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11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Land South of  
Blakesley Hill, Greens  
Norton

**Landscape  
Evidence of**  
Mr. Robert Hughes  
BSc (Hons), PgDipLA  
CMLI

Appeal between: Richborough Estates and  
South Northamptonshire Council

## **Volume 1: Text**

Council Ref: S/2020/1376/MAO

Planning Inspectorate Ref:  
APP/Z2830/W/21/3267906

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# Section 1: Introduction, Appeal Context & Principal Issues

## Witness and Qualifications

- 1.1. My name is Robert Hughes, I am a Director at Incola Landscape Planning and also a sub-consultant to Tyler Grange Group Ltd. I specialise in landscape and visual planning issues associated with development and change. I hold a BSc (Hons) degree in Rural Resources Management from the University of Wales Aberystwyth and a Post Graduate diploma in Landscape Architecture from the University of Central England. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (LI).

## Professional Practice

- 1.2. I have over 17 years of professional experience, having started my career in 2003 as a landscape consultant at CPM Environmental Planning and Design Ltd, progressing to the position of Senior Landscape Consultant by 2007. Between 2007 – 2008 I worked as a Senior Landscape Architect for The Landscape Agency, before working as a sole practitioner up until 2011 when I joined Tyler Grange LLP as an Associate. I became a Landscape Partner at Tyler Grange in August 2014 and Technical Director of Tyler Grange Group Limited in September 2019. In February 2021 I set-up and became a Director of Incola Landscape Planning.
- 1.3. I have been appointed by developers, local objection groups and public authorities to provide professional landscape and visual planning advice on a wide variety of projects throughout the United Kingdom, including housing allocations, strategic urban extensions, Garden Villages, commercial development, tall building assessments, LVIA assessments within Registered Parks and Gardens, as well as windfarm and photovoltaic proposals. I also specialise in Green Belt Review and Assessments.
- 1.4. The majority of my career has been involved in the assessment of landscape and visual effects of residential development on greenfield land and associated landscape design inputs. Over the past eight years, I have given evidence at planning Inquiries, Appeal Hearings and Examinations in Public.

## Statement of Truth

- 1.5. The evidence I have prepared represents my professional opinion in response to the Council's reasons for refusal and landscape case and having regard to my own assessment of the landscape and visual context within which the appeal site is situated and the effects of the appeal proposal. Based on my knowledge, I believe the facts stated in this evidence are true and accurate.



## Instruction

- 1.6. I have been appointed to prepare landscape evidence and appear as an expert witness on behalf of Richborough Estates (the Appellant) in relation to the decision of South Northamptonshire Council (the Council) to refuse outline planning permission for the development of up to 69 dwellings, with associated access, landscaping, open space and drainage infrastructure (all matters reserved other than access) (the proposed development) at Land south of Blakeley Hill, Greens Norton (the appeal site).
- 1.7. The planning application was accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Tyler Grange (report 12520/R03a) [CD1.09]. The LVA is the most up-to-date consideration of the appeal site and its capacity to absorb change. The LVA was prepared and reviewed by Chartered Landscape Architects. The Council have raised no technical concerns with the approach or findings of the LVA.
- 1.8. The LVA contains a Landscape Strategy plan that illustrates how existing trees and hedgerows bounding the appeal site would be retained and supplemented with additional native tree planting to the boundaries and within areas of open space to the north, west and south of the site.
- 1.9. The application was made with all matters reserved except access. There is therefore scope for the proposal to be developed at Reserved Matters stage to allow for the detailed design of the development and areas of Green and Blue Infrastructure, including landscape buffers, public open space and set backs to development edges.
- 1.10. Whilst I did not write the LVA, I undertook a desk-based technical review of the draft report prior to the final amendments and submitted report being reviewed by Jonathan Berry, Director of Tyler Grange.
- 1.11. When preparing my evidence, I have visited the appeal site, Greens Norton and the surrounding area and am therefore familiar with the landscape and visual context within which the site and settlement are situated. I include additional photoviews within my evidence which supplement those contained in the LVA and have been used to illustrate the visual setting of the appeal site and Greens Norton.

## Appeal Context

- 1.12. Full details of the planning history of the appeal site and applications for development on the site and adjacent land by Richborough Estates are set out in evidence prepared by Mr Richard Lomas of Axis. A brief overview of those matters relevant to Landscape Matters is set out below.
- 1.13. The appeal site comprises a single field of 2.87 hectares on the edge of Greens Norton, bounded by residential properties on Benham Road and Falcon View to the east, Blakesley Hill to the north, Bury Hill to the west and residential gardens and paddocks to the south.
- 1.14. The appeal site was subject to two previous applications for substantially larger schemes that included land to the south of the site extending to Bradden Road, and which were



refused permission. The proposed development on the single field of the appeal site represents a reduced scheme. As recognised by Officers within the Committee Report [CD5.01] the reduced scheme has positive implications in landscape terms through restricting the overall scale of development and reducing visibility from the south in the valley between Bradden and Greens Norton<sup>1</sup>.

1.15. Having undertaken an appraisal of the landscape and visual baseline, detailed the proposals and how these have been developed to respond to the landscape and visual context, the submitted LVA summarises at Section 7 that:

1. The site does not contain any notable, rare or unique features and is typical of the features that are characteristic within the 'Tove Catchment' Landscape Character Area (LCA) including arable land cover and settled characteristics;
2. The site is heavily influenced by the adjoining settlement edge and is physically separated from the wider undeveloped landscape by the roads at Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill. The site has a settlement edge character;
3. An assessment of landscape value indicators has found that the site does not contain any more than ordinary features and is of low, localised importance. The site has a medium susceptibility to the proposed development;
4. The proposed development is consistent with the existing scale, pattern, grain and land use of the prevailing character of Greens Norton and the wider Tove Catchment LCA;
5. Mitigation incorporated into the scheme includes setting back development from the western and southern boundaries with areas of informal public open space that allow opportunities for new planting to soften the settlement edges;
6. Impacts would be localised and limited. The development does not result in the loss of any rare or unique features, with the loss of agricultural land and short sections of hedgerow for access limited in relation to the wider LCA. Mitigation includes characteristic features of the LCA. The overall perception and distinctiveness of the wider LCA would not be compromised;
7. Views of the appeal site are limited and localised, with the site seen in context with the existing settlement edge character and built context. The site is well contained by existing field boundaries, the settlement edge and minor roads, with the effects of the proposed development limited by the rolling topography, intact field boundary vegetation and settlement and built form of Greens Norton;
8. Limited and highly localised visual effects include adverse effects on the visual amenity of residents of properties overlooking the site on Benham Road and Falcon View;

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<sup>1</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.22



9. The LVA also recognises that there will also be visual change for users of Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill, including motorists approaching Greens Norton. For these receptors residential development is not uncharacteristic, with the existing settlement edge clearly apparent; and

10. The proposed mitigation planting to the western boundary will provide a softer settlement edge and assist in assimilating the development into the wider landscape.

