

5 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 This Chapter sets out an assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects which would result from the Proposed Development. It considers the baseline landscape character and quality of the Application Site and surrounding area, and also the degree and extent of the anticipated visibility of the Proposed Development.

5.1.2 In landscape and visual assessments, a distinction is normally drawn between landscape effects (i.e. effects on the character or quality of the landscape, irrespective of whether there are any views of the landscape, or viewers to see them) and visual effects (i.e. effects on people's views of the landscape, from visual receptors such as residential properties, Public Rights of Way and other areas with public access). Thus, a development may have extensive landscape effects but few visual effects (if, for example, there are no properties with views of it, or public viewpoints), or few landscape effects but significant visual effects (if, for example, the landscape is already degraded or the development is not out of character with it, but can clearly be seen from many residential properties). Consideration is given to any changes to the landscape fabric of the site itself, and also to changes to the character of the site and surrounding area.

5.1.3 The approach to the assessment and a summary of the methodology used are set out in Section 5.2, and the baseline situation is described in Section 5.3. This describes the landscape around the Application Site as it presently stands (including the ongoing development of the Morris Homes site to the south west, also known as St George's Fields) and also notes the likely future presence within the local landscape of the HCA development, though this is assessed as a potential cumulative effect together with the Proposed Development, rather than being taken as part of the baseline.

5.1.4 The landscape and visual effects likely to result from the Proposed Development are then set out in Section 5.4 - these effects take into account the mitigation measures which form part of the Proposed Development, and those measures are set out in Section 5.5. Cumulative Effects are then considered in Section 5.6, and a summary is provided in Section 5.7.

5.2 ASSESSMENT APPROACH

Methodology

5.2.1 The methodology used for the assessment is based on that set out in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', produced jointly by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and the Landscape Institute ('the GLVIA', 1995, revised 2002 and again in 2013)¹. The document 'Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002' (The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage)² is also relevant, and stresses the need for a holistic assessment of landscape character, including physical, biological and social factors. The detailed methodology which has been followed for the assessment is summarised below.

5.2.2 'Landscape' is defined in the European Landscape Convention as:

¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013): Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Routledge.

² Carys Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002): Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland, Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

“Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”

5.2.3 The GLVIA guidance is on the principles and process of assessment, and stresses that the detailed approach adopted should be appropriate to the task in hand. It notes that professional judgement is at the core of LVIA, and that while some change can be quantified (for example the number of trees which may be lost), much of the assessment must rely on qualitative judgements, and the Landscape Institute’s Technical Committee has advised that the 2013 revision of the GLVIA places greater emphasis on professional judgement and less emphasis on a formulaic approach. The judgements made as part of the assessment were based on the tables set out below.

5.2.4 Assessment of the baseline landscape was undertaken by means of a desk study of published information, including Ordnance Survey mapping and landscape character assessments at national, county and local scales, and by a detailed site visit and photographic record.

5.2.5 Landscape and visual effects were assessed in terms of the magnitude of the change brought about by the development (also referred to in the GLVIA as the ‘nature of the effect’) and also the sensitivity of the resource affected (also referred to in the GLVIA as the ‘nature of the receptor’). Landscape and visual effects have been considered in terms of whether they are direct or indirect, short term/temporary or long term/permanent, cumulative, and positive or negative.

5.2.6 The magnitude of change will generally decrease with distance from its source, until a point is reached where there is no discernible change. It will also vary with factors such as the scale and nature of the proposed development, the proportion of the view that would be occupied by the development, whether the view is clear and open, or partial and/or filtered, the duration and nature of the change (e.g. temporary or permanent, intermittent or continuous etc), whether the view would focus on the proposed development or whether the development would be incidental in the view, and the nature of the existing view (e.g. whether it contains existing detracting or intrusive elements).

5.2.7 In terms of sensitivity, residential properties were taken to be of high sensitivity in general, although this can vary with the degree of openness of their view (see Table 5.6 below). Landscapes which carry a landscape quality designation and which are otherwise attractive or unspoilt will in general be more sensitive, while those which are less attractive or already affected by significant visual detractors and disturbance will be generally less sensitive (see Table 5.4 below).

5.2.8 For both landscape and visual effects, the assessment is of the development complete with the proposed mitigation measures, where those measures are an integral part of the Proposed Development, and there has therefore been no assessment of a hypothetical, unmitigated development. However, as many of the mitigation measures involve planting, they will take time to become fully effective, and the assessment therefore considers two scenarios; a winter day in the first year after completion, and a summer day 15 years later, when the new planting will have become established. For the purposes of the assessment, a conservative estimate of likely future growth rates has been made, with the assumption that typical native species planting will have grown to a height of between 5 and 10m after 15 years (the precise height achieved in practice is likely to vary with the size and species of planting stock, ground conditions, weather and maintenance inputs, but these heights have been observed to be achievable in most conditions).

Landscape Effects

5.2.9 Landscape change was categorised as shown in Table 5.1 below, where each level (other than no change) can be either positive or negative:

Table 5.1: Magnitude of Landscape Change

Category	Definition
No change	No loss or alteration of key landscape characteristics, features or elements.
Negligible	Very minor loss or alteration (or improvement, restoration or addition) to one or more key landscape characteristics, features or elements.
Low	Minor loss of or alteration (or improvement, restoration or addition) to one or more key landscape characteristics, features or elements.
Medium	Partial loss of or damage (or improvement, restoration or addition) to key characteristics, features or elements.
High	Total or widespread loss of, or severe damage (or major improvement, restoration or addition) to key characteristics, features or elements.

5.2.10 Landscape quality was judged on site by an experienced assessor, with reference to the criteria shown in Table 5.2 below. Landscape condition (i.e. the physical state of the landscape, including its intactness and the condition of individual landscape elements) can have a bearing on landscape quality, as indicated.

Table 5.2: Criteria for Determining Landscape Quality

Category	Typical Criteria ¹
Very high quality	National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty standard - the area will usually (though not necessarily, especially for small areas) be so designated. It is also possible that some parts of designated areas may be of locally lower quality, if affected by detractors. Will generally be a landscape in good condition, with intact and distinctive elements.
High quality	Attractive landscape, usually with a strong sense of place, varied topography and distinctive landscape or historic features, and few visual detractors. Will generally be a landscape in good condition, with intact and distinctive elements.
Medium quality	Pleasant landscape with few detractors but with no particularly distinctive qualities. Will generally be a landscape in medium condition, with some intact elements.
Low quality	Unattractive or degraded landscape, affected by visual detractors. Will generally be a landscape in poor condition, with few intact elements.

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of landscapes which may be judged to be of the given quality - they are not intended to be applied in full or literally in all cases.

5.2.11 The concept of landscape value was also considered. The GLVIA considers landscape value as a measure to be assessed in association with landscape character, in order to avoid consideration only of how scenically attractive an area may be, and thus to avoid undervaluing areas of strong character but little scenic beauty. It is defined in the glossary of the GLVIA as:

“The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons.”

5.2.12 Landscape value was judged on site by an experienced assessor, with reference to the criteria shown in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3: Criteria for Determining Landscape Value

Category	Typical Criteria ¹
Very high value	Often very high quality landscapes, usually in good condition, with intact and distinctive elements. Will often (though not necessarily, especially for small areas) be a designated landscape with strong scenic qualities. May have significant recreational value at national or regional scale and include recognised and/or popular viewpoints. May also be a rare landscape type, or one with strong wildlife, cultural or other interests or connections.
High value	Often high quality landscapes, usually in good condition, with some intact and distinctive elements. Will sometimes be a designated landscape with strong scenic qualities. May have significant recreational value at a local scale and include some recognised and/or popular viewpoints. May be a rare landscape type, or one with some wildlife, cultural or other interests or connections.
Medium value	Often pleasant, medium quality landscapes, usually in reasonable condition, with some intact or distinctive elements. Unlikely to be a designated landscape, but may have some localised scenic qualities. May have some recreational value at a local scale or include some local viewpoints. May have some wildlife, cultural or other interests or connections.
Low value	Likely to be a lower quality landscape, usually in poor condition, with few intact or distinctive elements. Likely to have limited recreational value at a local scale with no significant viewpoints. Few if any wildlife, cultural or other interests or connections.

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of landscapes which may be judged to be of the given value - they are not intended to be applied in full or literally in all cases.

5.2.13 Landscape sensitivity relates to the ability of the landscape to accommodate change of the type and scale proposed without adverse effects on its character (i.e. its susceptibility to change), and also to the value of the landscape concerned. As noted in the GLVIA (section 5.39), sensitivity is specific to the particular project or development that is being proposed and to the location in question. A landscape of high sensitivity will tend to be one with a low ability to accommodate change and a high value, and vice versa. Landscape sensitivity was judged according to the criteria set out in Table 5.4 below, taking into account factors such as the presence or absence of designations for quality and the nature of the proposed change.

