development is not located within LCA 142: High Rib Valley or LCA 143: Wyddial Plateau, both of which are identified as Moderate condition and Moderate strength of character. It is located within a small part of LCA 141: Cherry Green Arable Plateau, which is identified as Poor condition and Moderate strength of character, and is a fairly frequent LCA with no major distinctiveness.

6.6.9 As I have previously set out, the Appeal Site is located within the least constrained LCA within the Rib valley landscape cell.

6.6.10 The area of built development within the Proposed Development is located in the central and eastern parts of the Appeal Site, and is nearest to the A10, the existing built edge of Buntingford, and Buntingford Business Park. It is also in proximity to the consented residential development (Appeal Reference 6008238) situated to the north of the Appeal Site. The Proposed Development avoids the highest part of the Appeal Site. The landscape strategy includes woodland planting located on higher land to the western edge of the proposed area for built form and located between the proposed built form and area of open space. This proposed planting was acknowledged as being relevant to the 'Strategy for Guidelines for Managing Change: Improve and Restore' for LCA 141 and providing visual screening in the Council's Landscape Officer (Place Services) consultation response dated 14/10/2024 (Appendix D of this proof), which states, "*The 'Strategy for Guidelines for Managing Change: Improve and Restore' of the Area 141 LCA states, to "promote the creation of new small to medium scale native broadleaved woods throughout the area to reduce the scale of the open arable areas, using ancient hedge and field boundaries to locate the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion". The submitted Illustrative Masterplan (Rev. F) demonstrates an open space with tree planting and pathways, with a woodland belt running along the north-south ridgeline. This woodland planting provides visual screening to the*

proposed built form. We advise this area of strategic landscaping is planted in advance of the adjacent area of built development." (3rd bullet, page 4 of consultation response).

6.6.11 The planning application was accompanied by the LVIA (CD 1.18) which identified likely effects of the Proposed Development on landscape and visual receptors, and the Landscape Mitigation Strategy Plan. Subsequently, and following the Council's initial consultation comments, the LVIA Addendum (CD 2.15) was provided along with an updated Landscape Mitigation Strategy Plan (CD 2.18 and Figure NJ4, Appendix A) to accompany the revised planning application. The LVIA and LVIA Addendum took mitigation measures into account when considering the effect of development on landscape character.

6.6.12 The Proposed Development has potential to contribute to the Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy Priorities for Theme 1: A Resilient Landscape – 1A Expand tree coverage and enhance woodland connectivity; Theme 3: Nature Recovery – 3B incorporate biodiversity into existing and future new developments in accordance with BNG requirements; and Theme 4: Access and Connectivity – 4A Reconnect and create multifunctional links. Additionally, the Proposed Development has potential to contribute to the strategy and guidelines for managing change in LCA 141 through the creation of new woodland, and hedgerows.

6.7 Policies ES1 and BE2 of the BCANP (2017) (CD 5.2)

6.7.1 I consider that the Proposed Development meets the requirements of these policies for the reasons I have already set out in Paragraphs 6.6.3 to 6.6.12 above.

6.8 NPPF and Degree of Protection

6.8.1 The Council's Statement of Case (CSoC) CD 6.3 at paragraph 4.12 references Paragraph 187(b) of the former 2024 NPPF, and CSoC CD 6.3 paragraph 4.13 references the Cawrey Ltd v SoSCLG [2016] EWHC 1198 (Admin) judgement and the Alwyn De Souza v SoSCLG [2015] EWHC 2245 (Admin) judgement in relation to the recognition of intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside imparting a degree of protection to those matters. The Council states at 4.13 CsoC CD 6.3:

" *…Such protection and the degree of protection will be commensurate to the circumstances of the countryside, its contribution and its condition and quality. In the case of this site the Council considers the degree of protection should be at a high level.*"

6.8.2 I acknowledge that NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 policy N2 (1a) requires the environmental qualities of land proposed for development to be considered, including landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside. However, I disagree with the Council that the degree of protection applied to the Appeal Site should be at a high level. The Appeal Site does not lie within a Protected Landscape designation or local landscape designation, which would warrant a degree of protection at a high level.

6.8.3 I note that in paragraph 47 of Borough of Telford and Wrekin v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Gladman Developments Limited [2016] EWHC 3073 (Admin) (CD 8.1) , the judgement found that, "*…the Inspector did not err in law in concluding that Policy CS7 was not in conformity with the NPPF and so was out-of-date. It is a core planning principle, set out in NPPF 17, that decision-taking should recognise "the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it". This principle is reflected throughout the NPPF e.g. policy on the location of rural housing (NPPF 55); designation of Local Green Space (NPPF 76); protection of the Green Belt (NPPF 79 – 92) and Section 11, headed "Conserving and enhancing the natural environment" (NPPF 109- 125). However, NPPF does not include a blanket protection of the countryside for its own sake, such as existed in earlier national guidance (e.g. Planning Policy Guidance 7), and regard must also be had to the other core planning principles favouring sustainable development, as set out in NPPF 17*."