1.16. The Officer's assessment of landscape and visual impacts contained within the Committee Report [CD5.01] agrees with the findings and conclusions of the LVA in that the landscape and visual effects are highly limited and localised<sup>2</sup>.

1.17. Officers also considered that the proposed development would be well related visually to the settlement and offer opportunities to provide an improved edge, with properties fronting onto areas of open space and landscape planting to the defensible boundary formed by Bury Hill<sup>3</sup>.

### **Officer Recommendations and Committee Report**

1.18. The Committee Report recommended the proposals for refusal, including on the grounds of the localised landscape harm arising from the loss of an undeveloped field that forms an area of transition between the edge of Greens Norton and open countryside<sup>4</sup>.

1.19. This was despite the Officers' assessment concluding that:

*"The proposed development would be relatively self-contained with visual impacts restricted to the immediate locality without a prominence in the wider landscape significantly greater than existing settlement edge."* (paragraph 9.24)

1.20. The provision of new public open space was identified as a benefit of the proposal, contributing to the social aspect of sustainable development<sup>5</sup>.

1.21. The Committee Report refers to the LVA submitted with the planning application, summarising that the LVA:

*"... concludes development of the site will have limited and highly localised visual effects, with adverse effects restricted to existing properties on Benham Road and Falcon View whose westwards views would be irrevocably altered from a rural to a developed context."* (paragraph 9.20)

1.22. Officers also refer to the findings of the LVA in relation to the limited landscape harm, stating that, despite the assertion that the western edge of the village is more susceptible to harmful effects than other approaches:

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<sup>2</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.23, second sentence.

<sup>3</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.21

<sup>4</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 11.2, third bullet

<sup>5</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 11.1, fourth bullet



*“... Officers are of the view that the reduction in size of the development and prevailing context is such that wider landscape harm is limited, as per the findings of the LVIA.”* (paragraph 9.23)

1.23. The assessment of ‘Landscape and Visual Impacts’ within the Committee Report provides further detail to support the conclusion of limited landscape and visual effects, as well as recognising opportunities to provide an improved settlement edge. These include the following considerations as set out at paragraphs 9.19 – 9.24:

1. Officers were satisfied that the proposed development would generally be well-related in visual terms to the existing village, without any significant greater prominence in the wider landscape;
2. The site does not represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character area (the Tove Catchment of undulating claylands);
3. Bury Hill to the immediate west of the site would provide a substitute for Benham Road in terms of being a long-term defensible edge to the settlement;
4. This edge (along Bury Hill) could be developed in a higher-quality manner than the existing approach into the village, which is characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road;
5. The indicative layout shows outward facing properties and managed landscaping, both of which could be secured at reserved matters; and
6. The reduction from the previous proposals, omitting development on the field to the south is in stark contrast and has generally positive implications in landscape terms by restricting the overall bulk and physical scale of development and reducing longer-distance visibility to / from the south.

1.24. Despite the above assessment, it is the opinion of Officers that the localised harm resulting from the proposals:

*“... is not outweighed by the potential of achieving a higher quality edge to the settlement after development, particularly as the existing interface between the village and surrounding countryside is well established and itself not appreciable over long distances.”* (paragraph 9.23)

1.25. This conclusion does not reflect the Officers’ own assessment that recognises the existing approach to the village being characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road, the absence of any valuable landscape characteristics within the appeal site and that the proposed development would relate well to the existing village, with Bury Hill being able to provide a defensible edge to the settlement.

1.26. The current settlement edge bounding the appeal site forms an abrupt transition at the interface with the countryside. The fact that this interface is established does not alter the fact that it remains hard, linear edge comprising rear gardens with sparse vegetation to the



boundaries, nor reduce its influence on the character and perception of the land within the site and upon the local landscape.

1.27. At paragraph 9.23 the Committee Report states that:

*“It is commonly accepted by all parties that this western edge of Greens Norton is more tranquil than other approaches into/out of the village and is thus more susceptible to harmful effects from development.”*

1.28. It is not clear where this assertion has come from, as the LVA does not identify that the western approach and edge to the settlement is any more tranquil than any other. No other assessments or documents submitted alongside the application, including the Design and Access Statement (DAS) [CD1.04] have identified the site and its environs as being tranquil. Furthermore, the Committee Report does not provide any detail as to how this assessment of relative tranquillity has been arrived at, nor why the western edge of Green Norton is more susceptible to harm arising from the proposed development.

1.29. The Report concludes that in relation to landscape and visual impacts, the proposed development would be contrary to JCS Policy R1(b) and LPP2 Policy SS2(1a). These are carried forward into the reasons for refusal.

1.30. It is also worthy of note that neither the Committee Report nor reasons for refusal identify any impacts upon the amenity of existing residents or conflict with JCS Policy R1D.

## Scope of Evidence

1.31. My evidence addresses matters relating to the ‘Effect of the Proposal upon the Character and Appearance of the Area’. This has been agreed and confirmed as a main issue further to a Case Management Conference held on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2021 by the Planning Inspector, Mr S D Castle.