Table 5.4: Criteria for Determining Landscape Sensitivity

Category	Typical Criteria ¹
High	A landscape with a low ability to accommodate change because such change would lead to some loss of valuable features or elements, resulting in a significant loss of character and quality. Development of the type proposed would be discordant and prominent. Will normally occur in a landscape of high quality or value, but can also occur where the landscape is of lower quality but where the type of development proposed would be significantly out of character.
Medium	A landscape with reasonable ability to accommodate change. Change would lead to a limited loss of some features or elements, resulting in some loss of character and quality. Development of the type proposed would be visible but would not be especially discordant. Will normally occur in a landscape of medium quality or value, a low quality/value landscape which is particularly sensitive to the type of change proposed, or a high quality/value landscape which is well suited to accommodate change of the type proposed.

<p>Low</p>	<p>A landscape with a reasonably high ability to accommodate change. Change would not lead to a significant loss of features or elements, and there would be no significant loss of character or quality.</p> <p>Development of the type proposed would not be readily be visible or would not be discordant.</p> <p>Will normally occur in a landscape of low quality or value.</p>
<p>Negligible</p>	<p>A landscape with a high ability to accommodate change. Change would not lead to any significant loss of features or elements, and there would be no loss of character or quality.</p> <p>Development of the type proposed would not be readily be visible or would not be discordant, and there would be some beneficial aspects to the development.</p> <p>Will occur in a landscape of low quality or value, or one with significant exiting intrusive elements.</p>

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of landscapes which may be judged to be of the given sensitivity - they are not intended to be applied in full or literally in all cases.

Visual Effects

5.2.14 For visual effects, the GLVIA (in section 2.20) differentiates between effects on specific views and effects on 'the general visual amenity enjoyed by people', which it defines as:

"The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area."

5.2.15 There is obviously some overlap between the two, with visual amenity largely being an amalgamation of a series of views. This assessment therefore considers effects on specific views, but then also goes on to consider the extent to which effects on those views may affect general visual amenity, taking into account considerations such as the number of views within which the development may be present, the magnitude of change to those views, the discordance of the development, the relative importance of those views, and also the number and importance of other views in which the development is not present.

5.2.16 In describing the nature and content of a view, the following terms may be used:

- No view - no views of the site or development;
- Glimpse - a limited view in which the site or development forms a small part only of the overall view;
- Partial - a clear view of part of the site or development only;
- Oblique - a view (usually through a window from within a property) at an angle, rather than in the direct line of sight out of the window;
- Fleeting - a transient view, usually obtained when moving, along a public right of way or transport corridor;
- Filtered - views of the site or development which are partially screened, usually by intervening vegetation, noting the degree of screening/filtering may change with the seasons; or
- Open - a clear, unobstructed view of the site or development.

5.2.17 For the purpose of the assessment visual change was categorised as shown in Table 5.5 below, where each level (other than no change) can be either beneficial or adverse:

Table 5.5: Magnitude of Visual Change

Category	Definition
Negligible	The development would be discernible but of no real significance - the character of the view would not materially change. The development may be present in the view, but not discordant.
Low	The development would cause a perceptible deterioration (or improvement) in existing views. The development would be discordant (or would add a positive element to the view), but not to a significant extent.
Medium	The development would cause an obvious deterioration (or improvement) in existing views. The development would be an obvious discordant (or positive) feature of the view, and/or would occupy a significant proportion of the view.
High	The development would cause a dominant deterioration (or improvement) in existing views. The development would be a dominant discordant (or positive) feature of the view, and/or would occupy the majority of the view.

5.2.18 Sensitivity was also taken into account in the assessment, such that a given magnitude of change would create a larger visual effect on a sensitive receptor than on one of lesser sensitivity (see Table 5.6 below).

Table 5.6: Criteria for Determining Visual Sensitivity

Category	Typical Criteria ¹
High	Residential properties ² with predominantly open views from windows, garden or curtilage. Views will normally be from ground and first floors and from two or more windows of rooms in use during the day ³ . Users of Public Rights of Way with predominantly open views in sensitive or unspoilt areas. Non-motorised users of minor or unclassified roads in the countryside. Visitors to heritage assets where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience, or visitors to recognised viewpoints or beauty spots. Users of outdoor recreational facilities with predominantly open views where the purpose of that recreation is enjoyment of the countryside - e.g. Country Parks, National Trust or other access land etc.
Medium	Residential properties ² with views from windows, garden or curtilage. Views will normally be from first floor windows only ³ , or an oblique view from one ground floor window, or may be partially obscured by garden or other intervening vegetation. Users of Public Rights of Way with restricted views, in less sensitive areas or where there are significant existing intrusive features. Users of outdoor recreational facilities with restricted views or where the purpose of that recreation is incidental to the view. Schools and other institutional buildings, and their outdoor areas. Motorised users of minor or unclassified roads in the countryside.
Low	People in their place of work. Users of main roads or passengers in public transport on main routes. Users of outdoor recreational facilities with restricted views and where the purpose of that recreation is incidental to the view.

Negligible	People working indoors with no significant views out.
-------------------	-------------------------------------------------------

1. Note that the above criteria are indicators of the types of situation in which visual sensitivity of the given level may be expected - they are not intended to be applied in full or literally in all cases.
2. There is some discussion in the GLVIA as to whether private views from residential properties should be included within an LVIA, as they are a private (rather than a public) interest, but they have been included in this assessment on the basis that they are likely to matter most to local people. The appropriate weight to be applied to such views can then be determined by the decision maker.
3. When (as is usually the case) there has been no access into properties to be assessed, the assumption is made that ground floor windows are to habitable rooms in use during the day such as kitchens/dining rooms/living rooms, and that first floor rooms are bedrooms.

5.2.19 Photographs were taken with a digital camera with a lens that approximates to 50mm. This is similar to a normal human field of view, though this field of view is extended where a number of separate images are joined together as a panorama. Visibility during the site visit was good (by definitions set out on the Met Office website, i.e. visibility was 10 to 20km).

5.2.20 A useful concept in considering the potential visual effects of a development is that of the visual envelope (or zone of visual influence, ZVI). This is the area from within which the development would be visible. Any significant visual effects will therefore be contained within this area, and land falling outside it need not be considered in terms of visual effects. The area from within which the various elements of the proposed development would be visible has, therefore, been estimated (see Figure 5.5) but it is possible that in practice some limited views of those elements may be obtained from more distant properties or from elevated, distant vantage points, above or through intervening vegetation, and such views are referred to where appropriate in the assessment. An initial stage in the assessment of potential visibility is the use of a computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), which can be used as a filter to eliminate areas with no views to a proposed development as a result of intervening higher ground or woodland (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4). This technique was used, as set out in the EIA Scoping Report, but it tends to exaggerate visibility, as the model only includes larger buildings (with an assumed height of 9m) and blocks of woodland (with an assumed height of 12m). In practice some of the buildings to the north of the Application Site are taller than 9m, and some of the woodlands are taller than 12m, and in addition the many hedgerows and hedgerow trees in the landscape to the east and south can combine to form an effective screen in more distant views. The maximum theoretical visibility shown by the ZTV programme has therefore been checked and tested by on site observation, and the visual envelope shown on Figure 5.5 is a more accurate (though of necessity still estimated) indication of the areas which would have views of the new buildings.

Assessment of Significance

5.2.21 The significance of the landscape or visual effects is then determined according to the interaction between the magnitude of change and the sensitivity of the receptor concerned, as set out in Table 5.7 below, and where effects can be either beneficial or adverse. The shaded boxes indicate the levels of effects which are considered to be significant.

Table 5.7: Significance Matrix

Magnitude of Change	Sensitivity of Receptor				
		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High		Major	Major	Moderate	Negligible
Medium		Major	Moderate	Minor to Moderate	Negligible

	Low	Moderate	Minor to Moderate	Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

Legislative and Policy Framework

National Planning Policy

5.2.22 There are no statutory designations for landscape quality affecting the area of or around the Application Site.

5.2.23 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)³ contains (in Paragraph 17) 12 core planning principles, which include:

- **“... recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it.”**
- **“contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment ...”**

5.2.24 Paragraph 109 of the NPPF states that:

“The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- **Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;”**

5.2.25 The NPPF does not define the term 'valued landscapes', but it is clear that the paragraph is not referring to only nationally designated landscapes (i.e. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks), as they are covered by Paragraph 115, and because the supporting guidance (see below) refers to the wider countryside as well as designated landscapes. Some clarification on this matter was provided in a 2015 High Court case (Stroud District Council v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, February 2015) in which the view was taken that to be a valued landscape a given area would need some 'demonstrable physical attributes' rather than just being locally popular. The area around the Application Site has some reasonably attractive characteristics, but large parts of it are also allocated for residential development, and parts of the Application Site have been disturbed by past landfill operations. The landscape of and around the Application Site should therefore not be regarded as being a valued landscape in these terms.

