



WALLINGFORD CORE STRATEGY HOUSING STUDY

LANDSCAPE CONSIDERATIONS

RELATING TO

**A PROPOSAL TO CONSTRUCT ABOUT 850 DWELLINGS
FOR THE PERIOD UP TO 2026**

PREPARED BY

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ON BEHALF OF

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

1.0.1 The South East Plan is the regional spatial strategy for the south east of England. It sets out the long term spatial planning framework for the region for the period 2006-2026 and provides the context within which Local Development Frameworks (LDF) in the region is prepared. The emerging Plan, which is expected to be adopted in Spring 2009, determines amongst other things, the minimum amounts of housing that South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) needs to provide in its LDF up to 2026.

1.0.2 The Core Strategy is the first and key policy document in SODC's LDF, which will assist in delivering a number of key objectives for the period up to 2026. One of these objectives is to demonstrate where the needs for new housing might be met in the district. The Council's strategy is to focus most development on a network of towns and larger villages.

1.2 Appointment and Brief

1.2.1 Machin Bate Associates (MBA), Chartered Landscape Architects, were appointed by SODC to undertake three studies in the district for urban extensions into primarily greenfield sites on the edges of south Oxford, Thame and Wallingford. These studies should assess, in landscape and visual terms, whether there are any sites that have advantages for potential housing allocation amongst the areas ('search areas') that are advanced. The outcome of these studies will help to inform the Council's deliberations in identifying 'preferred options' for housing.

1.2.2 The extent of the search areas and the limitations of the brief have necessitated an overview of the sites based on desk studies and site visits. The appraisals have drawn upon a variety of well-established assessment techniques drawn from published guidance and widely used practice. In addition, given that professional judgements are involved, the findings are underpinned by the experience of MBA. However, it is stressed that the depth of the studies are not as exhaustive as if an individual site appraisal had been conducted.

- 1.2.3 Notwithstanding the above, the process has included consideration and analysis of numerous details relating to site character as well as sensitivity. Factors such as sense of arrival to the associated towns and landmark buildings (primarily ‘detractors’ on the existing urban edges) have also featured. A more comprehensive list of the considerations is included under Scope of Report Section 2.0 below.

1.3 **Scope of Report**

- 1.3.1 Given that the generic subject matter is similar for each of the three reports, there is an element of duplication. Inevitably, the specifics for each report reflect the search areas under consideration. **This report examines Search Areas relating to Wallingford.**

- **Section 2.0** covers generic subject matter relating to planning concepts and landscape related baseline considerations. These include greenfield development, sustainable development, designated landscape, agricultural land classification, coalescence and setting of settlements, topography, footpath linkages, landscape character, visual sensitivity, landmark structures and settlement edges. Where applicable, these topics are analysed in Section 3.0.
- **Section 3.0** summarises the baseline information for each site and provides a recommendations on potential for housing development.
- **Section 4.0** provides a brief resumé.

- 1.3.2 This report is illustrated with a number of annotated aerial photographs, plans and photographs. These are incorporated at the rear, commencing Appendix MBA 20 through to MBA 28. For brevity these are referred to as MBA 20, MBA 21 etc. Photographs are referred to as ‘Views’ and are a helpful aide mémoire but they are not an exhaustive record. Primarily, they are a number of semi panoramic photographs taken with a reflex camera with a 50mm focal length lens. Single views are 50mm or where the subject matter was confined, a 28mm lens was used. The

majority of the photographs were taken in January and February 2009 but some sites were also recorded in October 2008. A list of the Appendices is included in the Contents page preceding this report.

2.0 PLANNING AND BASELINE CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 Greenfield Development

2.1.1 Although the development of brownfield sites remains a Government priority, virtually the whole of each site would represent an urban expansion into the countryside. This would be contrary to the Government's aim as reflected in PPS7 'Delivering Sustainable Development'. However, given the amount of housing to be delivered as part of the South East Plan, urban expansions onto greenfield sites would be an acknowledged but necessary departure.

2.1.2 Prior to PPS3 the types of permissible built development in open countryside, outside the Green Belt, have usually been associated with agriculture or forestry. However, under the wide embracing consideration of sustainability, the prospect of alternative developments in the countryside might be permissible where it can be shown that it would result in sustainable development on sites that are not constrained environmentally.

2.1.3 Delivering sustainable strategies is at the heart of the Core Strategy. Landscape is a finite resource that varies in terms of its intrinsic qualities and views of it. Regardless of mitigation, once developed, a landscape will change irrevocably. It is incumbent on the decision maker to weigh the sustainability of exploiting one site in favour of an alternative.

2.2 Designated Landscapes

2.2.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are nationally designated areas confirmed by the Government as having the highest status of protection in relation to their landscape and scenic beauty. They should be given great weight in development decisions. Development within or conspicuous from an AONB, which would damage this 'beauty' or distinctive character, will be resisted. Where they exist, the boundaries of the AONB are shown relative to the Search Areas.