1.32. This main issue covers matters raised by the second reason for refusal (RfR2) which states that:

*“The development would result in **localised landscape harm** through the loss of an undeveloped field that forms part of the open countryside setting of Greens Norton, **adversely affecting the character of this part of the village**. The development would therefore conflict with the Policy R1(b) of the 2014 West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, Policy SS2(1a) of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2); and paragraph 170 of the NPPF” **Emphasis added***

1.33. It is important to note that RfR2 recognises the limited and localised landscape harm arising from the development of a single field on the settlement edge. Whilst identifying the appeal site as forming part of the open countryside setting of Greens Norton, the reason for refusal also recognises that the proposals would only result in adverse effects on the character of “this part of the village”, namely the western edge of the settlement. No wider effects upon the village or its setting are identified.



1.34. Local plan policies referenced in RFR2 are:

1. JCS Policy R1(b) 'Spatial Strategy for the Rural Areas'.

Paragraph (b) requires development in Rural Areas to: *“Not affect open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village”*

2. LPP2 Policy SS2 (1a) 'General Development and Design Principles'.

Paragraph (1a) states that planning permission will be granted where proposed development: *“Maintains the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts, does not result in physical coalescence that would harm its identity and does not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement”*

1.35. RfR2 does not cite any further JCS or LPP2 policies or paragraphs. As detailed below, within their SoC the Council introduces conflicts with additional elements of local policy over and above that included within the original reasons for refusal.

#### **Council's Statement of Case**

1.36. The Council's SoC reflects RfR2 in identifying the limited extent of any landscape and visual harm arising from the proposals, stating that:

*“The appeal site is located on relatively elevated land and is visible from several approaches by road to the village. The existing interface between the village and surrounding countryside is well established here and is not appreciable over long distances. The proposed development would be relatively self-contained. Visual impact is largely restricted to the immediate locality; impact on the wider landscape is limited.”* (paragraph 7.1)

1.37. The above reflects the findings of the LVA landscape and visual baseline which identifies the existing houses abutting the eastern site boundary as forming an abrupt, hard edge to the settlement and influencing the character of the site<sup>6</sup>. The visibility of the site when approaching Green Norton on local roads is limited to views from Blakesley Road from up to around 750m to the west and in localised views from Bury Hill passing the site. Views from the south on Bury Hill and Braden Road are limited by the rising, rolling topography and intervening hedgerows.

1.38. The SoC identifies the landscape to the west of Greens Norton as open and rolling countryside, of which the appeal site is characteristic, stating that:

*“... it is entirely open on three sides and with no built form or other urbanising features nearby to distinguish it from its rural surroundings. The site makes a positive and appreciable contribution to the rural setting of the village. There is localised harm resulting*

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<sup>6</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual appraisal, paragraph 3.19, point 4



*from the loss of land that forms a positive part of the village's transition to open countryside.”*  
(paragraph 7.2)

- 1.39. The above description does not take into consideration the influence of the defined built edge bounding the appeal site to the east or containment by Blakesley Hill to the north and Bury Hill to the west. Domestic gardens, paddocks, agricultural sheds and stable boxes are situated on the fields to the south. As recognised by the baseline analysis contained in the LVA<sup>7</sup> these factors combine to place the site within the peri-urban settlement edge context, separated from the wider undeveloped landscape beyond Bury Hill to the west and Blakesley Hill to the north.
- 1.40. The defined edge to the settlement does not represent a transition to the open countryside, but rather an abrupt change. As recognised by Officers in the Committee Report, the proposals offer the opportunity to improve the settlement edge through layout and orientation of properties, provision of landscape planting and open space<sup>8</sup>.
- 1.41. The SoC reiterates the Committee Report in considering that the western edge of Greens Norton is more tranquil than other approaches and is therefore more susceptible to the harmful effects of urbanising development<sup>9</sup>.
- 1.42. Paths and roads near the site are identified as being well-used by members of the public for amenity purposes, with Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Braden Road identified as a logical circuit for local residents to use to enjoy the rural environs of the village. The SoC states that development of the site would urbanise and reduce the tranquillity of this amenity.
- 1.43. I consider matters relating to tranquillity further within my evidence.
- 1.44. The SoC concludes at paragraph 7.4 that:  
  
*“The identified harm is not outweighed or mitigated by the potential, at Reserved Matters stage, of a high-quality design-led approach to landscaping, layout and building mass, siting and form.”*
- 1.45. In relation to RfR2 and landscape and visual impacts, the Council's SoC summarises that:  
  
*“... the development will result in localised landscape harm via the permanent loss of a tranquil, undeveloped field that forms an area of transition between the edge of Greens Norton and open countryside. It is therefore contrary to policies S1D (1 and 4) and R1(B) of the JCS and Policy SS2(1a) of the LPP2.”* (paragraph 7.9)
- 1.46. Through the SoC the Council have introduced conflicts with JCS Policy S1 'Distribution of Development' which did not form part of the original reasons for refusal<sup>10</sup>. This relates to:

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<sup>7</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, Section 3 (page 8)

<sup>8</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.21

<sup>9</sup> Council SoC, paragraph 7.3

<sup>10</sup> Council SoC, paragraph 7.5 (page 10)



1. *Harm to the distinctive character of the landscape west of Greens Norton (JCS Policy S1D (1)); and*
2. *Harm to tranquillity (JCS Policy S1D (4))*

## **Landscape and Visual Common Ground**

- 1.47. As requested by the Inspector, topic-based Statements of Common Ground are being prepared to identify those areas in agreement and matters in dispute. The Landscape Statement of Common Ground (LSoCG) will identify those matters agreed between the Appellant and the Council, as well as areas of disagreement and justification for these.
- 1.48. Areas sought for agreement within the LSoCG include the following, which reflect those matters as summarised in the Committee Report and Council's SoC:
1. The appeal site is not subject to any formal landscape designation and is not a valued landscape under Paragraph 170 of the Framework;
  2. The appeal site does not represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character area within which it is situated;
  3. The appeal site is heavily influenced by the adjoining settlement edge and is physically separated from the wider undeveloped landscape by the roads at Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill. The site has a settlement edge character;
  4. The appeal site is not publicly accessible and is not crossed by any public rights of way or permissive footpaths;
  5. The appeal site is not identified in the Greens Norton Village Design Guide as Important Open Space, nor does it lie in proximity to any space recognised as such;
  6. There are no important views across or towards the appeal site identified within the Greens Norton Village Design Statement or Landscape Character Assessment;
  7. The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Tyler Grange is the most up-to-date consideration of the appeal site and its capacity to absorb change;
  8. The Council have raised no technical concerns with the approach or findings of the LVA;
  9. Landscape harm arising from the proposal is limited and localised, relating to the change of the site from an agricultural field on the settlement edge to residential development and associated open space, landscape buffers and mitigation planting;
  10. The proposals recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and retain key landscape characteristics identified by the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment;