5.2.26 Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in nationally designated landscapes - the site does not fall within any such designated area. Paragraph 113 notes that:

'Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status'.

5.2.27 In this context it should be noted that the site is not designated at the local level either, and therefore is at the bottom of the hierarchy of protection.

³ Department for Communities and Local Government (2012): National Planning Policy Framework.

Local Planning PolicyAdopted Northampton Local Plan (1997)

5.2.28 Some of the saved policies of the Adopted Northampton Local Plan apply to the northern part of the Application Site, to the north of The Green. These policies are:

- Policy E1 - Landscape and the Open Space states that planning permission will not be granted for development where its siting, design or layout are detrimental to the character and structure of the landscape.
- Policy E6 - Greenspace - the Local Plan Proposals Map identifies the Application Site as 'Greenspace', and the policy states that planning permission will only be granted where development will not unacceptably prejudice the function of the area. The northern part of the Application Site is within the Brackmills Fringe area of Greenspace, which is intended to create space between development and surrounding areas, and to screen and reduce the impact of existing business development in the Brackmills Industrial Estate.
- Policy E7 - Area of Skyline Conservation states that when considering the impact of proposed development upon the landscape, special importance will be attached to its effect upon the skyline of areas including that between Great Houghton and Hardingstone, when seen in views from the north. The explanatory text notes that the skyline forms a strong feature helping to contain the Brackmills Industrial Estate, and the Proposals Map shows the policy as applying to land along the north side of The Green, to the south of the employment area. However, it should be noted that this policy was adopted in 1997, and since then there has been considerable growth and expansion of the woodland within the Brackmills Country Park, which itself now serves to visually contain the employment area, with the land of and around the northern part of the Application Site no longer visible from the north.
- Saved Policy E10 Hedgerows, Trees and Woodland states that in association with the third phase of development at Brackmills, the planting of new indigenous woodland will be required between Great Houghton and Hardingstone. This woodland has already been planted and is now part of Brackmills Country Park, and is maturing as noted above.

Adopted South Northamptonshire Local Plan (1997)

5.2.29 Some of the saved policies of the Adopted South Northamptonshire Local Plan apply to the southern part of the Application Site, to the south of The Green. These policies are:

- Policy EV1 - Design, which states that proposals for new development will be expected to pay particular attention to a range of factors including existing site characteristics such as landscape features, the relationship with adjoining land and the appearance and treatment of the spaces between and around buildings.
- Policy EV2 - the Countryside, which states that permission will not be granted for development in the open countryside, subject to a number of exceptions.
- Policy EV8 - Important Local Gaps aims to prevent the coalescence of Northampton with the surrounding villages to the south east, and is shown on the Proposals Map as applying to the southern part of the Application Site and also land to its east and south west (excluding the allocated Wootton Fields site, see below).
- Policy EV21 - Hedgerows, Ponds and other Landscape Features states that development proposals will be expected to retain wherever possible, or failing

that to replace, trees, hedgerows, ponds or other landscape features where they make an important contribution to the character of the area.

- Policy EV29 - Landscape Proposals states that where a landscaping scheme is required as part of a development proposal, planning permission will only be granted where the scheme indicates existing vegetation and landscape features to be retained or removed, and areas of new planting, identifies the species, size, location and planting density of the proposed trees and shrubs, uses indigenous plant species where appropriate. identifies any significant earthworks, changes in ground levels, and boundary treatments, identifies significant elements of hard landscaping features including furniture such as seating and play equipment together with surface treatments, and also identifies the routeing of proposed services, in relation to existing vegetation and retained or proposed landscape features.
- Proposal WFH1 allocates land adjacent to Wootton Fields for residential development. Development of this area is now well under way, in the form of the St George's Fields housing development.

Adopted West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) (2014)

5.2.30 Northampton Borough Council, South Northamptonshire Council, Daventry District Council and Northamptonshire County Council have established the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (JPU) to prepare joint development plan documents. The West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan contains the following relevant policies:

- Policy S5 - Sustainable Urban Extensions sets out the aim of focussing development on a series of sustainable urban extensions (SUEs) to the main settlements.
- Policy BN1 - Green Infrastructure Connections states that green infrastructure corridors of sub-regional and local importance will be conserved, managed and enhanced by measures including the incorporation of existing and identified future networks into new development proposals and that new green infrastructure provision will be designed and delivered sustainably, mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, be designed to the highest quality in terms of appearance, access provision and wildlife provision, reflect local character through the planting of native species and consideration of natural and cultural heritage features and be supported by a long-term management strategy. Figure 6 of Section 20 of the Joint Core Strategy shows a Sub Regional Corridor of green infrastructure extending from the centre of Northampton in the direction of Salcey Forest to the south east of the Application Site, and running roughly through the site.
- Policy BN3 - Woodland Enhancement and Creation, which seeks to create new areas of woodland and enhance and manage existing woodlands.
- Policy N6, Northampton South of Brackmills SUE sets out proposals for this SUE, and the Application Site forms the eastern part of the allocated area. The policy states that the area as a whole will provide for in the region of 1,300 dwellings, a primary school, a local centre, and integrated transport network, structural greenspace and wildlife corridors and the creation of a landscaped buffer to the south west of the site. Inset 11 of Section 20 of the Joint Core Strategy shows a band of 'Indicative Structural Greenspace' running along the northern edge of the SUE site, including the northern part of the Application Site, and a similar (but narrower) band along the eastern end of the SUE site, which is also the eastern side of the Application Site.

Scoping Criteria

5.2.31 The assessment set out in this Chapter is in accordance with the proposed scope as set out in the January 2017 Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report.

5.2.32 The assessment has also taken into account the Scoping Responses made by NBC and SNC in February 2017, which were that proposed viewpoints for the assessment should be agreed in advance with both Councils. Both NBC and SNC were therefore asked for their comments on the viewpoints for the assessment. SNC confirmed in an email dated 21 March 2017 that the main views to be considered were those from the south and east, and should include viewpoints in or around Quinton and Preston Deanery. SNC had not responded at the time of writing, but it is considered that the range of viewpoints used for the assessment is comprehensive.

5.2.33 Accordingly, the Landscape and Visual Assessment considers the following receptors and potential effects:

- Construction Phase - effects on the character of the local landscape, including Landscape Character Areas 6b Hackleton Undulating Claylands and 12a Wollaston to Irchester Limestone Valley Slopes;
- Construction Phase - visual effects on residential properties to the west and south west (including new properties in the St George's Fields development), east, south east and south, users of Public rights of Way to the west and south and users of local roads, and the;
- Operational Phase - all effects as noted above.

Limitations to the Assessment

5.2.34 No significant difficulties were encountered in the assessment. The process of landscape and visual assessment involves a certain amount of visualisation as to what the proposed scheme would look like in the landscape and how it would affect views, but that is inherent in all such assessments and the GLVIA methodology notes that a degree of judgement, based on observation and experience, is required.

5.2.35 This Landscape and Visual Assessment has been undertaken using parameter plans that consider land use, building heights and access arrangement. It has therefore not been possible to make detailed assessments of visual effects on individual visual receptors, as these would vary with the design and location of the new dwellings. Instead a more general assessment of likely levels of effects on groups of visual receptors (e.g. 'properties to the west of the site in Wootton') has been made.

5.2.36 The site visits for the assessment were undertaken in March 2017, and an on-site assessment was not carried out during the summer, when deciduous vegetation is in leaf and when views tend to be less open, but consideration has been given to how views may differ in the summer, based on observation of the vegetation within and around the site, and on experience of how views and visibility can vary with the seasons. The March visit was undertaken before deciduous vegetation was in leaf, and therefore represents a worst-case situation in terms of visibility and likely landscape and visual effects.

5.2.37 There is also some unavoidable uncertainty as to exactly where the boundary of the visual envelope would lie, as acknowledged in the note on Figure 5.5.

5.2.38 Finally, there is also some inevitable uncertainty over growth rates to be assumed for existing and proposed vegetation, for the Year 15 assessment. The methodology set out above notes the conservative assumptions which have been made in this respect, to avoid overestimating the effects of proposed planting.