6.8.4 I have already identified that the Appeal Site is within LCA 141, that the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) notes LCA 141 is large-scale, it is not described as rare or having major distinctiveness and was evaluated in the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) as being of Poor condition with Moderate strength of character. The Appeal Site is subject to existing urban influence from the A507 and A10 road corridors, and from the east to northeast-facing slopes of the Appeal Site, there is some intervisibility with parts of the existing settlement of Buntingford. The Appeal Site is

adjacent to the A507 and A10 road corridors, and the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) notes that LCA 141 has a "…*mainly quiet and remote feel apart from where locally closer to the A507 and A10 corridor*" (page 220).

6.8.5 Overall, the Appeal Site does not exhibit a high landscape quality or condition, as although typical landscape character is represented and it has a moderate level of intactness, the condition of individual elements is highly variable. The Appeal Site does not exhibit high scenic quality and is representative of the wider agricultural landscape. The Appeal Site does not exhibit wildness and is an intensively managed agricultural land use.

6.8.6 Both parties have agreed in the Main SoCG (CD 12.1) that the Appeal Site does not comprise a 'valued landscape' for the purposes of 187(a) in the former NPPF which protects a 'valued landscape'. I note that NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 does not carry forward a specific reference to valued landscapes.

6.9 NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 Policy S5 (1j)

6.9.1 Policy S5 lists the forms of development outside of settlement which should be approved unless the benefits are substantially outweighed by adverse effects. The evidence of Gary Stephens in respect of planning matters identifies the need to consider whether Policy S5 (j) applies as the Proposed Development would address an unmet need for employment provision. Policy S5 (1j) criteria (i), notes development is required to "*Be physically well-related to an existing settlement (unless the nature of the development would make this inappropriate) and be of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure…*". I note that Policy S5 (1j) criteria (i) does not require a site to adjoin a settlement, but to be 'physically well-related' to it.

6.9.2 In landscape and visual terms, it is my opinion that the development would be physically well-related to the existing settlement of Buntingford for the following reasons:

- It is closely connected to the existing built form of Buntingford and the eastern part of the Appeal Site is experienced as part of the settlement edge.

- The Appeal Site and thus the development is subject to existing urban influence from the A507 and A10 road corridors and where there is some intervisibility with parts of the existing settlement of Buntingford.

- The development would appear as an appropriate continuation of Buntingford's growth and be in keeping with the existing cluster settlement pattern of Buntingford within the Rib valley setting.

- There is already, and always has been, built development on both sides of the A10. The Proposed Development is adjacent to Buntingford Business Park and area of consented residential development, which are situated on the west side of the A10. Historically, there has been some form of development west of the A10 in addition to a Reservoir, as can be seen on Figure 6.5: 1988-1992 National Grid Map, which illustrates a small amount of built form located to the west of the A10 and adjacent to the A507 / A10 roundabout, which is now the southern end of the current Buntingford Business Park.

- There would be pedestrian and cycle connections between the development and existing settlement, as well as with nearby consented development – the evidence of Peter Blair provides further information regarding the pedestrian and cycle connections for the Proposed Development.

- When the development is built out, the A10 would simply be viewed as part of the settlement's urban structure. The A10 does not provide complete visual containment and enclosure to the existing settlement, which is demonstrated where there is intervisibility between the Appeal Site and existing built form of Buntingford.

- There would be no intervening open countryside between the development and Buntingford.

- The development is in proximity to the existing defined settlement boundary of the local plan.

- The development is in proximity to settlement as defined in Annex B of the NPPF 2026 and including the consented residential development (Appeal Reference 6008238), the

consented industrial units at Buntingford Business Park and the BUNT 3 allocation at the Buntingford Business Park.

6.9.3 Furthermore, as I have described in Section 6.4, the area of built form within the Proposed Development would be contained within the Rib valley landscape cell and valley setting, as is the existing settlement of Buntingford, thereby emulating the predominant character of the development of the settlement in the last 50 years.

6.9.4 For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the Proposed Development would be physically well-related to Buntingford in landscape and visual terms.

6.10 NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 Policy N2 (1a)

6.10.1 Policy N2 (1a) requires the environmental qualities of land proposed for development to be considered, including landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside, and the identification of opportunities for those qualities to be conserved or enhanced.

