Land North of A507, West of A10, Buntingford
Proof of Evidence – Effects on Landscape Character and Appearance

Appeal by Hallam Land Management Limited

LPA Reference: 3/24/0966/OUT

PINS Reference: 6008238

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August 2026

WWA LANDSCAPE

Robert Browne Proof of Evidence

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1 Introduction

1.1 Qualifications and Experience

1.1.1 This evidence has been compiled by Robert Browne, Director at Wynne-Williams Associates, a firm of Chartered Landscape Architects, registered with the Landscape Institute.

1.1.2 I hold a BSc (Honours) degree in Geography, an MA in Landscape Architecture, and I am also a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI). I have 10 years' experience in both planning and design projects across the commercial, residential, education, and care sectors. I specialise in landscape planning work and regularly produce landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIAs), townscape and visual impact assessments (TVIAs), landscape character assessments (LCAs), site appraisals including Green Belt Assessments, and provide expert evidence for planning appeals on behalf of both appellants and Local Authorities. My work covers a range of scales varying from sites including a single proposed dwelling to advising on the effects of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

1.1.3 I understand my duty to the Inquiry and have complied with and will continue to comply with that duty. The evidence that I have prepared and provide for this Inquiry is true. My evidence has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance and code of practice of the Landscape Institute. I confirm that the opinions given are my true and professional opinions.

1.2 Scope of my Evidence

1.2.1 In June 2026, I was appointed by East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC), to prepare evidence for this Inquiry.

1.2.2 In a decision notice dated 24th October 2025, EHDC refused permission for "Outline planning application for development of up to 600 dwellings (C3), elderly accommodation (C3), Mixed Use Local Centre (including flexible use E, F and Sui Generis), First School, informal and formal open space, associated works and infrastructure including a new access from the A507 and pedestrian bridge over the A10, with all matters reserved except access", on Land North of A507, West of A10, Buntingford.

1.2.3 The Decision Notice sets down four reasons for refusal of the application. My evidence relates to Reason 2 only:

1.2.4 **Reason for Refusal 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 HD2 of the Buntingford Community Neighbourhood Plan (2017) and paragraph 187(b) of the National Planning policy Framework".

1.2.5 I have reviewed the relevant application documents and applicable policy documents, and I have made multiple site visits to appraise the appeal site and its environs in terms of landscape character and visual impact. My evidence provides my professional opinion on the potential effects of the appeal scheme on the existing landscape character and appearance.

1.3 Guidance Used in Compiling my Evidence

1.3.1 I have used the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3) published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (C.D 9.2) in the preparation of my evidence.

1.3.2 I have also used Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note TGN 02-21: 'Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations' (C.D 9.3) to inform my assessment of landscape value for the site and surroundings.

1.4 Structure of my Evidence

1.4.1 My evidence is structured as follows.

Section 2 considers the planning policy context in relation to landscape issues.

Section 3 explains the methodology used for assessing the impact of the development.

Section 4 presents the existing landscape setting to the site and its character.

Section 5 sets down the effects of the proposals on landscape as a resource and character.

Section 6 considers the visual effects of the proposals.

Section 7 is a summary and conclusion to my evidence.

2 Planning Policy Context

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 In this section I consider the relevant landscape related policies at national and local level.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2.2.1 The areas of the NPPF (December 2024) relevant to landscape, character, and appearance with regards to this appeal are listed below:

2.2.2 Paragraph 187(b)

2.3 Local Planning Policies

2.3.1 Local planning policies relevant to this appeal related to landscape character and appearance, are listed below.

2.3.2 East Herts District Plan 2018

Policy DES2 – Landscape Character

Policy GBR2 – Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

2.3.3 Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2031

Policy ES1 - Development proposals should be appropriate to and maintain the Rib Valley setting of the Buntingford Community Area (BCA).

Policy HD2 - All new housing developments should be sensitive to the landscape and be of a height that does not impact adversely on views from the surrounding countryside. All development proposals should demonstrate how they conserve, enhance or strengthen the character and distinctive features of the BCA landscape.

3 Methodology

3.1.1 'Development' is defined in the GVLIA3 as 'any proposal that results in a change to the landscape and/or the visual environment'. My evidence considers both the landscape character and the visual environment and the impact that the proposed development would have on both.

3.1.2 The GLVIA3 methodology requires 'establishing the baseline landscape and visual conditions (which) will, when reviewed alongside the description of the development, form the basis for the identification and description of the landscape and visual effects of the proposal' (para 3.15 page 32).

3.1.3 The landscape baseline is defined with the aim to 'provide an understanding of the landscape in the area that may be affected – its constituent elements, its character and the way that this varies spatially, its geographic extent, its history, its condition, the way the landscape is experienced, and the value attached to it' (para 3.15 page 32).

3.1.4 I have reviewed the existing studies which seek to establish the baseline landscape character and sensitivities for the site and the surrounding area. I have also undertaken site visits to verify the extent to which the site is typical of these studies and the degree to which the development would impact on the existing landscape. This evidence sets out the results of these reviews in Section 4.

3.1.5 The visual baseline study has the 'aim to establish the area in which the development may be visible, the different groups of people who may experience views of the development, the places where they will be affected and the nature of the views and visual amenity at those points.' (para 3.15 page 32).

3.1.6 GLVIA3 defines the value of a given landscape as 'The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society' (para 5.19 page 80) and provides a range of factors that can

help in the identification of valued landscapes. However, the Landscape Institute have subsequently published a detailed Technical Guidance Note on Assessing Landscape Value Outside of National Designations (TGN 02/21) in February 2021. This guides my methodology for assessing the landscape value of the site, which in turn forms part of my landscape sensitivity opinion of the site. Landscape value is considered in Section 4.

3.1.7 GLVIA3 also provides guidance on assessing the significance of landscape effects. This requires the consideration of the sensitivity of landscape receptors (defined aspects of the landscape that have the potential to be affected by the proposal).

The sensitivity of a landscape is defined in GLVIA3 as the combination of the site and its surroundings' susceptibility and value. Susceptibility is the 'ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and /or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies' (pages 88 and 89 para 5.40). I consider the susceptibility and sensitivity of the site and its surroundings in Section 4.

3.1.8 Where possible, my assessments of potential landscape and visual effects have been determined using the criteria and definitions from the methodology provided within the Appellant's submitted LVIA. The aim of basing my assessments on this methodology is to provide consistency in the terminology and scales of effects used within the Inquiry. This is intended to aid the Inspector in their consideration of the evidence.

4 Existing Landscape Character

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 In this section I consider the existing baseline studies undertaken for the site and surrounding area, the extent to which the site is typical of those studies, as well as the value and susceptibility of the landscape of the appeal site and its surroundings.

4.2 Landscape Character Baseline Assessments

4.2.1 The site is located within the study area of several landscape character assessments ranging from a national to local scale. Each study provides baseline descriptions of the landscape character.

4.2.2 Natural England National Character Area (NCA) 86 South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland

At a national scale, the appeal site lies within NCA South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland. This overview assessment covers a broad area from Stevenage in the west to Ipswich in the east.

4.2.3 Due to the broad scale of this assessment, not all of the key characteristics and descriptive narrative can be observed in the area immediately surrounding the site. However, it is still useful for understanding the wider context of the appeal site. The Appellant's LVIA includes relevant extracts from the key characteristics listed within the NCA document, as well as the Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) identified for the area.