5.3 BASELINE CONDITIONS**Site Description and Context***The Surrounding Area*

5.3.1 To the north of the Application Site lies the Brackmills Industrial Estate which is screened from the south by an area of broadleaved woodland which is part of the Brackmills Country Park. Further to the north is the broad valley floor of the River Nene and beyond that the urban area of Northampton.

5.3.2 To the east of the Application Site is gently undulating arable farmland, with a few scattered farms being the only settlement. To the south east is the small village of Preston Deanery, approximately 1.5km from the Application Site, and the larger village of Quinton is around 2.5km to the south.

5.3.3 To the south west is the urban area of Wootton, and beyond that Grange Park. Wootton has expanded to the east, with development around Lady Hollow Drive, and further development is currently under way with the St George's Fields development, opposite the site on the south side of the B526 Newport Pagnell Road.

5.3.4 To the immediate west of the northern part of the Application Site and to the north west of the southern part are several large agricultural fields which are allocated in the Joint Core Strategy Local Plan as the Northampton South of Brackmills SUE, as noted above. A proposal for that part of the wider SUE (the full SUE Policy area also includes the Application Site) was approved on appeal, and all of the open land to the west and north west of the Application Site has therefore been approved for development, and will in due course become part of the urban area.

Topography

5.3.5 The Application Site lies on the western side of a broad local ridge which follows a north-east to south-west alignment, running gently down from a high point near Saucebridge Farm, and broadly parallel to the Nene Valley. The crest of the ridge is roughly along the eastern site boundary, such that the land within the southern part of the Application Site falls generally from east to west, with levels at around 106 to 108m AOD (above Ordnance Datum, or mean sea level) along the eastern boundary, falling to around 107m AOD (in the east) and 88mAOD (in the west) along the northern boundary. Within those general levels there is some local variation, and a slightly domed landform, as a result of the past landfill.

5.3.6 The northern part of the Application Site falls generally from south east to north west, with a more pronounced slope in its northern part, where levels fall to below 90m AOD in its north western corner.

5.3.7 Around the site, the land rises gently to the north west from The Green, which runs in a shallow local valley as it passes the Application Site, and then falls to the north, with the Brackmills Industrial Estate at levels of around 65m AOD, and continues to fall into the Nene Valley further to the north. To the east of the Application Site the land is gently undulating, with a series of broad ridges and shallow valleys and levels between 85 and 110m AOD. The land to the south of the Application Site falls into a broad, shallow valley between Grange Park and Preston Deanery, with levels as low as 75m AOD, before rising slightly towards Quinton. To the west of the Application Site the land falls gently into the urban area at Wootton.

The Application Site

5.3.8 The Application Site consists of two parcels of land separated by the rural lane of The Green, each with a different character. The area to the north is an arable agricultural field extending to approximately 7.9ha, with an area of woodland at its northern end where it adjoins Brackmills Country Park.

5.3.9 The area to the south is a former landfill site with a gently domed landform and a cover of rough grassland and areas of recent woodland plantation around its perimeter, some of which are now beginning to mature and form local landscape features. That planting was undertaken as part of the restoration scheme for the landfill, which was at one time intended for use as a golf course, but restoration for that purpose was never completed. This part of the Application Site is bisected by a former field hedgerow which contains isolated hedgerow trees, and has a number of gaps within it.

Site Boundaries: the Northern Part of the Application Site

5.3.10 The northern boundary adjoins an area of mature woodland within the Brackmills Country Park (see Photographs 13 and 14), which is protected by an area Tree Preservation Order (TPO Ref:181, imposed by NBC - the woodland is described as consisting of a mix of mainly native species including oak, ash, horse chestnut, Scots pine, larch and spruce). The woodland continues around the northern part of the eastern boundary, and here it is younger, comprising mainly birch, ash and pine. The southern part of the eastern boundary is a mixed hedgerow up to around 4m in height, with a single mature oak at its southern end (see Photograph 15). The southern boundary is marked by an overgrown hawthorn-rich hedgerow up to around 4m in height, with goat willow and ash trees up to 8m - this hedgerow runs along the north side of The Green (see Photograph 16). The southern part of the eastern boundary is more open, with a gappy hedgerow of bramble, elder and hawthorn and occasional ash trees up to 7m in height (see Photograph 11). The northern part of this boundary adjoins an area of young woodland within the Brackmills Country Park, comprising mainly birch and pine - this woodland is not fully mature, but the trees within it are around 15m in height and it provides an effective screen (see Photograph 13).

Site Boundaries: the Southern Part of the Application Site

5.3.11 This part of the Application Site is roughly triangular in shape, measuring approximately 16.3ha. It is defined on two of its three sides by roads, with The Green to the north west and the B526 Newport Pagnell Road to the south. There is a tall and dense hawthorn-dominated hedgerow along most of the boundary with The Green, with one or two small gaps only, and this hedge is up to 3m in height, with a number of taller ash trees within or just inside it (see Photographs 8 to 10). There is a variable band of developing planting within the site along this boundary, comprising mainly ash, pine and willow (see Photographs 1 and 5).

5.3.12 The eastern boundary is marked by a wide hedgerow which contains a number of trees including oak up to 15m in height and smaller poplar, willow and field maple, with hawthorn and blackthorn. This hedgerow has begun to merge with planting within the site, which includes pine, willow, ash and hawthorn, to form a broad band of vegetation around 5 to 6m in height along most of this boundary (see Photographs 2, 4 and 6).

5.3.13 The southern boundary, alongside the B526, is also well vegetated, with a tall hedgerow including some mature oak and ash trees, especially towards its western end (see Photographs 23 to 26), with the hedgerow itself comprising mainly hawthorn and blackthorn. This boundary has also begun to merge with planting within the site, which here comprises mainly ash and pine up to 5m in height.

5.3.14 Within the site there are some areas of landfill restoration planting, again mainly comprising ash, pine and willow, but the majority of this planting is around the site

perimeter and has been described above. There is also a remnant hedgerow through the centre of the site, running from The Green to the eastern boundary, and this comprises mainly hawthorn and ash, with some willow and pine (see Photographs 1 and 3). There is a small, seasonally dry pond in the western corner of this part of the Application Site, surrounded by encroaching scrub.

Landscape Character

National Landscape Character

5.3.15 In terms of wider landscape character, the site within the 'Northamptonshire Vales' National Character Area (NCA 89) - NCAs are identified by Natural England, and are described on their website as;

"areas that share similar landscape characteristics, and which follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision-making framework for the natural environment."

5.3.16 The summary description of this character area includes the following:

"The Northamptonshire Vales National Character Area (NCA) consists of a series of low-lying clay vales and river valleys, including the valleys of the rivers Nene and Welland and their tributaries. The area is 10 per cent urban, and settlement is often visually dominant."

"Challenges for this area include retaining the sense of place in light of ongoing pressure for development growth, and protecting and enhancing key features such as the many heritage assets, meadows, woodlands and hedgerows in the light of new development, continuing gravel extraction and the pressure to produce more food."

Regional Landscape Character

5.3.17 The East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment⁴ was undertaken in 2010. This identifies the Application Site as lying within Landscape Type 5C - Undulating Mixed Farmlands, which is described as having the following characteristics:

- Varied landform of broad rolling ridges, steep sided valleys, rounded hills and undulating lowlands;
- Well treed character arising from abundant hedgerow trees and smaller woodlands set amongst a predominantly arable farming landscape;
- Settlements are sparse, connected by a network of quiet country lanes linking rural communities with a lack of modern development; and
- Remote, rural and sometimes empty character to the landscape.

County/ Borough Landscape Character

5.3.18 Northamptonshire County Council have produced a Landscape Character Assessment (the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment⁵, or NCLCA) as part of a strategic county-wide Environmental Character Assessment. That assessment identifies the northern part of the Application Site as being within the 'Limestone Valley Slopes' landscape character type, and within landscape character area 12a, the 'Wollaston to Irchester Limestone Valley Slopes'. It shows the southern part of

⁴ LDA Design (2010): East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England.

⁵ Northamptonshire County Council (2005): Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment, <http://www.nnrpenvironmentalcharacter.org.uk/>

the Application Site as within the 'Undulating Claylands' landscape character type and landscape character area 6b, the 'Hackleton Undulating Claylands' (see Figure 5.2).

5.3.19 The Limestone Valley Slopes are described as being a transitional landscape of gently undulating farmland bordering the Nene Valley. The landscape is described as being generally open with opportunities for expansive long distance views across the valley to neighbouring landscapes. Land cover is dominated by arable farming in large and medium-large fields which are enclosed by hedgerows which contain few trees. Woodland cover is said to be sparse. The area contains numerous villages which display a close relationship to landform through morphology and orientation, and also a number of larger settlements.