2.3 Agricultural Land Classification

- 2.3.1 Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) represent the ‘best and most versatile’ (BMV) agricultural land. The level of significance attributed to BMV land has reduced during the last decade. The revised and now superseded 1997 PPG7 required “considerable weight” to be given to protecting BMV land against development. It was considered a “national resource” and that there needed to be a very strong justification to go against this national advice. The superseded planning guidance is now expressed in PPS7 which no longer refers to “considerable weight” to protect BMV against development. Nor is there any reference to BMV land being a “national resource”. In comparison, BMV land is to be considered alongside other sustainable resources. The PPS7 advice is that poorer quality land (Grades 3b, 4 and 5) should be developed in preference to higher quality land, except where this is inconsistent with other sustainable considerations.
- 2.3.2 The agricultural land gradings shown are provisional. They do not accord with any site specific soil analysis, but are derived from the Magic website. According to the website information, the detail is digitised from the ALC 1:250,000 published maps which in turn are compiled from the 1 inch to 1 mile maps. It will be noted that Grade 3 soils are not subdivided into 3a and 3b. Areas on the maps that are untuned fall into Grade 4 and below.
- 2.3.3 The versatility of soils is an intrinsic part of the landscape. Soils provide a growing medium, and depending on their inherent capacity to drain or retain soil moisture, they influence the type of agriculture and vegetation that can be sustained. The better the soils the more range of crops. Whereas, with the more limited soils, the prognosis for crop growth and yields is restricted. This in turn impacts on the character of the landscape. As a generalisation, the better quality soils have resulted in ‘prairie landscapes’ with large open fields. This is often due to hedgerow removal in order to maximise crop yields through mechanised farming practices. The lower quality soils can often be associated with a matrix of woodlands and hedgerows that may enclose pasture or perhaps more seasonally restricted crops that do not require intensive farming practices.

- 2.3.4 Although this report identifies whether a particular Area of Search might be a candidate for development in landscape and visual terms, it does not comment on whether such development might affect the viability of the remaining agricultural holding. That consideration is for others to determine.

2.4 Coalescence and Setting of Settlements

- 2.4.1 The concept of maintaining a gap or preventing settlements from merging into one another is an established planning principle. Gaps can protect the setting and identity of settlements. They can have both physical and psychological benefits. If available for access, a gap can provide a recreational resource. Even if only a visual facility, it can have a perceived advantage in terms of contributing to the separate identity of a settlement. There is no guidance as to the dimensions of a gap, its physical constituents, or its qualitative character. In contrast, the protection of the landscape setting of settlements introduces a qualitative consideration by reference to the need to resist development that would damage the attractive setting of settlements.
- 2.4.2 When contemplating whether a gap between settlements is likely to be compromised, it is our experience that whilst intervisibility between settlements is an important criterion, it can be influenced by landform and intervening vegetation. Where there are elevated views from a settlement, the requirement for a substantial gap becomes critical. Another consideration is the perception gained by travelling between settlements and the experience and duration between departing from one settlement and arriving at another.

2.5 Topography

- 2.5.1 As a generality, a hillside development and areas overlooked from high ground will be more difficult to assimilate than development in flat landscapes. Much will depend on distance and context. For example, whether a potential development area is seen in isolation, or a protrusion into open countryside, or whether it is seen juxtaposed with other development as a backdrop. The former more isolated or protruding development will be more evident and have significantly more impact than the latter juxtaposed development.

2.6 **Footpath Linkages**

- 2.6.1 As part of the thrust of delivering sustainable development, there is an emphasis on improving access opportunities. Definitive rights of way are one expression of access. Where they exist they are shown superimposed on the Areas of Search. Inevitably an allocated site can allow for new corridors of movement to augment those already in existence. The difficulty arises when attempting to provide permeability or movement through or into the existing urban structure where none exists. Definitive footpaths and bridleways (as opposed to claimed paths) are part of the resource of each Search Area.

2.7 **Landscape Character**

- 2.7.1 Understanding landscape character allows an appreciation of what gives a landscape its distinctive identity. Where a landscape forms the setting of a settlement, a landscape character assessment enables the settlement to be studied in its context. Thereby, the relationship between a settlement and its surroundings can be understood and appreciated.
- 2.7.2 A landscape character assessment was completed in 1998 for SODC entitled 'South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment' (SOLA). It was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in July 2003. This assessment covers the majority of the Search Areas and their context. The assessment examined character at two levels. Firstly, it defined '**Landscape Character Areas**'. These are generic descriptions of broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, land use and vegetation. Character Areas can repeat throughout the country without relating to a particular geographical location. A Character Area is a unit of landscape classification that embraces a number of different Landscape Types. Secondly, the assessment identifies '**Landscape Character Types**'. These are geographically distinct places which have their own coherent local identity.
- 2.7.3 The landscape types identified in SOLA and repeated against each site in Section 3.0 of this report are fundamentally a reflection of the landform and landcover (vegetation) of the particular area. Expressions of 'flat', 'undulating' and 'rolling' in

the type descriptions refer to landform. 'Open', 'semi-enclosed' and 'enclosed' are usually expressions of the incidence or absence of vegetation (hedgerows, trees, woodland etc) but also topography. Although the SOLA study landscape types are referred to, full descriptions of the types are not quoted in full. They are augmented in the baseline descriptions of each site which, on a site specific level, are more accurate than the SOLA report's acknowledged limited application on a field by field basis and at settlement edges.

2.7.4 The original format of the SOLA Report was produced on Coral Draw software but was not georeferenced. Copies of the original report contained in the appendices attached, have been saved in Jpeg format and georeferenced to create images that accord as close as possible with OS data. Even so the images are not an exact fit and the quality of reproduction is poor.