4.2.4 East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment 2007 (C.D. 9.1)

This local character assessment builds upon initial work produced for a county-scale assessment, commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council. The original report, 'A Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire', provided a strategic level study of six existing landscape character regions across the county. The Landscape Partnership then expanded upon this work in phases to provide more detailed assessments of local character areas.

4.2.5 In 2007, information was compiled into the EHDC Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 'Landscape Character Assessment'. Within this report, the site sits within Area 141, the

Cherry Green Arable Plateau. The appeal site is also located close to Area 140 Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau and Area 142 High Rib Valley.

4.2.6 Area 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau

4.2.7 The appeal site is located entirely within Area 141. The Appellant's LVIA includes all of the relevant key characteristics listed in the LCA. The LVIA correctly references the stated condition of the Cherry Green Arable Plateau to be 'poor', the strength of character to be 'moderate', and the and the overall landscape strategy to be 'improve and restore'. The LVIA also includes the full list of stated strategy and guidelines for managing change within the LCA.

4.2.8 Relevant extracts from the character area profile include:

- "Settlement within the area is sparse and limited to isolated farmsteads often at the end of long tracks and a few small hamlets such as Cherry Green.
- 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."

4.2.9 Area 140 Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau

4.2.10 Area 140 is located immediately north of the appeal site. The LVIA submitted with the original application includes the full list of key characteristics for the LCA. However, the LVIA does not reference the 'good' landscape condition and 'moderate' strength of character outlined within the LCA profile. The overall landscape strategy for the character area is stated to be 'conserve and strengthen'. The Relevant Strategy and Guidelines for Managing change are also omitted from the LVIA, with relevant extracts provided below:

- "Focus hedging opportunities on internal field boundaries, not those along roads and footpaths which could interrupt views over this area
- Encourage the conservation of the existing settlement pattern and resist any extensive development which would significantly affect this"

4.2.11 Area 142 High Rib Valley

The general description of landscape character in the High Rib Valley states that "The area is effectively divided into two sub areas by Buntingford which initially developed along the Ermine Street corridor, but in the 20th century has spread up the valley sides" (Page 208). The two parcels of LCA Area 142 are located to the south and north-east of the appeal site. The Appellant's LVIA references the relevant key characteristics from the study, but does not note the landscape condition was stated to be 'moderate', with the strength of character also given a rating of 'moderate'. The overall landscape strategy for the character area is 'improve and restore'.

4.2.12 The LVIA does not reference any elements of the Strategy and Guidelines for Managing Change for Area 142. A relevant extract is provided below:

- "Promote a strategy for reducing the visual impact of development on the upper slopes of Buntingford"

4.2.13 Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2031 (C.D 5.2)

The site is located entirely within the Buntingford Community Area. Appendix 1 of the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan (BCANP) provides an overview of the landscape setting to Buntingford and highlights potential sensitivity to expansion of the existing settlement. The document states, "This appendix provides views that show the nature of the Landscape around Buntingford and demonstrate that Buntingford, despite its significant expansion since 1960, is far from obtrusive within the local landscape of the north-east Herts plateau. It also shows that there is now a danger that further expansion, if not correctly located and appropriately limited in height, will obtrude into and spoil the views within this highly valued and predominantly rural northern area of East Hertfordshire" (Page 65).

4.2.14 In a section titled 'Views of Buntingford from the Surrounding Countryside', the BCANP provides nine illustrative photo viewpoints labelled A to I. Each photo shows a view towards the main settlement area from the wider countryside. The appeal site is clearly visible within View H (Throcking turn off A507) and View I (Throcking Lane). The location of these viewpoints is provided on Page 66 of the BCANP.

4.2.15 In relation to View H, the Appendix states, "Buntingford has largely remained hidden from view when approaching from the west, as this shot taken from close to the A507 clearly shows. Nowadays, apart from the mobile 'phone communication tower, the only significant object seen is the roofing of the buildings at Buntingford Business Park. With expansion of the Business Park being proposed for the future, every effort should be made to ensure that building heights are restricted to a level that will maintain this view" (Page 70-71).

4.2.16 Under the sub-heading of Discussion, Appendix 1 of the BCANP states, "The results 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 and if we are to ensure that the highly prized landscape remains the attractive area for all types of walkers and riders that it currently is" (Page 71). This emphasises the modest visual intrusion that built development within Buntingford has on much of the surrounding landscape, but also the potential visual sensitivity the Buntingford Community Area has to future development.

4.2.17 The Appellant's LVIA references policy sections from the BCANP, but omits information relating to the illustrative photo viewpoints. Visibility of the appeal site within the wider countryside is further discussed in Section 6 of this proof.

4.3 Observed Landscape Character

4.3.1 The baseline landscape character studies and policy documents provide useful contextual descriptions and guidelines for development, with the site and surroundings displaying many of the key characteristics highlighted. However, to fully appreciate the existing character, it is also important for me to outline the additional characteristics I have observed during my site visits.

4.3.2 The appeal site comprises three fields currently in arable use, with an area of approximately 50ha. Landform is undulating with an existing ridgeline forming the western slope of the Rib Valley. The land slopes from approximately 130m AOD at the peak of the ridgeline down to 110m AOD in the east, close to the A10, and the Thistley Vale Brook in the west. Internal hedgerows and tree lines separate the three fields. To the north, the site is bounded by

Throcking Lane, with the lane predominantly marked by an open grass verge and a small section of timber post and rail fencing. The western red line boundary within the northernmost field is not currently delineated and the proposals would bisect the large arable field. The western boundary of the south-western field is marked by an existing hedgerow.

4.3.3 A robust hedgerow is also present along the southern boundary, separating the appeal site from the A507 Baldock Road. The eastern boundary of the northernmost field is open, with land sloping down to the A10 and separated from the road by a narrow grass verge and timber post and rail fence. Much of the eastern boundary lies adjacent to the A10 single carriageway, which is partly located within a cutting. A dense tree line screens much of the road from within the site.

4.3.4 A notable characteristic of the appeal site is the variation in topography across the site and surrounding land. Changes in landform create a varied and dynamic landscape, influencing both the pattern of views and the degree of intervisibility with surrounding development. As a consequence, views to the existing settled area of Buntingford are often filtered, contained or redirected by the undulating terrain, reinforcing the site's separation from nearby built form and enhancing its rural character.

4.3.5 The northern site boundary, defined by Throcking Lane, retains a rural character. The open nature of the lane and its relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape are perceived as distinctly rural, with expansive views across adjoining farmland and an absence of significant built development. This boundary contributes positively to the perception of the site as an integral component of the wider rural landscape.

4.3.6 The existing Buntingford Business Park is located adjacent to the south-east corner of the appeal site. Although it occupies land immediately adjacent to the site, its presence is generally restricted to localised views and it does not form a dominant feature within the broader landscape context. Instead, the prevailing impression of the site is one of open countryside, with agricultural land and rural landscape features defining the character of the area.

4.3.7 Similarly, the A10 corridor to the east has little influence on the perceived landscape character of the appeal site itself. Despite its proximity, the road is generally inconspicuous within views from much of the site and does not materially affect the area's rural qualities. Noise from the road is noticeable at a low level from a short section of Footpath Cottered 40 within the site, decreasing rapidly when moving westwards away from the A10. This maintains the perceived separation from urbanising influences.