5.3.20 The Wollaston to Irchester Limestone Valley Slopes are bordered by the River Nene floodplain to the north and the Undulating Claylands to the south. The area comprises large-scale arable fields of cereals and horticulture, with limited pasture and improved grassland. Hedge boundaries are commonplace but varied in quality, with hedgerow trees generally infrequent. The assessment notes the significant areas of new woodland planting to the south of the Brackmills Industrial Estate.

5.3.21 The Undulating Claylands are described as a broad, elevated, undulating landscape which is drained by convex sloped valleys. Views are described as generally wide and open although the undulating landform creates opportunities for more intimate areas. Land-use is split between arable farming and pasture, with arable land occupying the more fertile lower slopes. Fields are contained by well kept, low hedgerows with few hedgerow trees. The assessment also notes that this area also contains several historic parklands and manor houses.

5.3.22 The Hackleton Claylands contain tributary streams draining into the River Nene, which have created the undulating landform of the area. Areas of pasture are limited and there are some isolated pockets of calcareous grassland, notably to the north-west of Quinton, to the south of the Application Site. Again woodland cover is limited, although the large woodlands of Salcey Forest and Yardley Chase have a significant influence on the area, limiting wider views south and south-east.

5.3.23 The County Council have also produced the 'Current Landscape Strategy and Guidelines' document, available via the same web site as the NCLCA. This sets out generic guidelines for the management of change within the identified landscape character types. The overall landscape strategy for the Undulating Claylands is stated to be:

"New development, change and land management practices should be controlled or encouraged to conserve the simplicity and the limited palette of characteristics that define this generally quiet and settled rural landscape. Intrusion of development onto the more elevated sections and interfluves within the Undulating Claylands should be resisted to retain the open and unobstructed views to the wider landscape. New landscape elements that are introduced should make reference to the locality for particular details of local vernacular building styles, materials, layout and arrangement of features to ensure they integrate into the landscape. Further areas of broadleaved woodland planting may be appropriate, particularly in the lower valley areas to emphasise the landform pattern and its undulating form that derives from the succession of valleys and interfluves."

5.3.24 The stated landscape guidelines for this type include to conserve and enhance existing panoramic views, hedgerows, woodlands and other key landscape character features.

5.3.25 The overall landscape strategy for the Limestone Valley Slopes is stated to be:

“New development, and land use and land management changes should be controlled and encouraged to conserve and enhance the diversity of this settled and productive rural landscape of the Limestone Valley Slopes. In view of the very limited woodland cover, existing woodlands should be retained wherever possible, and enriched to strengthen this resource and its biodiversity value. However, the changing patterns of openness and enclosure that form an integral part of the diversity of the landscape should remain. In view of the proximity of the many urban areas within and surrounding this landscape, it is likely to be vulnerable to development pressures and change. It is therefore particularly important that where development is considered, the subtle variations in the landform are responded to and incorporated in a creative and positive way. Reference should also be made to the locality to integrate with particular details of local vernacular building styles, materials, and layout.”

5.3.26 The stated landscape guidelines for this type include to conserve intrinsic character, existing long distance views, the pattern of hedgerows and fields and the open character of the valley slopes, and to create a vibrant and visually appealing urban/rural fringe or interface.

Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study (February 2009)

5.3.27 The Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study⁶ contains a baseline assessment of the NBC area, a sensitivity assessment and a green infrastructure assessment.

5.3.28 The study identifies the Application Site as lying within Study Area 3 (to the south of Northampton), and the visual analysis for that area describes it as a distinctive landform which has intervisibility with Northampton and as such contributes to the setting of the town. The southern part of the Application Site is identified as a rural landscape which has a stronger visual connection with the surrounding countryside than with Northampton.

5.3.29 The study also consider other factors such as cultural history, landform, agricultural land classification, biodiversity and landscape character and concluded that the overall sensitivity of the northern part of the Application Site was high and high to medium for the southern part.

Local Landscape Character

5.3.30 The above assessments are all of necessity somewhat general, and apply to the Application Site and the area immediately around it to varying degrees. While some aspects of the general assessments are reflected in the landscape of and immediately around the site (such as the presence of woodlands, the undulating landscape to the east and south and the valley side to the north) others are not - the landscape of and immediately around the Application Site does not have a remote, empty or particularly rural character, especially to the north and west.

⁶ Living Landscapes Consultancy Ltd (2009): Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study, River Nene Regional Park CIC.

5.3.31 Local landscape character is strongly influenced by the woodland to the north of the Application Site, which screens and encloses it in that direction (though there is still some awareness of the presence of the Brackmills Industrial Estate in the winter), by the urban areas to the south west and west (including the ongoing St George's Fields development) and by the nature of the southern part of the Application Site, which is not in agricultural use and has a somewhat disturbed character, especially in short distance views. The Application Site therefore has an edge of settlement character, rather than a fully rural or countryside one.

5.3.32 That character will be further affected by the presence of the large scale housing development of the SUE/ HCA site on a large area to the west of the site, which has now been permitted and is likely to commence on site in the near future.

Landscape Quality, Value and Sensitivity

Landscape Quality

5.3.33 The Application Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designation for landscape character or quality.

5.3.34 The northern part of the Application Site is typical of the rolling arable landscape described above, but is affected to some degree by the nearby Brackmills Industrial Estate, and has been assessed (using the criteria set out in Table 5.2) as being of medium landscape quality, as it is part of a generally pleasant landscape with few detractors but with no particularly distinctive qualities.

5.3.35 The southern part of the Application Site has a more disturbed character and a somewhat unnatural partially domed landform, resulting from its previous use as a landfill site. It has therefore been assessed as of low to medium landscape quality.

Landscape Value

5.3.36 As noted above, the concept of landscape value is also important, and is included in assessments in order to avoid consideration only of how scenically attractive an area may be, and thus to avoid undervaluing areas of strong character but little scenic beauty. Factors such as cultural association, recreational use and intangible qualities such as wildness are important in terms of determining landscape value. None of these are really applicable to the Application Site and immediately surrounding area, and the value of the local landscape has therefore been determined to be medium (to the north) or low to medium (to the south), in line with its quality.

Landscape Sensitivity

5.3.37 Landscape sensitivity relates to the ability of the landscape to accommodate change of the type and scale proposed without adverse effects on its character, and also to the value of the landscape concerned. Using the criteria set out in Table 5.4, the sensitivity of both parts of the Application Site has been assessed as medium - the northern part is of slightly higher quality, but is well screened and enclosed by woodland and the local topography, whereas the southern part is of lower quality but is more visible, particularly in views from the north west. The landscape of and around the Application Site has a reasonable ability to accommodate change as there are few features of value within the Application Site, and the Proposed Development would be visible but would not be especially discordant in the local, edge of settlement context.

Visibility

5.3.38 The Application Site in its current state is well screened from the north by the woodland of the Brackmills Country Park, from the east by the developing vegetation and the break in slope along the eastern site boundary, from the south by vegetation along the southern site boundary and the falling ground, and from the west by vegetation alongside The Green. As a result, the main views of each part of the Application Site are as follow:

Northern Part of the Application Site

5.3.39 The young plantation woodland (and also the mature woodland immediately to the north of the site) that surrounds the Brackmills Industrial Estate within the Brackmills Country Park means that there are no significant views of the northern part of the site from the north (see Photographs 13 and 14).

5.3.40 From the east, there are no significant views from the area around Hardingstone Lodge, as they are screened by the site boundary hedgerow, plantation woodland within the Brackmills Wood Country Park and also by the tall conifer hedge around the curtilage of Hardingstone Lodge (see Photographs 15 and 19).

5.3.41 From the south, there are views of the site from the field gate in its south western corner, and also filtered views through the hedge along the north side of The Green, mainly in the winter. There are also some views from within the higher, northern part of the Application Site to the south of The Green (see Photograph 6), but no significant views from any further to the south.

5.3.42 From the west there are views from the fields which extend away towards the urban edge, though the gappy hedge along the western site boundary provides some filtering to these views (see Photograph 18). It should also be noted that these fields will, in due course, be developed as part of the HCA site, and the presently open views will therefore be significantly reduced.

Southern Part of the Application Site

5.3.43 The tall hedgerow along the south side of The Green provides an effective screen to most short distance views of the southern part of the site from the north, though there are some partial views of it from the northern part of the Application Site (see Photographs 6 and 8 to 10).