11. The development does not result in the loss of any rare or unique features, with the loss of agricultural land and short sections of hedgerow for access limited in relation to the wider LCA. Mitigation includes characteristic features of the LCA. The overall perception and distinctiveness of the wider Undulating Claylands LCT and Tove Catchment LCA would not be compromised;
  12. The appeal scheme would be well-related in visual terms to the existing village;
  13. Visual impacts arising from the proposed development would be restricted to the immediate locality without a prominence in the wider landscape significantly greater than existing settlement edge;
  14. Mitigation incorporated into the scheme includes setting back development from the western and southern boundaries with areas of informal public open space that allow opportunities for new planting to soften the settlement edges;
  15. The proposed mitigation planting to the western boundary will provide a softer settlement edge and assist in assimilating the development into the wider landscape.
  16. The provision of new public open space is a benefit of the proposal, contributing to the social aspect of sustainable development;
  17. Bury Hill to the immediate west of the site would provide a substitute for Benham Road in terms of being a long-term defensible edge to the settlement;
  18. This edge (along Bury Hill) could be developed in a higher-quality manner than the existing approach into the village, which is characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road; and
  19. The indicative layout shows outward facing properties and managed landscaping, both of which could be secured at reserved matters.
- 1.49. The Officer's assessment of landscape and visual impacts contained within the Committee Report [CD5.01] agrees with the findings and conclusions of the LVA in that the landscape and visual effects are highly limited and localised<sup>11</sup>.
- 1.50. Officers also considered that the proposed development would be well related visually to the settlement and offer opportunities to provide an improved edge, with properties fronting onto areas of open space and landscape planting to the defensible boundary formed by Bury Hill.

## **Principal Issues / Matters in Dispute**

- 1.51. Having regard to RfR2, the Council's SoC and relevant planning policy, my evidence addresses following matters in dispute which relate to the Main Issue of the effect on the character and appearance of the area:

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<sup>11</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.23, second sentence.



1. Landscape value and attributes of particular significance to the character and setting of Greens Norton;
  2. Tranquillity of the appeal site;
  3. The extent of harm to the local landscape character setting to the West of Greens Norton; and
  4. The effects of the Proposed Development upon visual amenity.
- 1.52. With reference to and building upon the assessment of the landscape and visual context contained within the LVA and my evidence, I will demonstrate that the appeal site does not contribute to identified characteristics and features of “particular significance” and value to the character of the landscape and setting to the west of Greens Norton. When identifying these characteristics and features, reference will be made to the evidence base that supports the JCS and LPP2.
- 1.53. This analysis will feed into the assessment of the contribution that the appeal site makes to the character and setting of the village.
- 1.54. Further analysis of the tranquillity of the appeal site and its environs will also be provided to address matters raised in the Council’s SoC regarding the appeal site being a tranquil field and the impacts on the amenity of people using the local roads for walks.
- 1.55. Consideration of the susceptibility of the appeal site to the proposed development will also be examined in light of the assessment of value and tranquillity, building on the LVA and referring to the Landscape Character Strategy Guidelines<sup>12</sup> for the area.
- 1.56. The opportunities for mitigation through the layout and design of the proposed development, incorporating landscape planting to provide an improved settlement edge will be highlighted, with reference to the Mill Lane proposals and mitigation measures (Planning Application No. S/2020/1340/MAO) that have been recognised by the Council as providing betterment to the settlement edge.

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<sup>12</sup> CD6.23 - Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment: Strategy and Guidelines



# Section 2: Landscape and Visual Context, Proposed Development and Effects

2.1. Building on the assessment contained within the LVA, I summarise the landscape character and visual context of the appeal site below. In addition to the plans and photographs contained in the LVA, I also refer to plans and additional viewpoints contained at Volume 2 of my Proof of Evidence on Figures 1 – 3:

- Figure 1: Site Context – An aerial image of the site and its surroundings;
- Figure 2: Viewpoint Locations; and
- Figure 3: Photoviewpoints A – I

## Landscape Character

2.2. The LVA includes a summary of the landscape character of the area surrounding Greens Norton, with reference to published landscape character assessments, including the Current Northamptonshire Character Assessment, 2006 which forms part of the evidence base to the development plan.

2.3. Key characteristics of the Tove Catchment Landscape Character Area (LCA) as identified by the Council's assessment and which are of relevance to the site are listed in the LVA at Section 3 (paragraph 3.9, page 5), and include:

- A distinctive undulating landform which forms the catchment of the River Tove;
- Land cover is typically a combination of both arable and pasture farming with improved pasture largely located around village settlements bordering the River Tove and its tributaries, and on valley sides;
- Woodland is not a prominent feature, although a notable wooded horizon is recognised in views to the south;
- Well-settled landscape with numerous villages scattered throughout. Greens Norton is identified as a larger village in this context.
- Village morphology varies greatly;
- Church spires are prominent within many villages and provide local landmarks throughout the area;



- A diverse range of recreational opportunities, including the Knightley Way to the north of Greens Norton.

- 2.4. Whilst the wider landscape to the west of the settlement shares many of the characteristics identified by the published assessment, the influence of the built edge, adjacent land uses, landform and containment by roads combine to relate the appeal site to Greens Norton at the gateway to the village to the east of Bury Hill.
- 2.5. I set out in more detail below the local and site-specific landscape context within which the appeal site is situated.