6.10.2 As I have described in Section 6.6, I consider that sensitively designed new built form within the Rib valley landscape cell, which already contains Buntingford, is an appropriate approach to avoid far-reaching impacts on the wider rural landscape which is situated away from existing settlements, and upon landscape character.

6.10.3 As previously described in Sections 6.3 and 6.4, the LVIA and LVIA Addendum considered the effects of the Proposed Development upon landscape character.

6.10.4 As I have previously described in Section 6.3, the evaluation section of the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) identifies LCA 141 as Poor condition and Moderate strength of character, resulting in the strategy and guidelines for managing change to be Improve and Restore. The impact of built development on LCA 141 is noted in the evaluation section of the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) as being ‘moderate’, and the impact of land-use change noted as ‘low’, as shown in Figure 4.3 of this proof. Page 221 of CD 9.1 sets out the strategy and guidelines for managing change and, as I have previously identified, in my opinion the Proposed Development would contribute

to these through creation of new woodland and hedgerows; as well as contribute to the Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy Priorities for Theme 1: A Resilient Landscape – 1A Expand tree coverage and enhance woodland connectivity; Theme 3: Nature Recovery – 3B incorporate biodiversity into existing and future new developments in accordance with BNG requirements; and Theme 4: Access and Connectivity – 4A Reconnect and create multifunctional links. The Proposed Development would deliver new green blue infrastructure, which is multifunctional and would provide new informal open space and recreation to the wider community of Buntingford. This new open space would provide new recreational walking / cycling routes within it, and would connect to and extend the country park of the consented residential development (Appeal Reference 6008238) to the north of the Appeal Site, assuming that the residential development is built out. I therefore consider that in landscape and visual terms the Proposed Development accords with the requirements of NPPF CD 5.11 policy N2 (1a).

6.11 NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 Policy N2 (1d)

6.11.1 Policy N2 (1d) requires existing natural features, such as trees and hedgerows, to be conserved and enhanced where possible, and identifies that landscaping is required to help create a well-designed place and for the integration of development into its surroundings.

6.11.2 Existing trees and hedgerows are proposed to be retained in the Proposed Development where practicable, including key landscape features as shown on the Land Use Components Plan (CD 2.7). The Landscape Strategy Plan (Figure NJ4 of this proof and CD 2.18) illustrates landscape planting principles for the Proposed Development, including retained existing vegetation, proposed replacement planting, structure planting, and areas of tree planting and new hedgerow planting. The landscape strategy would result in a net increase in tree cover and hedgerows. Noting that this is an outline application, planting details would be provided at reserved matters and/or through planning conditions.

6.11.3 I therefore consider that, in landscape and visual terms, the Proposed Development accords with the requirements of NPPF CD 5.11 policy N2 (1d).

7 Summary and Conclusion

7.1 Summary and Conclusion

7.1.1 The landscape RfR asserts that the Proposed Development would intrude on and have a significantly harmful urbanising impact on LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau and would fail to preserve the Rib Valley setting of the Buntingford Community Area. Additionally, the landscape RfR considers that the Proposed Development would be a substantial urban extension outside of and adjacent to Buntingford, encroaching into the rural area beyond the Green Belt and causing significant harm to the rural landscape character.

7.1.2 I have set out the Appeal Site context and an appraisal of the Appeal Site, and a summary of pertinent landscape matters in the Appeal Decision CD 7.1 (Appeal Reference 6008238), followed by a summary of the landscape assessment methodology of the LVIA (CD 1.18) and discussion of the findings of the LVIA (CD 1.18) and LVIA Addendum (CD 2.15) for the landscape receptor of LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau. I have also set out the landscape policy context.

7.1.3 I have provided a chronological summary review of historic maps (Appendix B), tracing Buntingford's growth from an original ribbon settlement along Ermine Street (an ancient Roman road) to a clustered settlement pattern, and I have considered the addition of the A10. My key points include:

- Early maps show small fields behind settlement and ribbon development along the river and main road.
- Post-war and late 20th Century housing expanded the town to the west, east, and south, altering the settlement pattern to a cluster form. The Proposed Development would be a continuation of the growth of that cluster settlement pattern.
- The role of the A10 road opened in 1987 was for the purpose of diverting traffic out of the congested town centre, rather than acting as a boundary for development.

- I have shown that the alignment of the A10 does not respond to landform or historic landscape pattern, and that its purpose as a development-limiting boundary is a false construct.