4.3.8 The settlement of Buntingford is largely screened in views from the site. With the exception of limited glimpses of a small area of relatively recent residential development visible from the eastern part of the site, the town is generally well contained within the landscape. Consequently, the appeal site reads predominantly as part of the rural hinterland rather than as land associated with the urban edge of the settlement.

4.3.9 Taken together, these characteristics create a landscape that is overwhelmingly rural in nature. The combination of open agricultural land, varied topography, limited visual influence from adjacent employment development, minimal perception of strategic road infrastructure, and restricted glimpses of the settlement edge ensures that the appeal site is principally perceived as part of the open countryside surrounding Buntingford rather than as an extension of the existing developed area.

4.3.10 The appeal site forms part of a wider landscape that provides a predominantly rural and agricultural setting to Buntingford. The site occupies a location adjacent to the edge of the settlement where built development transitions rapidly into open farmland, giving the area a distinctly peripheral and countryside character. The surrounding landscape is formed principally of large arable fields, interspersed with mature hedgerows and occasional tree groups which provide a strong field pattern and a degree of visual openness within the wider landscape.

4.3.11 The area retains many features typical of the Hertfordshire rural landscape, including established hedgerow boundaries, scattered woodland blocks and pockets of semi-natural vegetation. These landscape elements contribute considerably to local character and provide important ecological connectivity across the countryside.

4.3.12 Water features also contribute to the character of the surrounding landscape. The presence of Thistley Vale Brook, together with associated drainage ditches and low-lying vegetated corridors, introduce an additional landscape component to the otherwise agricultural setting. These features create a network of green corridors which enhance biodiversity and reinforce the perception of a well-vegetated rural environment.

4.3.13 Buntingford itself is situated within the valley of the River Rib and is surrounded by an extensive rural hinterland. This geographical context results in strong visual and functional relationships between the settlement edge and the surrounding countryside. Views from the area around the appeal site are therefore influenced by the openness of the agricultural landscape and the relatively limited extent of urbanising influences beyond the developed areas of the town. The surrounding countryside plays an important role in defining the setting of Buntingford, contributing to a clear distinction between developed land and the wider rural landscape.

4.4 Landscape Receptors

4.4.1 GLVIA3 defines landscape receptors as components of the landscape that are likely to be affected by the proposed development, such as "overall character and key characteristics, individual elements or features, and specific aesthetic or perceptual aspects" (Page 86, paragraph 5.34).

4.4.2 Relating to this appeal, I agree with the submitted LVIA that the relevant landscape receptors are:

- The character of the site and its immediate surroundings
- The character of LCA Area 140 Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau
- The character of LCA Area 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau
- The character of LCA Area 142 High Rib Valley
- The character of footpaths within the site
- Native Hedgerow
- Canopy trees

- Waterbodies

4.5 My Assessment of Landscape Value

4.5.1 To assess the value of the appeal site and surrounding landscape, I have used the latest guidance from the Landscape Institute, TGN 02-21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations (C.D 9.3).

4.5.2 The technical note stresses that: "When assessing landscape value of a site as part of a planning application or appeal it is important to consider not only the site itself and its features/elements/characteristics/qualities, but also their relationship with, and the role they play within, the site's context" (paragraph 2.4.5 Table 1 notes).

4.5.3 Below I have assessed the site and surroundings against the indicators of landscape value identified in TGN 02-21:

4.5.4 Natural Heritage

The site itself does not display clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological, or physiographic interest. However, the River Rib stream corridor will have local natural capital value away from the channelised section that runs through Buntingford, contributing to a wider green infrastructure network. The same is true of the Thistley Vale Brook and adjacent Westminster Pond, situated close to Aspenden.

4.5.5 Cultural Heritage

The site itself does not reflect clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest. Within the wider context, the settlement of Buntingford displays clear evidence of historical interest including many listed buildings within its Conservation Area, situated approximately 600m from the appeal site boundary at the closest point. The Aspenden Conservation Area is also located approximately 875m to the south at its closest point.

4.5.6 Grade II Listed White Cottage and Buttermilk Hall Farm is located 570m south-west of the appeal site. Grade II* Listed Holy Trinity Church is situated 850m to the west in Throcking and is visible from the site itself. Grade II Listed Aspenden Hall lies 1km south of the appeal site, with its listing describing it as an "important landscape feature and part of setting of parish church". This refers to the Grade I Listed Parish Church of St Mary located nearby.

The expansive parkland associated with Aspenden Hall and the hall itself act to provide a sense of time depth in the landscape.

4.5.7 Landscape Condition

The landscape is generally in good condition. The agricultural land remains actively managed and the principal landscape features, including hedgerows and tree groups are largely intact and readily appreciable on the ground. There is little evidence of landscape degradation or urban fringe influences across much of the site. The retention of a recognisable field structure, together with the generally well-maintained condition of vegetation and boundary features, results in a landscape that remains coherent and functional.

4.5.8 Associations

Aspenden Hall was home to Ralph Freman, the MP for Hertfordshire from 1697 to 1727. I can find no other evidence of associations between notable people, events, or the arts and the appeal site or surroundings.

4.5.9 Distinctiveness

As outlined previously, the site and surroundings display multiple elements of the characteristics highlighted in the local and regional landscape character assessments. In addition, the site makes a contribution to the rural setting and distinctive character of Buntingford.

4.5.10 Recreational

There are two Public Rights of Way (PRoW) that provide direct access to the appeal site. Cottered Footpath 41 runs for approximately 300m across the north-east corner, between an access point off the A10 to the open boundary with Throcking Lane. Cottered Footpath 40 traverses the full width of the appeal site. Accessed from a footbridge over the A10, it provides an important link between Buntingford and the rural landscape to the west. Footpath 40 connects with Restricted Byway 39, which runs further west and offers PRoW access to Throcking.

4.5.11 Perceptual (Scenic)

The appeal site exhibits a good level of scenic value. A number of pleasant aesthetic qualities are experienced from the footpaths crossing the site, particularly where elevated landform affords wider views across the surrounding countryside. The combination of open rural views, varied topography, mature vegetation and limited visual intrusion from built development contributes positively to the scenic quality of the landscape.

4.5.12 Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquillity)

The appeal site cannot be regarded as exhibiting qualities of wildness due to the clear evidence of human management through agricultural activity. Nevertheless, the site possesses a degree of tranquillity. The dominance of rural land uses, the relative absence of urban development and the limited visual influence of nearby infrastructure combine to create a generally peaceful landscape experience. While traffic associated with the A10 is occasionally audible and introduces some perceptual disturbance in certain locations, the overall character remains one of a tranquil rural landscape where natural landform, vegetation and agricultural use are the defining influences.

4.5.13 Functional

The site performs an important functional role within the wider landscape. It forms part of the agricultural countryside surrounding Buntingford and contributes to the rural setting of the settlement and neighbouring Throcking. The site also assists in maintaining the distinction between the built form of Buntingford and the surrounding rural landscape, particularly when viewed from footpaths and local roads. In addition, the existing hedgerow network, vegetation structure and open agricultural land provide ecological, visual and landscape functions that contribute to the integrity of the wider landscape framework. Consequently, the site performs a meaningful role in sustaining the character, setting and visual separation that are characteristic of this part of East Hertfordshire.