### **Landform**

- 2.6. As recognised by the LVA, the appeal site is strongly influenced by the adjoining settlement edge and separated from the wider landscape by the roads of Blakeley Hill to the north and Bury Hill to the west (see Figure 1: Site Context). This places the site within a peri-urban / settlement edge context.
- 2.7. This relationship to the settlement is further emphasised by the topography. The western edge of Greens Norton is situated on land which rises from a shallow valley to the south. Beyond Bury Hill to the west, the topography forms a gently undulating, rolling landform running along the upper valley sides. The landform is illustrated on the LVA Plan 3 Topography (page 9) and is typical of the landscape character of the Undulating Claylands Landscape character type (LCT) and Tove Catchment landscape character area (LCA)<sup>13</sup>.
- 2.8. The existing linear settlement edge formed by properties of Benham Road and Falcon View along the eastern boundary of the appeal site forms a backdrop in localised views from the west, with the Site experienced in this context. The form of the built edge and lack of landscape planting further emphasises the developed context within which the site sits in the local landscape.
- 2.9. This context on the western edge of Greens Norton and the situation of the appeal site is illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 12 taken from Blakesley Hill on the approach to the village<sup>14</sup>. The view also clearly shows how the landform slopes to the west beyond Bury Hill, with the road and associated hedgerows and trees combining with the landform to provide a clear separation and distinct transition between the settlement edge character and large arable fields within the wider landscape.

### **Relationship with the Settlement Edge**

- 2.10. On the approach to Greens Norton along Blakesley Hill, the site is situated to the east of Bury Hill, at the gateway to the village. As illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 1, there is a pavement / footway set within the verge that extends along Blakesley Hill between Benham Road and Bury Hill. There are also 30mph speed limit signs, telegraph poles and a signpost at the junction with Bury Hill. All these features, combined with the houses on Benham Road adjacent to the eastern boundary relate the site to the settlement. The influence of the

<sup>13</sup> As identified by The Current Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment (CD6.22)

<sup>14</sup> CD1.09 - Landscape and Visual Appraisal, Page 23



houses and features on Blakesley Hill upon the character of the approach to the village is illustrated on Photoviewpoint A, taken to the west for the proposed site access (Figure 3).

- 2.11. The relationship of the appeal site with the settlement edge as experienced when travelling west out of Greens Norton is illustrated by Photoviewpoint B, taken from opposite the junction with Benham Road. This view illustrates how the site is set beyond the mown verge and footway, with signage, lighting columns and telegraph poles emphasising the influence of the settlement on the character.
- 2.12. The relationship of the appeal site with the settlement edge and containment by Bury Hill is illustrated by Photoviewpoint C (Figure 3) looking north adjacent to a field gate at the southwestern corner of the site.
- 2.13. Photoviewpoint D taken from Bury Hill to the south shows the clear distinction between the wider, open landscape to the west of the road and the smaller scale fields adjacent to the settlement edge to the east. Bury Hill forms a distinct transition between these two landscapes.
- 2.14. To the south of the appeal site, the land slopes down towards Bradden Road with houses on Falcon View continuing the abrupt linear edge to the village. The rear gardens of these properties have been extended west into the fields. The gardens are bound by post and rail fences and contain a variety of sheds and domestic paraphernalia including play equipment, garden furniture, etc. Adjacent to Bradden Road, a yard containing agricultural machinery and with corrugated iron agricultural sheds add to the built form and visual clutter alongside the western edge of the village. The houses and gardens south of the site further influence the edge of settlement character and introduce domestic elements into the local landscape that extend part way along the southern boundary of the site. The settlement edge, including the extended gardens and agricultural yard and structures are illustrated on Figure 1: Site Context.
- 2.15. To the west of the gardens and yard, the land south of the appeal site comprises two fields of pasture divided by a post and rail fence that are used as grazing for sheep and horses. Stable boxes are located to the south of the fields, accessed off Bradden Road.
- 2.16. As illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 2, from Bradden Road<sup>15</sup> the houses, gardens and sheds on the fields to the south of the appeal site further reinforce the relationship of the land east of Bury Hill with the settlement and the influence of the housing and domestic land uses on the edge of the village.

## Views

- 2.17. As recognised by the Current Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment, the undulating landform affords wide panoramic views across elevated areas with expansive views and wide horizons. The assessment also identifies that the shallow valleys and

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<sup>15</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal. page 13



undulating landform creates more contained and intimate areas. These are identified as being key landscape characteristics.

- 2.18. These characteristics are present on the edges of Greens Norton. As described above and illustrated in the LVA and viewpoints, the western edge of Greens Norton north of Bradden Road and adjacent to the appeal site is situated on rising land on the slopes south of Blakesley Hill. Given the elevation of the land above the valley to the south and southwest, there are characteristic wide panoramic views across the areas of lower lying land. The view westwards from Bury Hill is illustrated by Photoviewpoint E, taken from adjacent to the appeal site. Views to the southwest are illustrated by Photoviewpoint F, south of the site.
- 2.19. Views across the valley to the south are also obtained from Bradden Road, as illustrated by Photoviewpoint G. A bench on Bradden Road faces to the south, offering residents an opportunity to pause and enjoy the views out across the landscape.
- 2.20. As illustrated by Photoviewpoints E, F and G (Figure 3) the wider landscape comprises large arable fields stretching across the gently undulating landform defined by hedgerows, tree belts and interspersed with woodlands and copses. Trees and small woodlands are situated on the higher land above the valleys forming a well treed skyline in places.
- 2.21. The Current Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment contains landscape strategies and guidelines for each of the LCTs and their key landscape character features. For the Undulating Claylands, this includes for the conservation of the wide panoramic views across the landscape from elevated areas.
- 2.22. The land to the south of Bradden Road slopes down towards the lower-lying land of the valley, which is more contained within the landscape. The valley contains a greater number of trees and woodland, including at the Pocket Park and along the tree-lined bridledways that connect with Bengal Lane the south of the village. This area, and that formed by the smaller pasture fields and paddocks to the south is more enclosed and intimate in scale with outward views limited by the landform of the valley sides and greater tree cover. This is illustrated by Photoviewpoint H, taken from the bridledway south of Bradden Road looking towards Bengal. The landcover, vegetation and smaller scale, intact field pattern surrounding Bengal and to the south of the village is illustrated on Figure 1.

### **Landmarks**

- 2.23. As recognised by the Current Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment, church spires are characteristic landmarks within the area. The spire of the Church of St Bartholomew, situated to the north of Green Norton is such a feature, being visible in views across the local area.
- 2.24. As recognised by the LVA (paragraph 3.19, point 4, page 7), there are glimpsed views of the spire across the appeal site from Bury Hill. The spire is experienced in relation to the 20<sup>th</sup> century housing adjacent to the site which influences the development edge and is not a prominent feature.