2.7.5 Following on from the identification of character areas and landscape types, the SOLA study examined the intrinsic quality and condition of the landscape. Each was assessed in terms of a number of attributes such as scenic quality, unspoilt character and sense of place et al and were then assigned one of four enhancement strategies. These were 'Conserve', 'Repair', 'Restore' and 'Reconstruct'. The definitions of the first three strategies are included below but the fourth, 'Reconstruct' definition is omitted as none occurs in the Study Areas.

- **Conserve** - this strategy applies where the landscape is of particularly high scenic quality, is unspoilt, retains a strong, intact landscape structure and sense of place, and often contains areas or features of ecological or cultural heritage significance. In these landscapes, conservation is an overwhelming priority in order to maintain the landscape character and quality.
- **Repair** - this strategy applies to those landscapes which have a positive rural character, attractive qualities and where character, landscape structure and sense of place are still comparatively strong but which are not 'special' or distinctive to quite the same degree as those in the above category. These landscapes are also important to conserve but would benefit from some enhancement, in order to repair slightly weakened landscape structure and quality, and to reinforce and strengthen local distinctiveness.
- **Restore** - this strategy applies to those landscapes which retain a rural and essentially attractive character but where landscape elements and structure are in decline, largely through intensive

farming practices. Field enlargement, removal or deterioration of boundary walls and hedges, and the loss of trees, woodlands and other vegetation have substantially weakened landscape structure and sense of place. The priority in these landscapes is to restore landscape structure and to diversity and strengthen local distinctiveness.

- 2.7.6 These definitions express the inherent condition of the landscape and advise on restoration and the degree of enhancement necessary in order to reinstate their former structure. The process of repair or restoration of a depleted landscape structure was intended primarily to help improve landscape structure. This might be viewed as a philanthropic gesture. It also contemplated the possibility of a modicum of development linked to the reintroduction of an element of a former landscape structure.
- 2.7.7 Merely that the SOLA enhancement strategy might state ‘restore’ does not automatically infer that the reintroduction of a pastiche of a former landscape structure would lead to a favourable response to an associated housing development. Indeed introducing wholesale residential development on the scale anticipated would not be consistent with the enhancement anticipated by the SOLA study.
- 2.7.8 The inherent characteristics and qualities of a landscape will determine its sensitivity to change and its ability to absorb development. Sensitivity in landscape terms could be an intact landscape in which its structural vegetation (trees and hedgerows) and associated spatial quality would be overwhelmed by the introduction of development. An intact (‘conserve’) landscape structure would provide more screening potential than a landscape structure that is in decline (‘restore’). The conserve strategy landscapes are more sensitive, and least suitable for development. At the other extreme, a weakened landscape structure with widespread hedgerow loss is sensitive in visual terms because it lacks the framework to assimilate development.
- 2.7.9 Where greenfield development is exceptionally permitted, the aim is to integrate it as sensitively as possible without undue adverse impact or harm to the wider landscape. With the scale of development proposed, adverse impact will be inevitable. However, some landscape types can assimilate development better than others. A relevant factor includes the condition of the existing settlement edge relative to the adjacent Search

Area. In terms of visual sensitivity, consideration will be given to whether an Area benefits from screening or is overlooked, or is located on a prominent hillside or rising ground. However, merely that a site is unobtrusive is not of itself a good argument.

2.8 Landscape Features

- 2.8.1 Landscape features are many and varied. They are physical components that contribute to the character of a particular landscape. These include variations in topography, landcover (vegetation), land use and drainage (streams, rivers). Their combination is often referred to as the ‘grain’ of the landscape. In any development proposal, such assets need to be analysed and dovetailed into the proposed masterplan. Their inclusion will introduce interest, variety and elements of maturity.

2.9 Visual Sensitivity

- 2.9.1 This report is illustrated with the assistance of a number of photographic ‘Views’. These aim to show the interrelationship between settlement edges and the surrounding landscape. To assist orientation, the views are annotated and a view caption provides further elaboration.
- 2.9.2 Although not explicitly referred to in the report, users of rights of way are considered more important than occupants in a vehicle travelling at speed.
- 2.9.3 The visual consequences of developing the Search Areas are referred to at the end of each site appraisal in Section 3.0 under Summary Comment. The Landscape Analysis in the appendices provides a diagrammatic representation of some of the most important aspects of the visual assessment.

2.10 Landmark Structures

2.10.1 These can be distinguished and elegant structures such as church spires or fine buildings but all too often they are detracting structures on the edge of settlements. This also applies to power lines and pylons radiating out across the surrounding countryside. Due to their scale and mass, some buildings impact over wide areas of adjacent countryside. The assimilation of settlement edge buildings is an important consideration and requires more than a token strip of cosmetic ‘landscaping’.

2.11 Settlement Edges

2.11.1 A settlement edge makes a significant contribution to the distinctiveness of a place and how it relates to its landscape setting. The ‘gateway’ to or from a settlement represents the point of arrival/departure and provides an important first impression. Poorly managed land and a detracting urban edge of intrusive unsightly structures, overwhelming large scale development or sprawling unmitigated housing, undermines the sense of arrival compared to the heightened experience associated with, for example, a green approach.

2.11.2 From our analysis of settlements and settlement edges, we have recognised three main townscape edge character types. We describe these below and have afforded them their own terminology. There are those developments and edges that reflect or support the character of the original historic nucleus of a settlement or contribute to its distinctive identity (Supportive Townscape). There are developments that have no relationship to the nucleus of the settlement or that do not contribute to identity of a place (Undistinguished Townscape). Then there are developments that, due to their unsympathetic design perhaps combined with their mass, have a negative impact on the identity and character of a settlement (Detracting Townscape).