5.3.44 From the east there are no significant views to the surface of the southern part of the Application Site, though the hedgerow and developing planting along the eastern site boundary can be seen from a large area to the east, extending up to and beyond the minor road to the east of the site which accommodates National Cycle Route 6. These views extend as far south as Newport Pagnell Road, near The Grange (see Photographs 19 to 22).

5.3.45 From the south there are again no significant views of the surface of the site, but the tall hedgerow and trees and also the developing planting along the southern edge of the site can be seen from an area just to the south of Newport Pagnell Road, including the northern section of public footpath KM1, which runs south eastwards away from the site towards Grange Cottages (see Photographs 23 to 28). From the footpath, looking northwards, the southern boundary hedgerow and the young trees within the southern half of the Application Site are visible above the roadside hedgerow. From further to the south, along the road from Preston Deanery to Quinton, there are intermittent and distant views towards the site, but again it is the boundary vegetation rather than the

site itself which is visible on the skyline (see Photographs 31 to 34). Also visible on or near the skyline in these views is the recent housing development at St George's Fields.

5.3.46 From the west there are some views from houses on the edge of Wootton (mainly from upper storey windows) including some properties within the new St George's Fields development, and also views from the open landscape towards Hardingstone, including views from public footpath KN6, to the east of Landimore Road (see Photograph 17). In these views the southern part of the Application Site is visible above the hedgerows alongside The Green, as it slopes down to the north west and is therefore significantly more visible from that direction than it is from the east.

5.4 ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

The Proposed Development

5.4.1 The Proposed Development is described in Chapter 4 of the ES, but this section summarises those aspects of it which are of particular relevance to the assessment of landscape and visual effects, and also describes the outline landscape proposals.

5.4.2 The Land Use Parameter Plan (Figure 4.2) shows that the new dwellings would be predominantly 2 storey with potential for up to 3 storeys in some limited areas, and also that in a strip along the eastern side of the site that would be reduced to predominantly 2 storey with a maximum of 2.5 storeys. A 2.5 storey dwelling would have a maximum height above ground level of 10.5m, and that needs to be considered against the height of the existing vegetation along the eastern site boundary, which varies between a minimum of 4m, is generally 5 to 6m, and with some trees of up to 15m in height.

5.4.3 The main access to the Proposed Development would be in the south western part of the site, opposite the existing access to the St George's Fields development, by means of a new roundabout. This would entail some loss of existing vegetation along the southern site boundary at this point. There would also be an access to the northern part of the site from The Green, close to its south western corner, and again there would be some loss of roadside vegetation on each side of The Green at that point. Other than in those two areas, the development proposals would seek to retain all existing perimeter vegetation.

5.4.4 A strong landscape buffer would be provided along the eastern site boundary, based upon the existing hedgerow and developing planting, and thickened and reinforced where appropriate. Similar levels of structural planting would be retained and/ or provided along the north side of the southern part of the Application Site, building upon the existing hedgerow and developing planting, and also alongside Newport Pagnell Road to the south.

5.4.5 Within the site, there would be green infrastructure based on surface water attenuation features in the western corner of the southern part of the Application Site and the northern (lower) area of the northern part. The northernmost area of the northern part of the site would also be planted up as an extension to the adjoining woodland.

Visibility

5.4.6 The visibility of the existing Application Site has been described above. The construction of the proposed dwellings on the site would increase that level of visibility, but not to a significant extent, given the nature and height of the existing vegetation around the site, and the local topography. The main areas from which the Proposed

Development would be visible would be as follow, taking each part of the Application Site in turn (see Figure 5.5).

Northern Part of the Application Site

5.4.7 The woodland to the north of the site means that there would be no significant views of the northern part of the site from the north.

5.4.8 From the east there would be some limited views of the roofs only of the new dwellings from the area around Hardingstone Lodge (though there is no public access to this area) and also from The Green to the east of the site.

5.4.9 From the south there would be views of the new dwellings from The Green as it passes the site, above or (in winter) through the roadside vegetation, and also clearer views into the northern part of the site at the point of the proposed access.

5.4.10 From the west there would be clear views of the new dwellings though gaps in the boundary hedgerow, from the adjacent fields and also from the public footpath which runs across them, and from the B526 to the south west. However, once the HCA site has been developed, these views would be blocked (though there would then be some views of the new dwellings within the Application Site from that new development).

Southern Part of the Application Site

5.4.11 There would be some short distance views of the upper parts of the new dwellings on the site from The Green, above the tall roadside hedgerow, and also more open views at the point of the proposed access into the southern part of the Application Site. There would also be some partial views of the new dwellings from within the northern part of the Application Site.

5.4.12 From the east there would be some limited views of the roofs only of the new dwellings, above the hedgerow and developing planting along the eastern site boundary. Much of that vegetation is already around 5 to 6m in height, and it contains a significant proportion of evergreen species. The new buildings would be set back from the boundary, and it is therefore likely that only the roofs of the new houses would be visible from the generally lower land to the east.

5.4.13 From the south there would be views of the upper parts of the new buildings from an area just to the south of Newport Pagnell Road, including the northern section of public footpath KM1, and also views from the road itself, including short distance and open views at the point of the proposed new roundabout. From further to the south, along the road from Preston Deanery to Quinton, there would be intermittent and distant views of the upper parts only of some of the new houses on the skyline, but in such views the new houses on the site would only be seen in the context of the recent housing development at St George's Fields.

5.4.14 From the west there would be some views (again, mainly of the upper parts only of the new dwellings, above the site boundary vegetation) from houses on the edge of Wootton (mainly from upper storey windows) including some properties within the new St George's Fields development. There would also be more open views from the open landscape towards Hardingstone, including views from public footpath KN6, to the east of Landimore Road. In these views the site is tilted towards the viewpoint, and a greater proportion of the new dwellings would be visible. However, once the HCA site has been developed, these views would be blocked (though there would then be some views of the new dwellings within the Application Site from that new development).

Landscape Change

5.4.15 Bearing the above in mind, the degree of change to the local landscape brought about by each part of the Proposed Development would be medium - the northern part of the Application Site is more enclosed, and development in that area would therefore be less visible, but it would also appear (in the absence of other development around it) slightly more out of character, whereas the southern part of the Application Site is more open to view, but new dwellings within it would be better related to existing development to the south west.

Landscape Effects**Construction**

5.4.16 Effects during the construction stage would vary with the extent and nature of the construction operation concerned, and may be at a higher level in some cases due to the presence and movement of construction plant and activity, and the presence of partly completed buildings, and also because the proposed planting would not at that stage be in place. However, construction would not be likely to take place across the whole site at any one time, so the effects would be likely to be more limited in extent. On balance the effects during the construction stage would not be expected to be any greater than those set out below for year 1 of the operational stage, for each part of the site.

Operation

5.4.17 The sensitivity of both parts of the Application Site has been assessed as medium, and the magnitude of landscape change would also be medium. The effects of each part of the Proposed Development on the local landscape would therefore be (using the Significance Matrix of Table 5.7) moderate adverse. These would be the effects in the winter of the first year after completion of the Proposed Development, and they would be direct, negative and permanent, though they would decline over time.

5.4.18 Effects in the summer 15 years after completion would be at a lower level, as by that time the existing vegetation around the site boundaries and also the proposed planting would be expected to have grown to heights of up to 10m for the new planting and 15m for the existing vegetation, therefore forming an effective and reasonably complete screen to the new dwellings in most views from outside the site. The long term effects of each part of the Proposed Development on the local landscape would therefore be minor adverse after 15 years.

5.4.19 The above effects are those on the local landscape in general, as indicated by the extent of the visual envelope shown on Figure 5.5 (though the effects identified will tend to decrease towards the edge of the affected area). Parts of Landscape Character Areas 6b (Hackleton Undulating Claylands) and 12a (Wollaston to Irchester Limestone Valley Slopes) are included within the visual envelope, but the overall effects on those character areas as a whole would be much less, as the character areas are large and are mainly outside the visual envelope. As shown in Table 5.9 at the end of this Chapter, these larger character areas have been assessed as of medium sensitivity to the limited (relative to the extent of the character areas) development which is proposed, and the magnitude of change to the overall character area would in each case be low. Landscape effects of each part of the site for the overall character areas would be initially minor adverse, declining over time to become negligible by year 15.

Decommissioning

5.4.20 Given the nature and intended longevity of the Proposed Development's operational life, and the uncertainty as to when or if any of the proposed dwellings

would reach the end of their lives and be removed from the site, decommissioning has not been considered relevant as part of this assessment, which has focussed on the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development during the construction and operational phases only.