4.5.14 Summary assessment of landscape value

The Appellant's LVIA references TGN 02-21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations, the latest guidance on assessing landscape value. However, the report mainly relies on factors outlined in Box 5.1 of GLVIA3. Whilst this approach is somewhat outdated,

it can still provide some useful considerations of value. Nevertheless, the LVIA methodology does provide an acceptable descriptive scale for assessing landscape value in Table A.2.1 of its methodology, within Appendix A.

4.5.15 Considering the elements of value outlined above and using the descriptive scale included within the Appellant's LVIA methodology, I assess the site itself to hold medium landscape value. Although the site itself does not hold any national landscape designations, it forms an important part of the character setting to Buntingford and a functional buffer between the settlement and the A10.

4.5.16 I do not consider it as a 'valued landscape' for the purpose of NPPF Paragraph 187(a). However, it is important to stress the value that local people place on the appeal site. This is illustrated by the considerable number of objections raised by local residents.

4.5.17 The following summative assessments of landscape value are stated within the Appellant's LVIA, and my own work confirms my agreement with each.:

- The character of the site and its immediate surroundings – medium landscape value
- The character of LCA Area 140 Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau – high landscape value
- The character of LCA Area 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau – high landscape value
- The character of LCA Area 142 High Rib Valley – high landscape value
- The character of footpaths within the site – medium landscape value
- Native Hedgerow – medium landscape value
- Canopy trees – medium landscape value
- Waterbodies – medium landscape value

4.6 Susceptibility to Change and Character Sensitivity

4.6.1 GLVIA3 defines susceptibility to change as 'ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies' (pages 88 and 89 para 5.40).

4.6.2 From review of the baseline landscape character assessments and my own fieldwork observations, I consider the susceptibility of identified landscape receptors to the appeal scheme below. Each rating uses the definitions from Table A.2.2 of the Appellant's LVIA methodology:

- The character of the site and its immediate surroundings – high landscape susceptibility
- The character of LCA Area 140 Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau – high landscape susceptibility
- The character of LCA Area 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau – high landscape susceptibility
- The character of LCA Area 142 High Rib Valley – medium landscape susceptibility
- The Character of footpaths within the site – high landscape susceptibility
- Native Hedgerow – low landscape susceptibility
- Canopy trees – medium landscape susceptibility
- Waterbodies – medium landscape susceptibility

4.6.3 My summative susceptibility assessments agree with those submitted within the LVIA for each landscape receptor. It is my opinion that the Appellant's LVIA accurately reflects the generally elevated susceptibility that the site and surrounding character areas have to the proposed development.

4.6.4 The susceptibility of the appeal site to the proposed development is influenced to a limited extent by its relationship with existing built development, including some residential areas of Buntingford and Buntingford Business Park located to the south-east. However, notwithstanding these neighbouring influences, the site retains a strong rural character and is experienced principally as part of the open countryside surrounding the settlement.

4.6.5 Although the A10 corridor is perceptible from parts of the site and introduces a degree of influence, its effect on overall landscape character is relatively limited. The prevailing character remains defined by the agricultural land use, pronounced variations in topography, established boundary vegetation and the general absence of built development within the

site itself. These characteristics combine to create a landscape that is strongly rural in nature and visually connected to the wider countryside to the west of Buntingford.

4.6.6 The site also performs an important role in providing an instant transition between the settlement edge and the rural landscape beyond. It contributes to the separation between Buntingford and the wider countryside extending westwards, thereby ensuring that the A10 corridor maintains the distinction between developed and undeveloped land. This function is an important component of the existing landscape baseline.

4.6.7 Whilst the site is not wholly unaffected by nearby development and infrastructure, the balance of characteristics that currently define its rural character is such that it remains susceptible to substantial change. The introduction of development on the scale proposed by the appeal scheme would fundamentally alter the existing landscape baseline, replacing a largely undeveloped agricultural landscape with a significant area of built form and resulting in a considerable change to the character of the site and its immediate surroundings.

4.6.8 GLVIA3 explains that the process for assessing landscape sensitivity requires a combined judgement of susceptibility and value. The Appellant's LVIA also correctly uses this methodology. Below I have combined the value and susceptibility assessments for each receptor to give a summative sensitivity assessment:

- The character of the site and its immediate surroundings – high landscape sensitivity
- The character of LCA Area 140 Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau – high landscape sensitivity
- The character of LCA Area 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau – high landscape sensitivity
- The character of LCA Area 142 High Rib Valley – high landscape sensitivity
- The character of footpaths within the site – high landscape sensitivity
- Native Hedgerow – medium landscape sensitivity
- Canopy trees – medium landscape sensitivity
- Waterbodies – medium landscape sensitivity

4.6.9 The Appellant's LVIA provides slightly conflicting assessments of landscape sensitivity for the character of the site and its immediate surroundings. Within Table 5.1, Page 25, the LVIA states medium sensitivity, but within the Landscape Effects table on Page 4 of Appendix C, the landscape sensitivity of the site and immediate surroundings is judged to be high.

4.6.10 Aside from the uncertainty of rating for the site and immediate surroundings, all other summative landscape sensitivity assessments are agreed for each receptor. This represents a very good level of agreement between the parties.

5 Landscape Effects of the Proposals

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 In this section, I consider the landscape effects of the appeal proposals on the site and surrounding area.

5.2 Magnitude of Landscape Effects

5.2.1 I have reviewed the relevant submitted drawings, statements, and strategies that detail the proposed appeal scheme. Outlined below are predicted key changes to the landscape as a resource and also elements of identified landscape character.

5.2.2 The appeal scheme would represent a substantial loss of the agricultural land that currently contributes to the rural setting of Buntingford. Extensive areas of undeveloped arable farmland would be replaced by residential development, a school, roads, areas of hardstanding and associated infrastructure. This would materially alter the existing rural character of the landscape across the appeal site and within its immediate surroundings. The introduction of up to 600 dwellings and associated infrastructure would significantly increase the influence of suburban development within an area that is presently experienced as predominantly rural countryside.

5.2.3 Urbanisation is not simply a consequence of the presence of buildings, it also arises from the associated infrastructure and activities that accompany residential development. Features likely to contribute to urbanisation include street lighting, road signage, parked vehicles, engineered drainage systems, garden structures, domestic paraphernalia, traffic movements

and increased levels of human activity. These elements would become permanent components of the landscape and would alter the way in which the site is experienced from within, along Footpaths 40 and 41.

5.2.4 The character experienced from Footpath 40 is currently influenced by the open agricultural character of the land and the ability to appreciate its wider rural setting. The Illustrative Masterplan submitted with the appeal scheme appears to show minimal offsetting to Footpath 40, with considerable built form proposed close to the route. The introduction of substantial adjacent built development, roads and domestic activity would noticeably alter the perceptual and visual experience of footpath users. The existing sense of openness and separation from development would be diminished, resulting in a less rural recreational environment.

5.2.5 The urbanising effect would extend beyond the physical boundaries of the development. Perceptual change would be experienced from adjacent agricultural land, as well as along Throcking Lane, Baldock Road, and Restricted Byway 46. During hours of darkness, lighting associated with the development would further increase perceptions of urban influence within the surrounding countryside.