2.11.3 When contemplating development on the edge of a settlement, it is fundamental that the character of the existing edge is considered. Much will depend on whether further development would improve the existing townscape edge without detracting from the landscape setting. Physical features such as roads, railways, rivers or woodland can provide a boundary to development and prevent urban sprawl on the edge of a

settlement. Where development has halted at a physical barrier, a strong boundary edge is defined. Examples include Grenoble Road to the south of Oxford and the A4129 and the B4012 around the eastern perimeter of Thame. The downside of such definite edges is that they can present a hard and nondescript edge to a town. Conversely, settlements that have evolved slowly tend to have much softer more 'organic' irregular edges, often with mature gardens, allotments, parkland, paddocks et al. The boundary of Winterbrook and also the village edges of Crowmarsh are examples of soft transitional edges.

- 2.11.4 Where a settlement edge has stopped at a physical boundary, we have avoided breaching that boundary where other opportunities for expansion exist, for example to the east of Thame. The exception is where the existing edge is brutal in terms of mass or density and the negative impact on the adjoining countryside is severe. In these instances, there may be a case to warrant a new graduated town edge which provides a more sympathetic interface with the countryside.
- 2.11.5 The introduction of a new physical barrier does not automatically create a new boundary for infill development to a settlement. Where a mature and established settlement edge exists, it should be conserved and any additions should respond to the existing relationship of the built form and its landscape setting. The edge of a settlement should provide a gradual transition between development and the surrounding countryside in terms of scale and density.
- 2.11.6 **Historic Core:** Where the historic core of a settlement survives, it often provides a distinctive sense of place. This usually comprises elements of scale, historic street pattern and spaces, architectural style, notable buildings and local vernacular and building materials which combine to create a unique and special character.
- 2.11.7 **Supportive Townscape and Landscape Setting:** These are often contiguous with the original historic core but are of later growth and development. They provide a positive contribution to the distinctiveness of a town or city. They may include buildings which relate to the historic core, approaches to the centre along historic routes, views out of and into the historic core, landmark buildings and areas or spaces with a distinctive identity. Supportive townscapes and landscapes 'borrow' from and

contribute to a settlement's special character. Landscape can reinforce and support the special quality of a setting and an approach to a settlement. These landscapes are often associated with watercourses, and 'green fingers'. They provide links with surrounding countryside and contribute significantly to the experience, enjoyment and ambience of a place.

2.11.8 Undistinguished Townscape and Landscape Setting: These are areas of the town that do not contribute to the special character of a settlement. They often relate to later development and growth areas which have not acknowledged the identity and special character of the historic core, supportive townscape and local vernacular of the town. Rather, they include areas of 'anywhere' development with mass produced building materials and nondescript architecture, mediocre in style and often suburban in estate layout.

2.11.9 Detracting Townscapes and Landscape Setting: These are areas which contain or consist of elements and development that have a negative visual impact on the settlement or its setting. Dependant on scale and location, they can detract from a limited localised area or create a negative impact on the distinctive character of the wider townscape or its landscape setting.

2.11.10 Insensitively located incongruous buildings, brutal large scale development or degraded areas and landscapes will overwhelm or detract from the setting and approaches to a settlement, particularly if there has been scant regard to mitigation of the development.

2.11.11 Fundamental to whether a settlement edge should be extended, much will depend on the quality of the existing townscape and edges and whether it could be improved or augmented by further development, without compromising the landscape setting.

2.12 Green Infrastructure

2.12.1 The term relates to multi function green space. It would incorporate existing rights of way and new permissive routes and desire lines. There would be substantial areas of indigenous planting that might be expressed as 'buffer zones', 'green corridors' and

parks, all linked to the development and the wider countryside. Existing hedgerows and woodlands would be incorporated.

- 2.12.2 The intention is to provide a graduated green edge to development that would both mitigate and assimilate the development proposals. These would act as recreational areas, general amenity and provide for nature conservation.

3.0 WALLINGFORD SITES A, B, C, D, E and F

- 3.0.1 All the Wallingford sites share the same appendices bound in at the rear, namely MBA 20–28. Although Site F is grouped in with the Wallingford sites, it lies in Crowmarsh Gifford which, according to the SODC Preferred Options Consultation Paper, is classified as a ‘larger village’. Excluding the Crowmarsh Gifford site, the strategy is to allocate land to facilitate the construction of about 850 dwellings for the period to 2026.
- 3.0.2 This report does not attempt to identify how the 850 houses (excluding Crowmarsh Gifford) might be accommodated. It is possible that more than one site is involved. Where there are constraints that might preclude the exploitation of the majority of a site, it might be that a limited number of dwellings could be introduced augmented by a significant area of green infrastructure.
- 3.0.3 Each site is summarised below with respect to a number of baseline details. There is a sequence of representative photographs applicable to each site which illustrates some of these baseline features. The locations for these site photographs are shown in MBA 24, whilst the photographs are incorporated in the subsequent MBA 25.
- 3.0.4 A distinction is made between public footpaths (definitive routes) and footways or roadside pavements. Although each site is summarised in terms of a linear measurement from the nearest site boundary to Wallingford town centre, in reality any pedestrian movement is not so direct due to the irregular road and footpath network. Given that all the sites are on the edges of settlements, any through site footpaths also link to the countryside beyond.
- 3.0.5 It should be appreciated that when the SOLA Landscape Assessment was conducted, it predated the construction of the A4130 Wallingford Bypass. Thereby Sites B, C, D and E were not contained on their western flank by vegetation as they are now. Had the bypass been constructed with the associated planting, it may have affected the landscape types and the associated enhancement strategy.