7.1.4 I have analysed the relationship between the Appeal Site and Proposed Development and the published LCAs, focusing on LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau, within which the Appeal Site is located. My key points are:

- LCA 141 is described as a large-scale, elevated plateau landscape, which is not rare or highly distinctive within the county.
- The part of LCA 141 which is near to the A507 and A10, and within which the Appeal Site is located, is noted to have less of a quiet and remote feel due to the existing urban influences.
- The proposed built form would be concentrated in the central and eastern parts of the Appeal Site, with the western part proposed as open space.
- There is a greater extent of LCA 141 area which would not be subject to the theoretical visibility of the development, than the portion of LCA 141 which would have theoretical visibility.
- The urbanising effect of the Proposed Development upon LCA 141 would be limited and would not fundamentally alter or redefine the key characteristics of LCA 141 or affect the integrity of the distinctive features of LCA 141.

7.1.5 I have set out the reasonings for the findings of the assessment of landscape effects upon LCA 141 and noted the consideration of negative and positive effects that would arise.

7.1.6 I have discussed the Rib valley landscape cell, which is defined by a series of landform spurs that wrap around and contain the valley floor of the River Rib, the associated valley slopes and the settlement of Buntingford. My key points are:

- The Appeal Site is situated within the Rib valley landscape cell, and the Proposed Development would be contained within it, avoiding far-reaching impacts on the wider rural landscape and landscape character.

- The Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan (BCANP) (CD 9.2) emphasises the importance of maintaining the town's valley setting and limiting development on higher ground. I consider that the Proposed Development would be within the valley setting as it is within the Rib valley landscape cell.

- I consider that mitigation planting would soften the appearance of new built form, helping to integrate it into the landscape over time.

7.1.7 I have set out that LCA 142 High Rib Valley and LCA 143 Wyddial Plateau in the East Herts Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (CD 9.1) are described as being of Moderate condition, whereas LCA 141 is identified as being of Poor condition.

7.1.8 I have set out my considerations as to why, in my opinion, the Proposed Development would meet the requirements of planning policy DES2 Landscape Character, of the East Hertfordshire District Plan 2011 – 2033 (CD 5.1) and planning policies ES1 and BE2 of the BCANP (CD 5.2).

7.1.9 I have also considered the former 2024 NPPF Paragraph 187(b) and the NPPF 2026 policy N2 (1a) requirements and set out why I consider that the Appeal Site does not warrant a degree of protection at a high level. The Appeal Site does not lie within a Protected Landscape designation or local landscape designation.

7.1.10 I have considered NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 policy S5 (1j) criteria (i) and set out the reasons, in my opinion and in landscape and visual terms, why the Proposed Development would be physically well-related to the settlement of Buntingford. I have also considered NPPF 2026 CD 5.11 policy N2 (1a) and policy N2 (1d) and set out why I consider that the Proposed Development would be in accordance with the requirements of those policies.

7.1.11 In conclusion, it is my opinion that Proposed Development would be a settlement extension which is in keeping with the cluster pattern of settlement of Buntingford that has evolved. From

a townscape perspective, the A10 would be perceived as a road within the extended settlement area, with appropriate pedestrian and cycle connections for community integration. New built form of the Proposed Development would be situated adjacent to the existing urban area that is within a small part of the northeastern area of LCA 141 and located where there is existing urban influence upon LCA 141 from Buntingford, the A507 and A10 road corridors. LCA 141 is described as a large-scale character area that is not rare or distinctive. Therefore, I consider the Proposed Development's urbanising effect on LCA 141 to be limited, and which would not alter the key characteristics of the character area.

7.1.12 The Proposed Development would be contained within the Rib valley landscape cell, which includes the valley floor of the River Rib, the associated valley slopes and the settlement of Buntingford. Of the LCAs which surround and abut Buntingford, LCA141 is identified as being fairly frequent in the county with no major distinctiveness, of a Poor condition and Moderate strength; whereas the other LCAs which abut Buntingford are of a Moderate condition and Moderate strength. I consider that sensitively designed new built form within the Rib valley landscape cell is an appropriate approach to avoid far-reaching impacts on the wider rural landscape and landscape character. I also consider that mitigation planting would soften the appearance of new built form, helping to integrate it into the landscape over time. In my opinion, the Proposed Development would be physically well-related to the existing settlement of Buntingford. I therefore conclude that the level of adverse harm to the landscape would be limited and localised, and there would be no conflict with the NPPF policies or Development Plan.

Appendices

Appendix A Figures

Figure NJ1: Landform and Settlement Analysis

Figure NJ2: LVIA Figure L3 Landscape Character Plan

Figure NJ3: LVIA Addendum Figure L4b Zone of Theoretical Visibility

Figure NJ4: Landscape Mitigation Strategy Plan

Appendix B Historic Maps

Appendix C LCA 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau

Appendix D Place Services Consultation Response 14/10/2024