- 2.25. The spire is more apparent as a landmark in views travelling along Blakesley Road to the west and when entering the village on the hill east of Behnam Road, as well as elevated views to the north (LVA Photoviewpoints 5 and 6), from Mill Lane to the south (LVA Photoviewpoint 8) as well as views from within areas of open space to the south of the village, north of Bengal as illustrated on Photoviewpoint I (Figure 3).

## Visual Context

- 2.26. As recognised by the Council within their Statement of Case and the Committee Report, the proposed development will only be visible from within a localised area within the vicinity of the appeal site. This reflects the findings of the LVA, which summarises that:

*“The extent of views are limited and localised. In localised views the site is viewed in context with the adjacent residential edge. In limited wider views from elevated vantage points to the north and south, the site forms a small part of the wider expansive views and is seen in context with the settlement of Greens Norton.*

*Views of the site from, the local area are influenced by the existing settlement edge character. Where the proposed development would be visible from the local area, it would be seen within the existing built context.”<sup>16</sup>*

- 2.27. The extent of visibility is described in the LVA at section 4<sup>17</sup> and illustrated by the representative Photoviewpoints within the report. The extent and composition of views is summarised below. Reference is made to the LVA and Photoviewpoints where applicable.

### Views adjacent to the Appeal Site

#### *Adjacent Properties*

- 2.28. Residents of properties on Benham Road and Flacon View adjacent to and overlooking the site have views across the site beyond fencing and vegetation to rear garden boundaries. Views from the east beyond the adjacent properties are screened by the intervening built form of houses on the western edge of the village.

#### *Blakesley Hill*

- 2.29. As described above and illustrated on LVA Photoviewpoint 1 from the junction of Bury Hill, and Photoviewpoint A (Figure 3) to the north on Blakesley Hill, the site is situated at the gateway to the settlement when arriving at Greens Norton, set beyond the junction with Bury Hill and fronted by a footway and signage at the entrance to the village, with houses on Benham Road beyond. The hedgerow limits views across the site in the foreground when passing adjacent to Bury Hill. Combined with the houses on the eastern boundary, the signage, footway and road junction strengthening the sense of arrival and association with the settlement.

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<sup>16</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, Section 4 Visual Study: Conclusion on Views/Visibility (page 26)

<sup>17</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, Section 4, paragraphs 4.42 – 4.44, page 25



- 2.30. When exiting the village and traveling west along Blakesley Hill, views are focussed along the road towards the farm buildings and wider landscape to the west. There are views across the site above the hedgerow and between hedgerow trees, with houses on Benham Road and Falcon View framing views to the south and filtered views of the wider landscape beyond Bury Hill to the west.

#### *Bury Hill*

- 2.31. When travelling along Bury Hill to the western site boundary, there are some views over the hedgerow across the site towards the settlement edge, although the hedge screens views across the site along much of the length of the boundary. As illustrated by Photoviewpoint C (Figure 3) and LVA Photoviewpoint 4 taken through the gateway to the southwestern boundary, where there are views across the site the houses backing onto it form an abrupt bult edge and backdrop.
- 2.32. As described above, there are characteristic elevated panoramic views across the wider landscape to the west and southwest from Bury Hill (see Photoviewpoints E and F (Figure 3)). Given the nature of the views to the west and the hedgerow to the east screening views across the site, the focus for users of Bury Hill is across the wider landscape, away from the settlement edge.
- 2.33. When travelling north along Bury Hill (Photoviewpoint D), houses to the east of the site and on Flacon View to the southeast forms a developed backdrop, with wider views across the open fields to the west. As illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 3, the rising topography and roadside hedges screen views of the site and adjacent residential edge in views from the south near Bradden Road.

#### **Views from the West**

- 2.34. Despite the elevation of the land on the western edge of Greens Norton, there are only limited publicly available views towards the appeal site and settlement edge from the west beyond Bury Hill. This is due to the lack of public roads and rights of way across the area, as well as the undulating landform which limits distant views when approaching along Blakesley Road.
- 2.35. As a result, views are limited to glimpses from the crest of hills west of the farm at Green's Norton Park (950m distant from the appeal site), and from within 500m on the approach to the village. In these views, the site is seen set against the backdrop of properties on Benham Road and Falcon View that bound the site to the east.

#### **Views from the North**

- 2.36. In expansive panoramic views from the Knightley Way and public footpaths on the rising land 500 – 8000m to the north, rooftops of houses on the northern edge of Greens Norton, east of the appeal site are visible between hedgerows and trees. The western Site boundary along Bury Hill partially visible beyond the undulating topography, set amongst trees and hedgerows in the foreground and along the road (LVA Photoviewpoints 5 and 6). The site



sits below the skyline, with views of distant hills beyond and forms only a small part of the wider panoramic views.

### **Views from the South**

- 2.37. Given the rising land and roadside hedgerows, views towards the appeal site from Bradden Road and Bury Hill to the south are largely screened. This is illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 3 taken from the junction with Bradden Road.
- 2.38. Where there are views towards the appeal site through gateways on Bradden Road the extended rear gardens of properties on Falcon View, agricultural sheds and associated machinery, garden furniture, etc. dominate the foreground, with the houses backing onto the fields and to the east of the site as a backdrop. The hedgerow and trees to the southern site boundary are situated on the skyline beyond (see LVA Photoviewpoint 2).
- 2.39. In views south of Greens Norton on Mill Lane (LVA Photoviewpoint 8) and north of Bengal (LVA Photoviewpoint 7), the intervening settlement and associated vegetation screen the appeal site.
- 2.40. The Pocket Park and bridleway RN22 that connects Bury Hill with Bengal Lane southwest of the village are situated on the lower-lying land towards the Tove Valley, with the rising land to the north limiting views towards the site and development on the western edge of the settlement. This is illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoints 9 and 10.
- 2.41. The Pocket Park comprises young woodland set around several ponds, and is a secluded and enclosed area with little outward visibility. As the bridleway runs west from Bengal, trees and hedgerows filter outward views. There are glimpses of properties on Bradden Road to the south of the village between the trees and undulating land from along the bridleway, as well as the ridges of properties on the elevated land east of the appeal site. Development on the site would be screened by intervening sheds, trees, hedgerows and the landform in the foreground in these glimpse views to the west of the Pocket Park, east of Bury Hill.
- 2.42. In elevated views from the land south of the Tove Valley, 2km distant, the appeal site is visible adjacent to the existing settlement and below the skyline, forming a small part in the wider panorama from the elevated land south of the Tove Valley (LVA Photoviewpoint 11).