- 3.0.6 **Sense of Arrival:** The A4130 Wallingford Bypass is the primary route from which to gain an impression of the western edge of Wallingford. Sites B, C, D and E are all contained by the bypass and its associated planting (Views 12 and 15). In places, the road is in cutting, which further precludes views of parts of the western edge of Wallingford. The current perception, from the standpoint of bypass users, could change according to the nature of any proposed developments and the manner in which they were assimilated. A token strip of 'landscaping' would merely duplicate the effect of some of the existing raw developed edges to the town.
- 3.0.7 Where footpath access allows, within the confined edge of the bypass, existing built development impacts variously on the adjacent search areas. The landscapes of Sites C and D are influenced by the impact of the adjacent Hithercroft Road Industrial Park, whereas the landscapes of Sites B and E are influenced by the impact of the existing peripheral housing. Site E has a more verdant edge to the existing developed town edge than Site B, due to the interspersed nature of the houses and their verdant gardens.
- 3.0.8 Northbound out of Wallingford along Shillingford Road is the conspicuous break between the developed edge of the town and open rising countryside beyond (View 1). The tree lined road is a distinctive point of egress and arrival, particularly when western light through the trees highlights the experience. Although the existing houses along this northern edge are apparent, it is the Arcadian route and sense of space beyond that heightens the sense of arrival and leaves an enduring impression (View 7).
- 3.0.9 The Crowmarsh Gifford Site F is similar to the Wallingford Bypass sites in that Benson Lane was the previous route to Oxford, and the realigned A4074 now acts as a bypass enclosing the site. Any development within Site F would butt up to the existing edge of the village. Some of the larger buildings west of Benson Lane are evident from the A4074, primarily in winter and when lit at night. However, the main core of the village, including dwellings fronting The Street, is not that apparent from the A4074. When seen from the local footpath system, the existing built edge reflects an informal arrangement of diverse dwelling styles with well treed mature gardens (supportive townscape - View 24). This is not too dissimilar in character to the edge of Winterbrook when viewed from Site E (Views 20 and 21).

3.1 **WALLINGFORD SITE A**

- **Location and Topography (MBA 20)**

The photographs that help to illustrate baseline features for this site are Views 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 and are contained in MBA 25. With the exception of View 5, which is an elevated view from the adjacent AONB, all the other views are within, adjacent or close to the site.

This site abuts the northern built edge of Wallingford and is confined between Shillingford Road in the east and Wantage Road in the west. The northern (countryside) boundary does not accord with any obvious physical feature.

The site is relatively flat, orienting generally about the 55mm AOD contour, although to the north the land rises beyond the site to the higher land of the AONB.

- **Landscape Designation (MBA 21)**

The AONB encircles two sides of the site to the north and east. The whole of the northern site boundary intrudes into the AONB as a linear strip, varying in width up to about 125m.

- **Agricultural Land Quality (MBA 22)**

According to provisional information, the whole of the site is Grade 1, which is the highest grade of best and most versatile soils. Currently the site is largely in arable production.

- **Footpath Linkages (MBA 23)**

From the nearest site boundary to the 'Lamb' cross roads in Wallingford town centre, the distance is about 0.8km measured in a straight line. There are no direct footpaths towards the town centre and pedestrians would be confined to existing roadside footways.

A footpath aligns west to east alongside and parallel to the northern site boundary. This is joined by a second footpath from the north.

- **Landscape Character** (MBA 26A and 26B)

SODC Landscape Character Assessment: The site lies within an ‘**open rolling downs**’ landscape type and has been identified as a ‘**repair**’ enhancement strategy.

The site consists of large open fields without boundary definition. Apart from a young plantation within the north eastern corner of the site, there is little internal site vegetation. The tree lined Shillingford Road, alongside the eastern site boundary, is a distinguished approach into Wallingford, whilst the treebelt along the eastern edge of the road is a strong landscape feature which provides a sense of enclosure to the site. Mature garden trees and shrubs assist mitigation of housing along the Wantage Road (western) boundary (Views 3 and 4). However the southern boundary has a raw, unmitigated and ‘detracting’ edge of housing (Wilding Road) (View 2).

The site is inextricably linked to the adjacent AONB which contributes to the landscape character of the site. The site landscape relates in physical and visual terms to the higher land to the north and is also distinguished by the woodland boundary edge of the AONB to the east.

- **Visibility**

- Much of the site is overlooked by AONB footpaths to the north. The existing northern and western built edge of Wallingford is evident but its impact is reduced by distance (View 3). When viewed from elevated AONB vantage points (View 5), the northern developed edge is recessive.
 - From the Arcadian approach to Wallingford along Shillingford Road, the awareness of Site A is of open space beyond the trees and filtered light from the west. When viewed from passing vehicles, the northern edge of Wallingford is glimpsed through the trees. From the adjacent footway along the site side of Shillingford Road, the northern edge is much more apparent.
 - Residential views of the site are available from properties along the southern and western boundaries and from Severalls Cottages within the AONB to the north.