5.2.6 The existing landform is an important component of the site's character. Given the topographical variation across the site, it is likely that substantial earthworks would be required to facilitate the proposed scheme. These interventions would represent a considerable modification of the existing landform and further alter the site's landscape character. Whilst the precise nature and extent of level changes cannot be fully assessed at this stage, due to the application being in outline, it is reasonable to conclude that a development of this scale would necessitate extensive ground remodelling and associated engineering works, including retaining structures in some locations.

5.2.7 The proposals also include the construction of a new roundabout on Baldock Road to facilitate vehicular access. This would require the removal of sections of established boundary vegetation on either side of the road. In addition, visibility splays may constrain opportunities for replacement planting within these areas. The resulting gaps within the existing vegetation structure would increase views into the site from Baldock Road and

enable road users to more readily perceive the change from open countryside to suburban development. Consequently, the extension of the built-up area into the countryside would become more evident within the local landscape.

5.2.8 Notwithstanding these changes, the submitted LVIA and Design and Access Statement demonstrate that efforts have been made to retain and incorporate existing landscape features. Existing hedgerows and mature trees would be retained across much of the site. The proposals also include areas of woodland planting in the west, parkland with clustered tree planting in the north, and a series of ponds. These elements would provide some beneficial landscape effects in places through increased planting, habitat creation and different recreational opportunities.

5.2.9 When considering the magnitude of landscape effects, GLVIA3 states that effects should be assessed in terms of size or scale, the geographical extent of the area influenced, and its duration and reversibility (para 5.48, page 90). Each element is considered below.

5.2.10 Size or scale

The Design and Access Statement identifies an application area of 50.12ha. The proposals would result in a considerable proportion of this being transformed from agricultural use to residential development and associated built infrastructure. This will include significant change in the form of building footprints, hard surfacing, or as residential garden space, and represents a comprehensive alteration away from the baseline landscape elements of the site. Proposed buildings are stated to be 10m maximum in height in the highest areas of landform at the western edge and in the centre of the site, as well as fronting onto the A507 Baldock Road. A 12.5m maximum height is proposed for lower areas of landform in the appeal site, and for the local centre building.

5.2.11 The scale of the proposed development would be notable. When compared to the existing Buntingford settlement, the appeal scheme would be a large and pronounced extension. As there is currently very minimal development to the west of the A10, this would represent an even greater change.

5.2.12 Geographical extent

The greatest landscape effects would occur within the site itself, where the characteristics of the existing landscape would be fundamentally altered. Beyond the site boundary, there would be a noticeable change to the character of the western edge of Buntingford, with the settlement extending further into its rural setting. However, the effects would remain largely confined to the local landscape context, with most perceptual change limited to within 1km of the appeal site boundaries.

5.2.13 Duration and reversibility

5.2.14 The predicted landscape effects will be permanent and irreversible. Effects will be amplified during construction due to the increase in activity and the temporary presence of uncharacteristic machinery and stockpiles of materials.

5.2.15 Using the descriptors from Table A.2.3 of the Appellant's LVIA, I have summarised my predicted magnitude of landscape effects on each identified receptor below.

Table 1: Magnitude of Landscape Effects

		Assessment timeframe		
		During construction	**At Year 1**	**15 Years following completion**
Landscape Receptor	The character of the site and its immediate surroundings	Large	Large	Large
	The character of LCA Area 140 Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau	Small	Small	Small
	The character of LCA Area 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau	Medium	Medium	Medium
	The character of LCA Area 142 High Rib Valley	Small	Small	Small

	The character of footpaths within the site	Large	Large	Large
	Native Hedgerow	Small	Small	Medium
	Canopy trees	Small	Small	Large
	Waterbodies	Small	Large	Large

5.2.16 There are some areas of agreement between the parties, but also some key areas of disagreement. Much of the disagreement relates to the assessed magnitude of change during construction. The LVIA appears to assess lower levels of change during construction than at Year 1 or Year 15. In my opinion this is not correct, as elements of perceptual change will be more noticeable in construction due to uncharacteristic activity, machinery, and incomplete structures.

5.2.17 There is also disagreement on the magnitude of change for LCA Areas 140, 141, and 142. Due to the size of the appeal site, it is my opinion the proposals would represent a direct change to LCA Area 141 over an extensive area. This should be assessed as a medium magnitude of change as opposed to the small level stated within the LVIA. In my opinion, the LVIA also underestimates the level of change for the two adjacent LCA Areas. Due to the level of perceptual effects that will be experienced from with LCA 140 and LCA 142, I assess a small magnitude of character change for both receptors. This compares to a very small assessment provided within the LVIA.

5.2.18 Areas of agreement include the large magnitude of change predicted for the character of the site and its immediate surroundings across all three assessment timeframes. Large effects are also agreed for the character of footpaths within the site at Year 1 and Year 15.

5.3 Significance of Landscape Effects

5.3.1 The table below summarises my significance of landscape effect assessments for identified receptors across varying temporal scales. This is based upon the descriptors given in Table A.4.1 of the Appellant's LVIA methodology. Assessments combine an understanding of the sensitivity of each receptor to the proposals with the predicted magnitude of change.

Table 2: Significance of Landscape Effects

			Assessment timeframe		
		Landscape sensitivity	**During construction**	**At Year 1**	**15 Years following completion**
Landscape Receptor	The character of the site and its immediate surroundings	High	Major adverse	Major adverse	Major adverse
	The character of LCA Area 140 Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau	High	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Minor adverse
	The character of LCA Area 141 Cherry Green Arable Plateau	High	Moderate adverse	Moderate adverse	Moderate adverse
	The character of LCA Area 142 High Rib Valley	High	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Minor adverse
	The character of footpaths within the site	High	Major adverse	Major adverse	Major adverse
	Native Hedgerow	Medium	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Moderate beneficial
	Canopy trees	Medium	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Moderate beneficial
	Waterbodies	Medium	Minor adverse	Minor beneficial	Moderate beneficial

5.3.2 When considering effects on the character of the site and immediate surroundings, as well as footpaths within the site, the Appellant's LVIA assesses major adverse effects during construction, reducing to minor adverse by Year 15. This correctly recognises the significant change in rural character during construction, but overestimates the effect of mitigation measures by Year 15. It is my opinion that mitigation measures included within the proposals do not reduce the effects brought about by comprehensive loss of rural character across the

site and perceived from Footpaths 40 and 41. This scale of proposed development would be substantially uncharacteristic on the western side of the A10 and result in a pronounced deterioration of landscape character. Major adverse effects are predicted to remain by Year 15.

5.3.3 In relation to the character of LCA Area 141, the LVIA assesses minor adverse effects during construction and at Year 1, shifting to minor beneficial by Year 15. It is difficult to understand the justification for effects shifting from adverse to beneficial. The large development will still be readily perceived within the host LCA, eroding the existing rural character. It is my opinion the appeal scheme would result in a partial deterioration of the existing rural character within LCA 141, equating to a moderate adverse effect across each assessment timeframe. Incursion into the countryside of the proposed scale is not mitigated within the scheme.