Visual Effects

Construction

5.4.21 As for landscape effects, visual effects during the construction stage would vary with the extent and nature of the construction operation concerned, and may be at a higher level in some cases due to the presence and movement of construction plant and activity, and the presence of partly completed buildings, and also because the proposed planting would not at that stage be in place. However, construction would not be likely to take place across the whole site at any one time, and any visual receptor would not be subject to construction stage effects from the entire site. On balance the effects during the construction stage would not be expected to be any greater than those set out below for year 1 of the operational stage.

Operation

5.4.22 Effects on visual receptors around the Application Site have been assessed and are summarised in Table 5.9 at the end of this Chapter. In principle the anticipated effects are similar to the landscape effects in that they would be reduced by the presence of the existing screening vegetation around the site, and would tend to decline further over time as a result of the growth of that vegetation and also the additional planting which would take place as part of the Proposed Development.

5.4.23 There would be a general adverse effect on overall local visual amenity, but this would be at a lower level than the effects noted in Table 5.9 for individual visual receptors.

Effects in Terms of Policy

5.4.24 With reference to the relevant policies summarised in Section 5.2 above, the Proposed Development would have no significant effects in terms of Adopted Local Plan Policy E7 (Area of Skyline Conservation), as the woodland to the north of the Application Site would effectively screen the Proposed Development in views from the north, and it would not appear on the skyline.

5.4.25 There would be some conflict with general countryside protection policies, as would be the case for any development on a greenfield or currently undeveloped site, but the main policy effect of the Proposed Development would be in assisting with the delivery of Policy N6 of the Adopted Joint Core strategy Local Plan for the Northampton South of Brackmills SUE, of which the Application Site forms the eastern part.

5.5 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Mitigation by Design

5.5.1 There are no detailed landscape proposals for the Proposed Development at this stage, but the broad measures outlined in Section 5.4 above in terms of retention of existing perimeter vegetation and its reinforcement with new and additional structure planting are part of the Proposed Development, as shown on the Land Use Parameter Plan. Those measures are therefore Mitigation by Design, and the assessment of effects set out above has assumed their presence.

Additional Mitigation

5.5.2 No additional mitigation measures are recommended, or are considered to be required, that are not included within the design. There is likely to be a condition attached to any planning approval for the Proposed Development requiring the submission of detailed landscape proposals, but that would involve the provision of additional detail, rather than additional mitigation measures. Some of the detailed landscape proposals within the development would be geared towards making it attractive rather than mitigating its potential landscape and visual effects, and could therefore be regarded as providing enhancement rather than mitigation, but are included in Table 5.8 below on the basis that they are necessary to deliver an attractive internal environment for the development.

Table 5.8: Mitigation

Ref	Measures to avoid, reduce or manage any adverse effects and/or to deliver beneficial effects	How measure would be secured		
		By Design	By S.106	By Condition
1	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation, where possible and where in good condition.	X ¹		X ²
2	Strengthening perimeter vegetation where appropriate by means of new and additional structural planting.	X ¹		X ²
3	New green infrastructure including areas associated with drainage attenuation and play areas.	X ¹		X ²
4	Planting and other landscape proposals within the Proposed Development.			X

1. The principle of these measures has been secured by their inclusion in the design of the Proposed Development, but (2) their detail would be secured by an appropriate planning condition.

5.6 CUMULATIVE AND IN-COMBINATION EFFECTS**General**

5.6.1 This Section considers the potential cumulative effects on the landscape and visual receptors arising from the Proposed Development considered together with other nearby developments. The other developments which could be considered in this respect are as shown on Figure 2.1, and are the HCA development to the west (1,000 homes, a school and retail space), and the Morris Homes development to the south west (i.e. the ongoing St George's Fields development, for a total of 338 homes). As the latter is well under way, and the new houses within it closest to the Application Site are already completed and occupied, that development has been taken into account in the assessment as part of the baseline, and has therefore not been considered in terms of cumulative effects.

5.6.2 The landscape and visual effects of the HCA development have not been assessed as part of this assessment, but it can be noted that the Inspector who permitted that development on appeal took the view that, while there would be a large scale change to the landscape of that site, there would not be a significantly detrimental effect on the local landscape. This Section therefore considers what additional cumulative effects may arise from the Proposed Development taken together with those of the HCA development.

5.6.3 As each part of the Application Site (to the north and south of The Green) will be considered independently by NBC and SNC respectively, this Section also considers:

- the potential cumulative effects on the local landscape of both parts of the Application Site taken together (the above assessment has considered them separately);
- the potential cumulative effects of the entire Application Site taken together with the HCA development;
- the potential cumulative effects of the northern part of the Application Site taken together with the HCA development, and
- the potential cumulative effects of the southern part of the Application Site taken together with the HCA development.

5.6.4 This assessment of cumulative effects is made in respect of landscape effects only - as visual effects have been found to be at a generally low level, it was not considered necessary or helpful to carry out a four way analysis of how effects would vary for each receptor in terms of cumulative effects, so a general overview of cumulative visual effects has been provided below instead.

Cumulative Landscape Effects

5.6.5 The assessment set out in this Chapter has found that the effects of each part of the Proposed Development on the local landscape, taken separately, would be moderate adverse, declining to minor adverse by year 15. Cumulative effects on the local landscape, considering the four scenarios set out above, would be as set out below.

5.6.6 Taking both parts of the Application Site together, their cumulative effects on the local landscape would still fall within the moderate adverse (declining to minor adverse over time) category - while the overall quantum of development would be greater, the receiving landscape in each case would be of similar character and sensitivity, and the full extent of the overall development would not be apparent in most views. The effects of the entire development would be greater than those for each part of it considered separately, but not sufficiently greater for them to move into a higher category.

5.6.7 Taking the entire Proposed Development together with the HCA development, the overall effects on the local landscape would again be greater than those for either of the developments considered on their own, but the main effects would be those of the HCA development, as it is significantly larger than the development on the Application Site, and the addition of the Proposed Development would not add significantly to the effects of the HCA development, which were judged by the appeal Inspector to be acceptable. Turning this around, if the HCA development were to be regarded as part of the baseline for this assessment, and to already be present, then the effects of the Proposed Development would be reduced, as the landscape to the west of the site would already have been developed.

5.6.8 Given the above assessment that the entire Proposed Development would not significantly add to the landscape effects of the HCA development, it can be seen that there would be no significant cumulative effects arising from either of the separate parts of the Application Site considered individually with the HCA development.

Cumulative Visual Effects

5.6.9 For the visual receptors set out in Table 5.9, a note has been made as to which part (or both parts) of the Proposed Development would be most likely to lead to visual effects, and a note has also been made as to where effects would be likely to vary significantly with the HCA development in place. It would be unnecessarily complicated, and also somewhat speculative (given there are no detailed proposals for either

development) to attempt a detailed analysis of potential cumulative effects for the four scenarios set out above for each visual receptor.

5.6.10 Instead, it can be said in general that the main visual effects for a given receptor will tend to arise from the nearest part of the Application Site, and that consideration of the other part of the site taken together would be unlikely to significantly increase the effects. There would therefore be no significant cumulative visual effects in terms of both parts of the Application Site taken together.

5.6.11 For similar reasons, there would also be no significant cumulative visual effects in terms of the entire Application Site taken together with the HCA development - views for the receptors concerned would tend to be mainly of one or the other. For receptors to the west of the Application Site, the effects of the HCA development would tend to be much greater than those of the Proposed Development, as it is a larger development and would be closer to them, but there would not be any significant cumulative effects, as in that case the effects of the Proposed Development would be far less, as it would be screened by the HCA development.

5.7 SUMMARY

Introduction

5.7.1 This Chapter has set out the results of an assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects which would result from the Proposed Development. It has considered the baseline landscape character and quality of the Application Site and surrounding area, and also the degree and extent of the anticipated visibility of the Proposed Development. It has then considered how that baseline landscape character and quality would be affected, and what the effects on people's views would be.

5.7.2 In this landscape and visual assessment, a distinction has been drawn between landscape effects (i.e. effects on the character or quality of the landscape, irrespective of whether there are any views of the landscape, or viewers to see them) and visual effects (i.e. effects on people's views of the landscape, from visual receptors such as residential properties, Public Rights of Way and other areas with public access).

Baseline Conditions

5.7.3 The assessment has found that the northern part of the Application Site is within landscape character area 12a, the 'Wollaston to Irchester Limestone Valley Slopes', and the southern part is within landscape character area 6b, the 'Hackleton Undulating Claylands', as identified in the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment.