- **Summary Comment**
- **Recommendations:** We advise against the wholesale development of Site A. In part, this is because of the proximity of the adjacent AONB landscape and the potential visual impact on AONB footpaths and partly because of the sense of arrival along the Shillingford Road approach to Wallingford.
- Although the existing urban edge (southern boundary) detracts from the site landscape, it is the immediacy of the contiguous AONB to the north and adjacent AONB to the east that provides the main influence to the landscape character of the site. Conversely, further development north of Wallingford (even with a softer edge) would potentially increase the impact of the urban edge on the AONB, particularly to the north.
- The fact that the site is entirely provisional Grade 1 agricultural land needs to be factored into any decision.

3.2 **WALLINGFORD SITE B**

- **Location and Topography (MBA 20)**

The photographs that help to illustrate baseline features for this site are Views 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 and are contained in MBA 25. These are taken within or adjacent to the site.

The site is confined between the A4130 Wallingford Bypass to the west, housing along Wantage Road to the north, housing along the western edge of Wallingford to the east (Chiltern Crescent and Fir Tree Avenue), allotments and part of Wallingford Sports Park to the south.

The site has a slight gradient from north to south. This is evident from the two contours of 55m and 50m AOD within the site.

- **Landscape Designation (MBA 21)**

The site lies outside the AONB, being about 50m away at its most north west corner.

- **Agricultural Land Quality (MBA 22)**

According to provisional information, much of the site is Grades 1 and 2, best and most versatile, although part of the eastern side of the site is Grade 4 or below. Currently the site is in arable production.

- **Footpath Linkages (MBA 23)**

From the nearest site boundary to the ‘Lamb’ cross roads in Wallingford town centre, the distance is about 1.1km measured in a straight line.

Of all the Wallingford sites, this site has the best linkages along definitive rights of way towards the town centre. The linking footpaths would allow pedestrians to use dedicated routes for much of the distance, with an option to walk through Bull Croft Park, without undue need to rely on footways adjacent to roads. One footpath aligns through the northern part of the site and a second footpath is immediately adjacent to and parallel with the southern site boundary.

- **Landscape Character (MBA 26A and 26B)**

SODC Landscape Character Assessment: The site lies within an ‘**open rolling downs**’ landscape type (see also ‘Topography’ above) and has been identified as a ‘**repair**’ enhancement strategy.

The site consists of a large arable field, divided by a well defined crossing footpath. Housing and mature garden boundaries on two sides, the hedged Wallingford Bypass and a hedgerow along the southern site boundary enclose the site. Internal site vegetation consists of a distinctive group of trees in the centre of the site surrounding Fir Tree Cottage (Views 10 and 11). There are views out of the site to the higher land of distant Chilterns AONB beyond the bypass (View 11).

Along the eastern site boundary, first floor windows, gables and the roofscape of recent housing development present an ‘undistinguished’ urban edge to the site landscape (View 13) but garden hedgerows screen ground floor windows. Mature properties with well stocked gardens provide a softer edge to the north eastern site boundary (View 10), with the exception of some unmitigated housing infill adjacent to the north east corner of the site (View 13).

- **Visibility**

Although there is intervisibility from the site with two AONB vantage points i) A4074 en route to Reading about 3.75/4.0 km to the south and ii) the Sinoudun Hills about 3.75/4.0km to the north west, views from these locations towards the site render any detail barely perceptible.

- Views into site are limited to glimpses from passing traffic on the adjacent bypass. (e.g. View 12).
- One public footpath crosses the northern site and skirts part of the northern boundary. There are open views across the whole site from this footpath (Views 10 and 11).
- There are open views northward across the site from the western section of a second footpath to the south of the southern boundary (View 13).
- The site is overlooked from first floor windows of properties lining the northern (Wantage Road) boundary and the eastern boundary (Chiltern Crescent et al). Some of these views are filtered by garden vegetation.

- **Summary Comment**

- **Recommendations:** Development could take place in this site due to the ‘undistinguished’ edge of settlement (eastern boundary), limited visibility and a general absence of internal landscape structure. The existing through site footpath provides good links to the town centre and the wider countryside. If development took place, this footpath should be developed as a green corridor through the site. The western and southern boundaries should also be reinforced with landscape buffer plantations.
- The fact that the site has a substantial area of provisional Grades 1 and 2 agricultural land needs to be factored into any decision.

3.3 **WALLINGFORD SITES C AND D**

3.3.1 These two sites are considered together, given that Site C is relatively small and abuts Site D and both are contiguous with Hithercroft Road Industrial Estate,

- **Location and Topography (MBA 20)**

The representative photographic Views for Site C and Site D that help to illustrate baseline features are respectively Views 14, 15 and 16 for Site C and Views 17 and 18 for Site D, contained in MBA 25. These are taken within or adjacent to the sites.

The western boundaries of Sites C and D are defined by the A4130 Wallingford Bypass. The eastern boundary of Site C and the northern boundary of Site D are contiguous with Hithercroft Road Industrial Estate. Site C's northern boundary fronts onto Hithercroft Road and Site D's eastern boundary is defined by the Cholsey and Wallingford railway line (seasonal use). Bradford's Brook flows en route to the river Thames along the common boundary to Sites C and D.