5.3.4 The Appellant's LVIA correctly assesses minor adverse effects on adjacent LCA 140 and LCA 142 during construction and at Year 1. However, it is asserted that effects on both character areas reduce to a negligible adverse level by Year 15. It is my opinion that, once again, the proposed mitigation has been overestimated. The substantial urban extension will be perceived within parts of both LCA 140 and LCA 142, leading to a localised deterioration of rural character. Predicted landscape effects for each LCA remain at minor adverse by Year 15.

5.3.5 It is agreed that the proposed tree and hedgerow planting, as well as introduction of multiple attenuation basins will lead to moderate beneficial effects on the quantity of individual landscape elements. This has no material effect in offsetting the wider harm to landscape character receptors.

5.3.6 My colleague Phillip Hughes deals primarily with planning policy. However, when considering these assessments of landscape effects against the relevant planning policy, it is my opinion that the appeal scheme conflicts with both local and national policy. The proposals do not conserve, enhance or strengthen the character of the site and surrounding area, placing the scheme in conflict with Local Plan Policy DES2. The proposed large urban development on the west side of the A10 is also not compatible with the character and appearance of the

rural area, conflicting with Local Plan Policy GBR2. The appeal scheme does not protect and enhance existing landscape features, nor does it maintain the Rib Valley setting of the Buntingford Community Area, placing it at odds with BCANP Policy ES1. By failing to be sympathetic to the local character and landscape setting, the appeal scheme is in conflict with BCANP Policy HD2. In addition, the proposals do not recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside as required by NPPF Paragraph 187, sub-paragraph (b).

5.3.7 It is important to note that my conclusions are in line with a previous appeal decision regarding Land East of A10, Buntingford. In a decision dated August 2024, Inspector Ford commented on the importance of the A10 as a defensible boundary between the urban settlement of Buntingford and the rural landscape to the west, "I am satisfied that the A10 would provide a buffer and defensible boundary between the urban edge and the countryside" (C.D 7.1 Paragraph 20, Page 4). The appeal scheme would be a notable urban incursion beyond this boundary.

6 Visual Effects of the Proposals

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 In this section, I examine the potential visual effects of the appeal proposals. I visited the site in June and July 2026 to make my own observations and carry out my own visual impact assessment in accordance with GLVIA3.

6.2 Receptors and Visual Sensitivity

6.2.1 When considering the sensitivity of visual receptors, GLVIA 3 states:

"It is important to remember at the outset that visual receptors are all people. Each visual receptor, meaning the particular person or group of people likely to be affected at a specific viewpoint, should be assessed in terms of both their susceptibility to change in views and visual amenity and also the value attached to particular views" (Page 113, paragraph 6.31).

6.2.2 It continues to identify visual receptors most sensitive to change as being:

- Residents at home

- People engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focused on the landscape
- Visitors to heritage assets where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience
- Communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area

6.2.3 The guidance states that "travellers on road, rail or other transport routes tend to fall into an intermediate category".

6.2.4 GLVIA3 identifies less sensitive receptors to be (para 6.34, page 114):

- People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape
- People at work

6.2.5 I visited all 17no. initial viewpoints from the Appellant's LVIA, as well as the 4no. additional viewpoints provided within the LVIA Addendum. I agree that the appropriate visual envelope has been identified and assessed by the LVIA and Addendum. I am generally satisfied that viewpoints represent the views that I experienced during my site visits. The LVIA identifies the correct receptor groups.

6.2.6 After reviewing the LVIA assessments of visual value for identified receptors, I have some concerns over summative judgements. The LVIA methodology includes a three-point scale from low to high. This should be capable of assessing visual value for people across a full spectrum of visual amenity. For example, it should be able to assess the value of views towards a dilapidated industrial estate at one end of the scale or scenic views featuring within in a notable piece of artwork within a National Landscape at the other end of the scale. With this in mind, it does not seem correct for visual value for all receptors to be assessed as low within the LVIA. For example, people walking along public rights of way within the rural landscape with scenic views over undeveloped undulating topography are not experiencing low value views.

6.2.7 Following my own site visits, and adopting the LVIA's three-point scale, I have assessed the visual value of receptor groups to be:

- Pedestrians on PRoW within and immediately adjacent to the site – medium visual value
- Pedestrians on PRoW within 0.5km of the site – medium visual value
- Pedestrians on PRoW 0.5km to 1km from the site – medium visual value
- Pedestrians on PRoW on elevated land more than 1km from the site – medium visual value
- Users of secondary roads within 0.5km of the site – low visual value
- Users of principal roads within 0.5km of the site – low visual value
- Residents of dwellings within 0.5km of the site – medium visual value
- Residents of dwellings 0.5km to 1km from the site – medium visual value
- Residents of dwellings on elevated land more than 1km from the site – medium visual value
- Workers at workplaces within 0.5km of the site – low visual value

6.2.8 Visual susceptibility assessments for receptors are agreed by both parties and are as follows:

- Pedestrians on PRoW within and immediately adjacent to the site – high visual susceptibility
- Pedestrians on PRoW within 0.5km of the site – high visual susceptibility
- Pedestrians on PRoW 0.5km to 1km from the site – high visual susceptibility
- Pedestrians on PRoW on elevated land more than 1km from the site – high visual susceptibility
- Users of secondary roads within 0.5km of the site – medium visual susceptibility
- Users of principal roads within 0.5km of the site – low visual susceptibility
- Residents of dwellings within 0.5km of the site – high visual susceptibility
- Residents of dwellings 0.5km to 1km from the site – high visual susceptibility

- Residents of dwellings on elevated land more than 1km from the site – high visual susceptibility
- Workers at workplaces within 0.5km of the site – low visual susceptibility

6.2.9 The LVIA methodology correctly utilises a combination of visual value and susceptibility ratings to provide a summative visual sensitivity assessment for each receptor group. However, as previously outlined, my disagreement with the LVIA's approach to visual value leads me to some different conclusions on visual sensitivity:

- Pedestrians on PRoW within and immediately adjacent to the site – medium to high visual sensitivity
- Pedestrians on PRoW within 0.5km of the site – medium to high visual sensitivity
- Pedestrians on PRoW 0.5km to 1km from the site – medium to high visual sensitivity
- Pedestrians on PRoW on elevated land more than 1km from the site – medium to high visual sensitivity
- Users of secondary roads within 0.5km of the site – medium visual sensitivity
- Users of principal roads within 0.5km of the site – low visual sensitivity
- Residents of dwellings within 0.5km of the site – medium to high visual sensitivity
- Residents of dwellings 0.5km to 1km from the site – medium to high visual sensitivity
- Residents of dwellings on elevated land more than 1km from the site – medium to high visual sensitivity
- Workers at workplaces within 0.5km of the site – low visual sensitivity

6.3 Magnitude and Significance of Visual Effects

6.3.1 Using the descriptors included within Table A.3.3 of the Appellant's LVIA methodology, I have assessed the magnitude of change to identified visual receptors. I have also used Table A.4.2 in the same methodology to assess the significance of visual effects on each receptor during construction (winter), at Year 1 (winter), and at 15 years post completion (summer). Once again, I have exercised professional judgement where necessary when applying the descriptor tables. A summary of visual effects on each receptor group is provided below.

6.3.2 **Visual effects on pedestrians on PRoW within and immediately adjacent to the site**

It is agreed with the Appellant's LVIA that the proposals will lead to a large magnitude of change and major adverse visual effects on users of PRoW within an immediately adjacent to the site at Year 1. This includes Footpaths 40 and 41.