### **Visual Receptors**

- 2.43. The LVA has identified those groups of people (visual receptors) who have the potential for their views and visual amenity to be affected by the proposed development. As set-out within the LVA, there are no recognised vantage points or key / important views identified within the Development Plans within which the site is visible<sup>18</sup>.
- 2.44. In considering those views that are likely to be valued at a highly localised level and those people who may be susceptible to visual change, the LVA identifies the following receptors:

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<sup>18</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, para 6.29, page 31: when considering visual sensitivity and those views that may be valued at a localised level



1. Residents of properties adjacent to the site on Benham Road and Flacon View;
2. Users of the Public Rights of Way ref RN24 and RN25 (including a section of the Knightley Way) to the north; and
3. People walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Road and the views obtained when travelling along these routes.

- 2.45. Residents of properties overlooking the site are of a high sensitivity to visual change associated with the proposal. They experience views of the site day-to-day whilst at home and travelling to and from their houses.
- 2.46. The LVA considers users of the Public Rights of Way and Knightley Way to the north to have a high sensitivity to visual change, as they will value the views across the open countryside<sup>19</sup>. However, I would consider on balance that, given the distance, intervening topography limiting views across the site and developed context, combined with the wide panoramic views experienced from these elevated locations, users of these rights of way are of a medium sensitivity to visual change associated with the proposed development.
- 2.47. Despite identifying people walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill as being amongst the most susceptible to visual change associated with the proposed development, the LVA focusses on motorists using these roads. These motorists have been considered within the report as being of a medium visual sensitivity due to their focus being on the road as opposed to the landscape and wider countryside.
- 2.48. Below, I consider the experience and sensitivity of people walking along the roads as part of recreational routes for amenity purposes.

*Recreational Users of Local Paths and Roads*

- 2.49. Residents and people using Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill as part of recreational routes and local walks experience the appeal site in highly localised views when passing the site to the immediate north and west, as well as for a section of Bury Hill further south towards the junction with Bradden Road (see Photoviewpoint D (Figure 3)).
- 2.50. When walking along the footway on Blakesley Hill to the northern boundary, the site is experienced as being on the settlement edge and strongly influenced by the adjacent houses to the eastern boundary. Traffic entering and exiting the village add to the perception of being on the edge of the settlement. Views to the west are focussed along the road, although there are filtered views across the site towards the wider landscape between hedgerow trees and over hedgerows.
- 2.51. As examined in detail above and illustrated on Photoviewpoints E and F (Figure 3), from Bury Hill there are expansive views out across the wider landscape to the west and south. Where there are views across the site, these are towards the settlement edge and limited

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<sup>19</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, paragraph 6.38, page 31



to those obtained from sections of lower hedgerow near the junction with Blakesley Hill to the north, and through a field gate to the southwest (Photoviewpoint C).

- 2.52. Whilst the focus is upon the outward views, where there are views across and towards the site, the residential edge forms an abrupt edge, placing the site into the settlement edge context. The transition between the open countryside and wider landscape is experienced in the view from Bury Hill, with the road acting as a distinct boundary and threshold beyond which there are uninterrupted views across the countryside.
- 2.53. In views obtained at gateways off Bradden Road, the site is seen in the context of properties on Falcon View and Benham Road as a backdrop and the extended gardens, agricultural yard and sheds to the south of the site. As illustrated by Photoviewpoint G (Figure 3), views from Bradden Road are orientated to the south, looking out across the Tove Valley and the rising land beyond. Views towards the site are predominantly screened from view.
- 2.54. As detailed above and illustrated on the Photoviewpoints within the LVA and Figure 3 (Volume 2), for people using the Public Rights of Way to the south of the village, including the Pocket Park and bridleways connecting Bury Hill, Bengal Lane and Bradden Road, views of the site and proposed development will be screened by intervening landform, vegetation and development within Greens Norton.
- 2.55. Views of the site only form a small part of wider walks and routes along the roads and rights of way to the south and west of Greens Norton when passing the site to the north and west on Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill. When using these routes including when passing adjacent to the site the focus is on the characteristic, expansive views across the wider landscape to the south and west of the village. The appeal site does not form a part of these uninterrupted views across the open countryside

## **The Proposed Development**

- 2.56. The proposed development has been designed and developed to respond to the landscape and visual context, incorporating measures to provide an improved settlement edge at the transition with the wider countryside. The proposals include for landscape planting and setting back development with lower building heights and properties fronting onto green space to the site boundaries to reduce the prominence of development.
- 2.57. The planning application was made in outline with all matters reserved except for access. Whilst matters relating to the character, layout and landscape can be detailed at Reserved Matters stage, the proposed development is defined by a set of parameters. These parameters reflect the landscape and visual opportunities and constraints, including landscape buffers and building heights.

### **Outline Parameters**

- 2.58. The Parameters Plan [CD1.03] sets-out the proposed development envelope, landscape buffer and public open space and retained trees and hedgerow, as well as the proposed access and location of Sustainable Drainage features alongside the southern boundary and southwestern corner off the site.



2.59. The landscape buffer and opens space is a minimum width of 10 metres from the boundary hedgerows along the northern and western site boundaries, 15m to the southern boundary and up to 60m from the southwestern corner of the site where the drainage feature is located. The buffers incorporate the canopies and root protection areas of the existing hedgerow trees.