Site C is relatively flat, and lies at somewhere between the 45m and 50m contour AOD. Site D is gently crowned, rising from 45m AOD at its northern boundary to a local high point of 50m AOD towards its southern corner.

- **Landscape Designation (MBA 21)**

No landscape designation applies to these sites.

- **Agricultural Land Quality (MBA 22)**

According to provisional information, Site C is theoretically Grade 2. The majority of Site D is also Grade 2, best and most versatile. Site D is currently in arable production.

- **Footpath Linkages (MBA 23)**

The distance measured in a straight line from the nearest site boundary to the 'Lamb' cross roads in Wallingford town centre is about 1.25km from Site C and about 1.0km from Site D.

There are no linking footpaths towards the town centre in the vicinity of these sites and pedestrian access would need to rely primarily on footways adjacent to roads.

- **Landscape Character (MBA 26A and 26B)**

The SODC Landscape Character Assessment considered that Site C lay within the confines of the built up area of Wallingford. Site D lies within a **‘flat open farmland’** landscape type, which has been identified as a **‘restore’** enhancement strategy.

Of all the Wallingford search areas, Site C is the nearest to what could be described as ‘urban fringe’. That is, it is an unused semi derelict area subjected to occasional fly tipping and motorcycle scrambling. The site landscape is subjugated by the effect of the adjacent land use, namely the industrial estate (View 16). In contrast, Site D is in obvious agricultural use. However, the adjacent Hithercroft Estate presents a ‘detracting’ boundary edge which has a negative effect on the landscape character of Site D.

The western boundaries of Sites C and D both abut the planted interface with the A4130 Wallingford Bypass. This is augmented on the inside of Site C with a thicket of naturalised scrub. The southern boundary of Site C is defined by the riparian water side vegetation of Bradford’s Brook, as is the northern boundary of Site D. Site D also benefits from recent planting alongside the eastern boundary with the Cholsey and Wallingford railway line. The distant AONB is a backdrop to views towards the east.

- **Visibility Site C**

- Views into site from traffic using Hithercroft Road.
- No public access.

- **Visibility Site D**

- No public access.
- No public views into site.
- Limited residential views from housing on Barley Close to north east of site.

- **Summary Comment**
- **Recommendations:** Site C would lend itself to light industrial development. The amenity and ecology of Bradford's Brook should be preserved and enhanced. The site would benefit from a continuation of the western hedgerow along the northern boundary.
- Site D could be considered for development due to the negative urbanising influence of the adjacent industrial estate on its landscape and its visual remoteness. Peripheral planting to augment the existing boundaries would be desirable.
- The fact that the site is almost entirely provisional Grade 2 agricultural land needs to be factored into any decision.

3.4 **WALLINGFORD SITE E**

- **Location and Topography (MBA 20)**

The photographs that help to illustrate baseline features for this site are Views 19, 20, 21, and 22 and are contained in MBA 25. These are taken from within or adjacent to the site or on the through site footpath.

The northern and eastern site boundaries abut the mature, well treed gardens of existing housing development on the southern edge of Wallingford and the western edge of Winterbrook. The development associated with Barley Close and Brookmead Drive (northern site boundary) appears to be more traditional serried lines of dwellings compared with the organic, indented eastern boundary with the 'supportive' townscape of Winterbrook, which is more assimilated by its Arcadian gardens and enclosed paddocks.

The south western boundary coincides with the A4130 Wallingford Bypass, whilst the north western boundary is defined by the Cholsey and Wallingford railway line.

Although there is an absence of contours, other than the 45m contour associated with Bradford's Brook along the northern boundary, there is a subtle but perceptible fall towards the south and east.

- **Landscape Designation** (MBA 21)

No landscape designation applies to the site.

- **Agricultural Land Quality** (MBA 22)

According to provisional information, the central and western parts of the site accord with Grade 2, best and most versatile, although the northern end and extreme south eastern corner are Grade 4 or below. The southern end of the site, south of the footpath is currently in arable production. The remainder of the site is largely pasture.

- **Footpath Linkages** (MBA 23)

From the nearest site boundary to the ‘Lamb’ cross roads in Wallingford town centre, Site E is about 0.775km distant measured in a straight line. There are no direct footpaths towards the town centre. The through site footpath terminates at the end of Winterbrook Lane, at which point pedestrians would have to utilise footways adjacent to roads.

- **Landscape Character** (MBA 26A and 26B)

SODC Landscape Character Assessment: The site lies within a **‘flat open farmland’** landscape type and has been identified as a **‘restore’** enhancement strategy.

Site E has the best matrix of internal hedgerows and vegetation of all the Wallingford sites. Hedges and fencelines define small pastures and paddocks, albeit, of those hedgerows that do exist, many are ‘vestigial’ (i.e. gappy). Relatively new linear plantations have been planted adjacent to the railway, the bypass and adjacent to the through site footpath. The landscape has a small scale, enclosed and rural landscape character which draws from the wooded garden edge of Winterbrook (Views 21 & 20 rhs)

In addition, all the peripheral site boundaries have a range of hedgerows and garden trees. Riparian brook side vegetation defines the northern boundary. The well established Arcadian gardens bolster the ‘supportive’ townscape of Winterbrook.