6.3.3 During construction, short distance views of construction activity, uncharacteristic machinery and material stockpiles will represent a large magnitude of change affecting extensive parts of the view from each footpath. This equates to a major adverse effect during construction, as opposed to the moderate adverse level assessed within the LVIA.

6.3.4 By Year 15, established mitigation planting may soften some aspects of the view, but there will still be short distance views to housing, education buildings, and associated built infrastructure. This will be in place of the open views to undulating rural land that were previously experienced from Footpaths 40 and 41. The proposed mitigation will not replace these lost elements of visual amenity and the appeal scheme will result in a noticeable deterioration to views. I assess a large magnitude of change and major adverse visual effects to remain by Year 15.

6.3.5 Visual effects on pedestrians on PRoW within 0.5km of the site

For walkers on nearby PRoWs, visibility is influenced by landform and vegetation screening, although open views remain available from some locations along Footpath 40 west of the appeal site, and along parts of Restricted Byway 46 to the south-west. Once again, Year 1 visual effects are agreed with the Appellant's LVIA that the proposals will lead to a large magnitude of change and major adverse visual effects on these receptors.

6.3.6 During the construction phase, views from these routes will undergo a pronounced change, similar to those outlined for PRoW within the site. Large scale built development will become prominent, eroding the rural scenic quality that exists in baseline views. This large magnitude of change will lead to a major adverse effect during construction, as opposed to the moderate adverse level assessed within the LVIA.

6.3.7 By Year 15, proposed mitigation will have some effect in softening the outer appearance of the appeal scheme, making the visual transition slightly less harsh between the new development and surrounding rural landscape. The magnitude of visual effects will still

remain large, but the significance will reduce to a moderate to major adverse level. The Appellant's LVIA makes an assessment of moderate adverse in comparison.

6.3.8 Visual effects on pedestrians on PRoW 0.5km to 1km from the site

Effects on views from PRoW 0.5k to 1km from the site are almost completely agreed between the parties. This mainly relates to Restricted Byway Aspenden 10 south of the site. The Appellant's LVIA assesses minor adverse effects across all timeframes, with a small magnitude of change during construction raising to medium change at Year 1 and Year 15. The minor difference of opinion is that I assess medium change across all timeframes.

6.3.9 The proposals will appear visible through gaps in existing vegetation and it will be possible to perceive new built development within the otherwise rural setting.

6.3.10 Visual effects on pedestrians on PRoW on elevated land more than 1km from the site

Long distance visibility to the appeal site is restricted to areas of elevated land and there is a large amount of agreement on visual effects on these receptors. It is agreed with the Appellant's LVIA that negligible adverse effects are assessed across each timeframe. Once again, a minor difference of opinion relates to the magnitude of effect during construction. I assess small, whereas the LVIA states very small. Small effects are agreed at Year 1and Year 15.

6.3.11 Visual effects on users of secondary roads within 0.5km of the site

Secondary roads with views to the appeal site are Throcking Lane/Road adjacent to the northern boundary, as well as Phillips Way, Neale Drive, Baker Drive, Bishop Way, and Norris Way, which are all located to the north-east of the A10.

6.3.12 Construction activity will be prominent in views from Throcking Lane/Road with visibility to sloping land at the northern end of the appeal site also available from receptors to the north-east of the A10. The magnitude of change during construction is assessed to be medium, leading to moderate adverse visual effects. This is higher than the very small and negligible adverse effects outlined within the Appellant's LVIA.

6.3.13 There is agreement between the parties at Year 1 that the visual magnitude of change will be medium and significance of visual effects will be moderate adverse. The proposed development will be a noticeable incursion into rural land.

6.3.14 It is also agreed that proposed mitigation will have a softening effect. I assess moderate to minor adverse effects by Year 15. This is slightly higher than the minor adverse effects stated in the LVIA.

6.3.15 Visual Effects on users of principal roads within 0.5km of the site

Views from principal roads are experienced from the A507 Baldock Road, along the southern boundary of the appeal site, and the A10, adjacent to the eastern boundary. It is agreed with the Appellant's LVIA that visual change will be medium in magnitude and minor adverse in significance at Year 1 and Year 15. Although there will be open views in places to the appeal scheme, people in vehicles will be travelling at speed and experiencing oblique views.

6.3.16 Construction effects are assessed to have a small magnitude of change within the LVIA. I assess a medium level. It is agreed that minor adverse effects are predicted during construction.

6.3.17 Visual effects on residents of dwellings within 0.5km of the site

Visual receptors in this group include residents at How Green Farm off Baldock Road, Hill View, and Suncrest along Throcking Lane/Road, as well as Phillips Way, Neale Drive, Baker Drive, Bishop Way, and Norris Way, which are all located to the north-east of the A10.

6.3.18 During the construction phase, activity across the site would be readily apparent from these residential receptors in their own homes, where open views are available across the northern part of the appeal site. The introduction of construction compounds, plant, machinery, material stockpiles and associated activity would represent a noticeable departure from the existing rural baseline. In my opinion, this would give rise to a medium magnitude of visual change, resulting in moderate adverse visual effects. This represents a higher assessment than that contained within the Appellant's LVIA, which asserts construction effects would be small in magnitude and minor adverse in significance.

6.3.19 At Year 1, there is broad agreement between the parties that the completed development would result in a medium magnitude of visual change and moderate adverse visual effects. The proposed development would form a clear and readily perceptible incursion into land that is currently experienced as open countryside, introducing substantial built form, infrastructure and associated activity into views that are presently characterised by a predominantly rural landscape.

6.3.20 As planting matures and proposed landscape features become established, the severity of visual effects would reduce. Nevertheless, it would not fully offset the substantial change arising from the permanent introduction of built development. I predict that visual effects would reduce to moderate to minor adverse by Year 15. This assessment is marginally higher than the Appellant's LVIA, which concludes visual effects would be minor adverse by Year 15.

6.3.21 Visual effects on residents of dwellings 0.5km to 1km from the site

These receptors include a small cluster of houses within Throcking. Assessment of visual effects on residents from 0.5km to 1km are very similar between the parties. The Appellant's LVIA assesses minor adverse effects at Year 1, reducing to negligible adverse by Year 15. The slight difference is that I assess a small magnitude of change and minor adverse effects during construction, instead of the very small and negligible effects outlined within the LVIA.

6.3.22 The appeal scheme will be noticeable through gaps in existing vegetation and it will be possible to perceive visual intrusion into the rural landscape.

6.3.23 Visual effects on residents of dwellings on elevated land more than 1km from the site

This is a small group of receptors located within Wyddial to the north-east of the appeal site. It is agreed with the Appellant's LVIA that change will be small in magnitude and negligible adverse effects are assessed by Year 15. Views will be restricted by intervening vegetation and changes in topography.

6.3.24 Visual effects on workers at workplaces within 0.5km of the site

Workers with views to the appeal site are limited to people working within Buntingford Business Park, directly adjacent to the south-east corner of the site. Views from within the Business Park will be heavily screened by existing vegetation.

6.3.25 During winter months, there may be filtered views to construction activity close to the site boundary. This will represent a small magnitude of change, leading to minor adverse visual effects. With minimal boundary planting proposed along the south-eastern corner of the site, these effects are predicted to remain small and minor adverse by Year 1 and into Year 15.