5.7.4 Local landscape character within and around the Application Site was found to be strongly influenced by the woodland to the north, which screens and encloses it in that direction (though there is still some awareness of the presence of the Brackmills Industrial Estate in the winter), by the urban areas to the south west and west (including the ongoing St George's Fields development) and by the nature of the southern part of the Application Site, which is not in agricultural use and has a somewhat disturbed character, especially in short distance views. The Application Site was therefore found to have an edge of settlement character, rather than a fully rural or countryside one.

5.7.5 That character will be further affected by the presence of the large scale housing development of the HCA development on a large area to the west of the site, which has now been permitted and is likely to commence on site in the near future.

5.7.6 The assessment has also analysed the anticipated visibility of the Proposed Development, and found that there would be few views from the north, as they are well screened by the adjacent woodland, limited views from the east and south because of the screening effects of vegetation around the site boundary and the falling land in those directions, and that the main views would be from the south west and west, though many of those views would be lost if the HCA development were to be in place.

Likely Significant Effects

5.7.7 The assessment has found that effects on the local landscape would be initially significant, as a result of the presence of the new houses on what is at the moment an undeveloped site, but that those effects would decline over time as the existing and proposed planting around and within the site grows up to screen and integrate the new development, such that the effects would not be significant by a time 15 years after completion of the Proposed Development.

5.7.8 Similarly, the assessment has found that there would be some significant adverse visual effects for users of two sections of public footpaths to the west and south of the Application Site, but that those effects would also decline over time to become not significant.

Mitigation and Enhancement

5.7.9 This assessment has taken account of the presence of the existing vegetation around the perimeter of the site (most of which would be retained as part of the Proposed Development) and also the proposed planting around and within the site, which would over time significantly extend and strengthen the existing vegetation.

Conclusion

5.7.10 The assessment set out in this Chapter has shown that there would be some adverse landscape and visual effects as a result of the Proposed Development. However, such effects are a largely inevitable consequence of developing any greenfield site, and would decline over time to the extent that they would not be significant. The effects of the Proposed Development would also be reduced if taken in the context of the HCA development already being present as part of the baseline landscape, as is likely to be the case. Furthermore, the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development would be less than those of the HCA development, which is far more extensive (for up to 1,000 dwellings and a school), but for which the landscape and visual effects have been deemed to be acceptable by the Inspector for the recent appeal. Finally, the Application Site is the eastern part of the wider Northampton South of Brackmills SUE, allocated under Policy N6 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan, and it can be assumed that the allocation of the SUE site took into account the potential landscape and visual effects of developing this greenfield site, and deemed them to be acceptable.

Table 5.9: Summary of Effects, Mitigation and Residual Effects

Receptor / Receiving Environment	Description of Effect	Nature of Effect	Sensitivity Value	Magnitude of Change	Geographical Importance	Significance of Effects (year 1)	Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects (i.e. effects in year 15)
Construction								
Landscape Effects	Effects as set out below for Operation Stage.	See below - some additional effects possible due to presence of construction plant and activity, but extent of that activity would be less than for the completed development, so effects would on balance be as for Operation Stage.	See below.	See below.	See below.	See below.	No specific measures for Construction Stage.	None
Visual Effects	Effects as set out below for Operation Stage.	As above.	See below.	See below.	See below.	See below.	No specific measures for Construction Stage.	None

Table 5.9: Summary of Effects, Mitigation and Residual Effects (continued)

Receptor / Receiving Environment	Description of Effect	Nature of Effect	Sensitivity Value	Magnitude of Change	Geographical Importance	Significance of Effects (year 1)	Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects (i.e. effects in year 15)
Operation								
Landscape Effects								
Local landscape character	Presence of new development on a previously undeveloped site.	Direct and Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Medium	Local	Moderate Adverse	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	Minor Adverse
Landscape Character Area 6b Hackleton Claylands	Presence of new development on a previously undeveloped site.	Direct and Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Low (on overall character area).	Borough/District	Minor Adverse	As above	Negligible
Landscape Character Area 12a Wollaston to Irchester Limestone Valley Slopes	Presence of new development on a previously undeveloped site.	Direct and Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Low (on overall character area).	Borough/District	Minor Adverse	As above	Negligible

Note: The above effects apply for each part of the Application Site, i.e. both the southern and northern parts would, taken in isolation, have these effects.

Table 5.9: Summary of Effects, Mitigation and Residual Effects (continued)

Receptor / Receiving Environment	Description of Effect	Nature of Effect	Sensitivity Value	Magnitude of Change	Geographical Importance	Significance of Effects (year 1)	Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects (i.e. effects in year 15)
Visual Effects								
Properties to the west ¹	Views of upper parts of new dwellings in both parts of site from properties in Wootton along the B526, at distances of around 250 to 600m.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Low - views would either be partial and of roofs only, or more distant for northern part of site.	Local	Minor to moderate adverse for up to 15 properties. N&S.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	Minor adverse for up to 15 properties. N&S.
Properties to the south west	Views of upper parts of new dwellings in southern part of site from properties in Wootton and also in St George's Fields, at distances between 30 and 500m. Also some open views at proposed access, across the B526.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium for most properties, high where views are more open, as at proposed site access.	Low - views would either be partial and of roofs only, or across the B526 close to the St George's Fields access.	Local	Minor to moderate adverse for up to 20 properties. S.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	Minor adverse for up to 20 properties. S.
Hardingstone Lodge	Property is around 250m east of site, but well screened by intervening vegetation - no significant views though may be some views from curtilage.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Negligible	Local	Negligible N&S.	None required.	No effects N&S.

Table 5.9: Summary Of Effects, Mitigation And Residual Effects (continued)

Receptor / Receiving Environment	Description of Effect	Nature of Effect	Sensitivity Value	Magnitude of Change	Geographical Importance	Significance of Effects (year 1)	Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects (i.e. effects in year 15)
Properties to the south east	Properties at Grange Cottages and in Preston Deanery are screened from the site by intervening high ground, at distances of 600 to 1200m. May be some distant glimpse views of roofs only of new buildings from some upper floor windows.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Negligible	Local	Negligible S.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	No effects S.
Properties to the south	Properties in and around Quinton would have some distant views of the roofs only of new buildings at distances of 2km or more.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Negligible	Local	Negligible S.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	Negligible S.
Public footpath to the west ¹	Views of new buildings in both parts of the site at distances of 500 to 800m, for people walking to the east only, on footpath KN6 to the east of Landimore Road.	Permanent (but declining over time).	High	Low	Local	Moderate adverse N&S.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	Minor adverse N&S.

Table 5.9: Summary Of Effects, Mitigation And Residual Effects (continued)

Receptor / Receiving Environment	Description of Effect	Nature of Effect	Sensitivity Value	Magnitude of Change	Geographical Importance	Significance of Effects (year 1)	Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects (i.e. effects in year 15)
Public footpath to the south	Limited views of upper parts only of new buildings in the southern part of the site from northern section of footpath KM1, to the south of the B526, at distances of 50 to 250m, for people walking to the north only.	Permanent (but declining over time).	High	Low	Local	Moderate adverse S.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	Minor adverse S.
Users of local roads	Views of new houses will vary with location and the openness of the view, but main effects would be in short range views at the proposed access points. Any effects would also be experienced as part of an overall journey and would be transient.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium for minor roads, low for B526.	Low in terms of overall journey.	Local	Minor to moderate adverse for minor roads, minor adverse for B526. N&S.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	Minor adverse N&S.

Table 5.9: Summary Of Effects, Mitigation And Residual Effects (continued)

Receptor / Receiving Environment	Description of Effect	Nature of Effect	Sensitivity Value	Magnitude of Change	Geographical Importance	Significance of Effects (year 1)	Mitigation / Enhancement Measures	Residual Effects (i.e. effects in year 15)
Cumulative and In-combination								
Local landscape character	Cumulative effects of both parts of the Application Site taken together.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Medium	Local	No significant additional cumulative effects.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	No significant additional cumulative effects.
Local landscape character	Cumulative effects of the entire Application Site taken together with the HCA development.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Medium	Local	No significant additional cumulative effects.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	No significant additional cumulative effects.
Local landscape character	Cumulative effects of the northern part of the Application Site taken together with the HCA development.	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Medium	Local	No significant additional cumulative effects.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	No significant additional cumulative effects.
Local landscape character	Cumulative effects of the southern part of the Application Site taken together with the HCA development	Permanent (but declining over time).	Medium	Medium	Local	No significant additional cumulative effects.	Retention of existing perimeter vegetation and substantial new planting.	No significant additional cumulative effects.

Notes:

1. For these receptors, effects would be substantially reduced with the presence of the HCA development.
2. 'N&S', in the effects columns, indicates that each part of the Application Site, taken in isolation, would generate effects at that level. 'S' indicates that effects would arise only from the southern part of the site.