- **Visibility**
 - Views into the site from the crossing footpath (Views 21 and 22).
 - Both open and filtered views are available from residential properties bounding the site.
 - Glimpsed views from the Wallingford Bypass.
- **Summary Comment**
- **Recommendations:** Of all the sites, this site has the most intact internal field pattern. Additionally, given the presence of 'soft', well treed edges to Wallingford and the interface with the supportive and mature townscape of Winterbrook, we advise against the development on this site.

3.5 **WALLINGFORD (CROWMARSH GIFFORD) SITE F**

- **Location and Topography** (MBA 20)

The photographs that help illustrate baseline features for this site are Views 23, 24, 25 and 26. These are taken within or adjacent to the site.

The site occupies the south eastern part of a field within a triangle of enclosed land between Benson Lane, The Street and the A4074. Its location is confined to the southern end of the field behind properties fronting Benson Lane (western site boundary) and The Street (southern site boundary). The northern site boundary has no physical definition. The eastern extremity of the site abuts the roundabout junction of The Street with the A4074.

There is a subtle fall from east to west, with the 50m AOD contour aligning through the central area of the site.

- **Landscape Designation** (MBA 21)

Part of the site's eastern extremity, where it abuts the A4074, extends to about 150m inside the AONB boundary. From this boundary the AONB extends to the east and the south.

- **Agricultural Land Quality (MBA 22)**

According to provisional information, the whole site is Grade 2, best and most versatile. The site is currently under arable production.

- **Footpath Linkages (MBA 23)**

Although the site is within Crowmarsh Gifford, a straight line measurement to the 'Lamb' cross roads in Wallingford is given from the nearest site boundary – a distance of about 0.95km. This is because of the relative dearth of high street shops in the village, other than the former post office. Thereby it is anticipated that Wallingford is the nearest centre and convenient shopping location for pedestrians.

The site has two footpaths, each link variously to the footpath network of Crowmarsh Gifford. The main pedestrian link into Wallingford is likely to be along footways adjacent to The Street from the vicinity of Benson Lane.

- **Landscape Character (MBA 26A and 26B)**

SODC Landscape Character Assessment: The site lies within a '**parkland and estate farmland**' landscape type and has been identified as a '**conserve**' enhancement strategy.

The site lies within a well defined field system severed by the A4074 from the adjacent AONB. There is no vegetation within the site. The field containing the site is enclosed by bushy peripheral hedgerows along Benson Lane (west) and the A4074 (east). The well treed, double hedgerow, field boundary along the footpath to the north of the site is a strong landscape feature.

Although the site is physically separated from the Chilterns AONB by the A4074, it is linked by virtue of topography and is viewed in the context of higher land to the east. The site 'borrows' landscape character from the nearby AONB.

- **Visibility**

Intervisibility from the site suggests that it is overlooked from within the rising ground of the AONB to the east. Much of this area of AONB is devoid of public vantage points from which to view the site. Those that do allow a view are about

2.0km distance, for example from a length of the long distance 'Icknield Way' and also close to Clack's Lane, both in the general locality of Clack's Farm. From these locations the site is perceptible but not prominent.

- Available but distant views (about 2km) into the site from Icknield Way and close to Clack's Farm in the AONB.
- Limited filtered views from A4074.
- Available residential views from The Street and Benson Lane.
- Open views from N-S crossing footpath and southern boundary path.
- Filtered views, particularly in winter, from hedged footpath along northern field boundary.

- **Summary Comment**

- **Recommendations:** The settlement edge already has a relatively green and in part 'supportive townscape'. It does not include an 'undistinguished' or 'detracting' townscape edge which would be improved by the introduction of a new development. The site and indeed the wider triangle of land in which it is located 'borrows' landscape character from the rising ground of the AONB to the east. It is visually and physically linked to the AONB by virtue of the rising topography. We consider that the strong structure of this landscape benefits the quality of the space. It does not provide a reason for development because of its visual discreteness. We advise against development of this site.
- The fact that the site is entirely Grade 2 agricultural land needs to be factored into any decision.

4.0 SUMMARY

- 4.0.1 This study has been prompted by the South East Plan which sets out the long term spatial planning framework for the region for the period 2006-2026. The Plan determines, amongst other things, the minimum amounts of housing that South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) needs to provide in its LDF up to 2026. It is recognised that the provision of these dwellings will require their construction on greenfield sites.
- 4.0.2 The focus of this study has been to examine which of the Search Areas, in landscape and visual terms, would absorb the development with least impact on the inherent qualities of the landscapes involved. 'Landscape' considerations have included a range of subject matter such as landscape character, visual sensitivity, settlement edges, landscape setting and sense of arrival. With such a diverse range of topics there are competing considerations, even within the generic discipline of landscape assessment. That is before other issues are factored in, such as the prognosis for flooding or the need to introduce transport infrastructure.
- 4.0.3 Section 2.0 of this report examines planning and baseline considerations. These include designated landscapes (AONB) where applicable, greenfield development and the priority and weight given to the protection of 'best and most versatile' soils, now that their importance is reduced by the new wording in PPS 7.
- 4.0.4 Section 3.0 examines a range of baseline studies and provides a commentary on which parts of the Search Areas might accommodate housing development. Site photographs in MBA 25 indicate graphically the extent of development contemplated. The Landscape Analysis in MBA 27 and Landscape Recommendations for Housing Allocations in MBA 28 show indicatively the locations which could accommodate development best with some suggestions for green infrastructure.
- 4.0.5 This report balances all these considerations and recommends that only Sites B, C and D should be developed.