6.3.26 Summary of visual effects

Although the proof of Phillip Hughes deals primarily with planning policy, I have considered my assessment of visual effects against the relevant local and national policy. The identified level of visual effects feeds directly into the perceptual aspects of character harm discussed within Section 5. Direct visual effects further demonstrate the failure of the scheme to conserve, enhance or strengthen the character of the site and surrounding area, conflicting with Local Plan Policy DES2. Visual effects on residents and footpath users represent adverse change to views from the surrounding countryside and conflict with BCANP Policies ES1 and HD2. Visual effect assessments further demonstrate that proposed large urban development on the west side of the A10 is not compatible with the character and appearance of the countryside, conflicting with Local Plan Policy GBR2 and NPPF Paragraph 187, sub-paragraph (b).

7 Conclusion and Summary

7.1.1 The appeal relates to an outline planning application for the development of up to 600 dwellings, elderly accommodation, a mixed-use local centre, a first school, public open space and associated infrastructure on land north of the A507 and west of the A10, Buntingford. East Hertfordshire District Council refused planning permission for four reasons. My evidence relates solely to Reason for Refusal 2, which concerns the effects of the proposals on landscape character, appearance and the rural setting of Buntingford.

7.1.2 I was appointed by East Hertfordshire District Council in June 2026 to prepare landscape evidence for this Inquiry. I have reviewed the application and appeal documents, relevant planning policies and baseline landscape studies, and have undertaken multiple site visits to assess the site and its surroundings. My evidence provides my professional opinion on the likely landscape and visual effects of the appeal scheme and has been prepared in accordance with GLVIA3 and Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21.

7.1.3 I have established the planning context for the appeal by identifying the relevant national and local planning policies. I have also considered the landscape baseline at national, district and local levels, including the East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment and the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan. The site lies within the Cherry Green Arable Plateau (LCA 141) and displays many of the characteristics identified within the published character assessments. In particular, it forms part of a largely undeveloped agricultural landscape that contributes to the rural setting of Buntingford and the transition between the settlement and the wider countryside to the west.

7.1.4 My site observations confirm that the appeal site possesses a strong rural character. The landscape is defined by open arable farmland, established hedgerows, mature vegetation, varied topography and limited visual influence from surrounding development. Whilst the site is located adjacent to Buntingford Business Park and within relative proximity to the A10, these features have a limited influence on the character of the site itself, which continues to be experienced predominantly as open countryside.

7.1.5 Using the criteria set out in Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21, I have assessed the landscape value of the site and its surroundings. Whilst I do not consider the site to constitute a valued landscape for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework, it nevertheless possesses a range of attributes that contribute positively to landscape value, including its functional relationship with the countryside surrounding Buntingford, its recreational role through the Public Rights of Way network, its scenic qualities and its contribution to local landscape character. I assess the site itself to hold medium landscape value.

7.1.6 I have assessed the susceptibility of the identified landscape receptors to the proposed development and agree with much of the Appellant's assessment in this regard. The site, the character of the Cherry Green Arable Plateau, the adjacent landscape character areas and the footpath network all display a high susceptibility to development of the scale proposed. The site performs an important function in maintaining the distinction between the developed area of Buntingford and the countryside to the west and is therefore particularly susceptible to extensive urban expansion. Combining value and susceptibility, I assess the site and the principal landscape character receptors to be of high landscape sensitivity. There is substantial agreement between the parties regarding these sensitivity assessments.

7.1.7 The appeal scheme would result in the loss of a considerable area of agricultural land and would introduce a substantial urban extension onto the western side of the A10. Up to 600 dwellings, educational facilities, a local centre, roads, lighting, drainage infrastructure and associated activity would replace the existing arable landscape. The proposals would fundamentally alter the existing character of the site and would significantly increase the urban influence experienced within the surrounding countryside.

7.1.8 The greatest landscape effects would occur within the site itself and in relation to the character experienced from Public Rights of Way crossing the site. It is my opinion that the appeal scheme would result in major adverse landscape effects on the character of the Site and its immediate surroundings during construction, at Year 1 and at Year 15. Similarly, major adverse effects would occur on the character and experience of Footpaths 40 and 41, where extensive areas of open countryside would be replaced by built development and associated urban influences.

7.1.9 In relation to the Cherry Green Arable Plateau (LCA 141), I assess moderate adverse landscape effects throughout the assessment period. Whilst the proposals would affect only part of the wider character area, they would nevertheless introduce substantial urban development into the host landscape character area and would erode its established rural qualities. I do not agree that these effects become beneficial over time. For the adjacent Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau (LCA 140) and High Rib Valley (LCA 142), I assess minor adverse landscape effects during construction, at Year 1 and at Year 15. Whilst effects would

remain relatively localised, the development would be perceptible from parts of both character areas and would result in a deterioration of rural character where it is experienced.

7.1.10 I agree that the proposed planting strategy would, over time, result in beneficial effects for individual landscape elements, including hedgerows, trees and water features by increasing the quantity of each. However, these beneficial elements do not overcome the wider landscape character harm arising from the urbanisation of the site and the loss of open countryside. The proposed mitigation would soften some views but would not restore the existing rural character of the site or its role within the wider landscape.

7.1.11 In relation to visual effects, there is considerable agreement between my assessment and the Appellant's LVIA regarding the principal visual receptors and the likely extent of visibility. I generally agree with the identified visual envelope and receptor groups. However, I consider the visual value of many receptors, particularly footpath users and nearby residents, to be greater than that attributed within the LVIA.

7.1.12 The greatest visual effects would be experienced by users of Public Rights of Way within and immediately adjacent to the site. I assess major adverse visual effects during construction, at Year 1 and at Year 15. Although mitigation planting would become established over time, it would not replace the existing open views across undeveloped countryside, nor would it prevent the development remaining a prominent feature in views from these routes. Pedestrians using nearby Public Rights of Way within 0.5 kilometres of the site would also experience substantial visual change. I assess major adverse visual effects during construction and at Year 1, reducing to moderate to major adverse effects by Year 15 as mitigation planting matures.

7.1.13 Residents occupying properties closest to the site would experience moderate adverse visual effects during construction and at Year 1. Whilst mitigation planting would assist in reducing the prominence of the development over time, it would not remove the substantial change to existing views. I therefore assess residual visual effects of moderate to minor adverse by Year 15.

7.1.14 More distant residential receptors, road users and users of more distant Public Rights of Way would generally experience lesser effects due to distance, topography and vegetation

screening. Although visibility would be more limited for these receptors, the development would still be perceptible in a number of views and would contribute to an increased urban presence within the wider landscape.

7.1.15 Overall, it is my opinion that the appeal scheme would result in significant and permanent harm to the character of the appeal site and its immediate surroundings. This would erode the rural setting of Buntingford, weaken the role of the A10 as a clear edge to the settlement, and introduce a significant urbanising influence into the countryside west of the town. Whilst aspects of the mitigation strategy would provide localised landscape benefits, these measures would not offset the considerable adverse effects identified in relation to landscape character and visual amenity.

7.1.16 For these reasons, I conclude that the appeal proposals conflict with East Herts District Plan Policies DES2 and GBR2, Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan Policies ES1 and HD2, and National Planning Policy Framework Paragraph 187(b).



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