2.60. The parameters also define a 'Green development edge' that is located along the western and southern edges of the proposed development envelope. As set-out on the Parameter Plan, within the green developed edges:

*“Development in this area should be designed to mitigate impacts on surrounding landscape including:*

- *Limiting development to a maximum of 2 storeys*
- *Locating bungalow provision in this area; and*
- *Increased use of detached properties”*

2.61. The parameter plan also includes a 'Residential amenity area' that runs alongside the eastern site boundary adjacent to properties on Benham Road and Falcon View. As set-out on the drawing:

*“Development in this area should be designed to mitigate impacts on the amenity of existing residents including:*

- *Adoption of increased minimum back-to-back spacing standards; and*
- *Introduction of suitable boundary treatments and screening.”*

2.62. Through the above measures, the parameters have responded to the landscape and visual context of the site, ensuring that the proposed development retains existing boundary vegetation, allowing opportunities for additional landscape planting within the landscape buffer and areas of open space as well as space for the maturation of existing hedgerow trees.

2.63. Through the provision of the green development edge alongside the landscape buffers to the west and south of the development envelope with single and two storey ho houses and detached properties, the proposals will provide a softer, varied settlement edge that will provide an improved transition and more positive interface between Greens Norton and the surrounding countryside than currently exists.

### **Illustrative Proposals**

2.64. Building on the parameters, the Illustrative Masterplan [CD1.19] has been prepared to test the design principles and capacity of the site and how development of up to 69 dwellings could be accommodated within the parameters. The Illustrative Masterplan and illustrative proposals included in Section 6 of the Design and Access Statement (DAS) [CD1.04] are



illustrative and are not fixed as part of the outline planning application. The layout, house types and landscape proposals will be approved at Reserved Matters stage.

2.65. Initial design thoughts as set-out within Section 3 of the DAS resulting from the assessment of landscape and visual amenity undertaken by Tyler Grange and which have informed the design principles and are embedding into the illustrative masterplan include the following:

- *Conserve wide panoramic views across the landscape from elevated areas;*
- *Conserve and enhance existing hedgerows and trees;*
- *Conserve predominantly unwooded character;*
- *Conserve diversity of the landscapes' settlement morphologies;*
- *Retain and incorporate church views into green spaces;*
- *Preserve perimeter edges for landscape and filtering of views; and*
- *Create circular walks with areas of natural play*

2.66. As summarised in Section 6 of the DAS:

*"The illustrative layout has been designed to create a gentle transition from the existing urban edge to the east, to the open and more rural setting to the west and south. This is achieved by creating a lower density, less formal and outward looking development frontage to the west and south, creating a softer edge to this edge of the village. (paragraph 6.4)*

*"Primary streets and lane swill be characterised by stronger building lines which frame views through the development; informal lanes/ shared driveways towards the edges of the site are characterised by lower density, informal building lines. The rural character of the southern edge of the site is further accentuated by a mix of detached single and two storey dwellings." (paragraph 6.5)*

*"The privacy and aspect of existing dwellings have been respected, in particular the rear elevations of existing houses on Benham Road where interface distances between habitable elevations will be in accordance with local standards. Additional planting alongside this boundary will also increase privacy and security to existing dwellings." (paragraph 6.7)*

2.67. As illustrated on DAS Figure 17, the illustrative proposals include for a "Rural Edge" character area to the western and southern peripheries of the site. As set-out at paragraph 6.36, dwelling on these edges:

2.68. *"... will feature less formal characteristics, e.g. a looser relationship with alignment of the street, deeper setbacks from the street and more irregular building lines. Appearance will be more organic to respond to the surrounding landscape."*

2.69. The streets are aligned to allow for outward views towards the surrounding landscape.



- 2.70. Illustrative sections on page 63 of the DAS show how properties and private driveways fronting the landscape buffers and open space to the site boundaries may appear.
- 2.71. In relation to “Integration with surrounding landscape and habitats”, the DAS identifies the opportunities to provide setbacks to the western and southern boundaries where there is a greater potential for visual impacts and provide a positive interface between the development and surrounding countryside. The retention of existing hedgerows and trees and supplementing with new native planting will provide a defensible edge to the village and a level of visual screening between the proposals and surrounding countryside.
- 2.72. DAS Figure 21 (page 65) shows an illustrative Landscape Strategy that incorporates the above objectives and design principles within the illustrative layout, including the retained trees and hedgerows, grass and meadow, wetland habitats and sustainable drainage as well as the circular walk, areas for natural play.
- 2.73. The LVA contains a Landscape Strategy (Plan 6) that builds on that contained in the DAS to show indicative proposed native tree planting to site boundaries and within the landscape buffer, as well as areas of wildflower meadow and street trees. The retained hedgerows and trees, and new planting will provide a soft transition to the site boundaries and assimilate the scheme into the landscape.
- 2.74. As summarised in the LVA, Section 5 – Proposals and Benefits<sup>20</sup>, the proposed development has been developed to minimise landscape and visual effects, retaining existing landscape features. The illustrative landscape proposals, which are illustrated on the Landscape Strategy (LVA Plan 6) have been designed to provide a soft transition to the site boundaries and to assimilate the scheme into the landscape. As summarised at paragraph 5.5 of the LVA, the proposals have responded to the landscape and visual baseline and include the following measures:
- *“Existing field boundaries along the northern., western and southern field boundaries will be largely retained, enhanced and managed to help soften the overall appearance of new development;*
  - *The provision of a mix of native hedgerow whips, with additional scattered hedgerow standards and light standards will offer some varied age and height structure whilst enhancing the level of visual containment and improving biodiversity;*
  - *The amenity of residential receptors overlooking the site and the site’s eastern boundary are carefully considered through the consideration of plot orientation and required off-sets. New native screen planting will be provided in certain locations to mitigate the potential visual impact on these receptors;*
  - *The character of the lanes has been respected through retention and enhancement of the hedgerows and setting back of development, with a varied soft edge to provide a more appropriate transition with the countryside than the linear, abrupt settlement that currently exists”*

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<sup>20</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, Section 5, paragraph 5.5, pages 27 and 28



## Landscape and Visual Effects

- 2.75. As recognised in the Officer's Committee Report, the effects of the proposed development are limited and localised, relating to the development of a single field on the edge of Greens Norton. The Committee Report agrees with the findings of the LVA in that the scale of the development and prevailing context is such that that wider landscape harm is limited<sup>21</sup>.
- 2.76. Furthermore, within the Council's Statement of Case, it is recognised that:
- "The proposed development would be relatively self-contained. Visual impact is largely restricted to the immediate locality; impact on the wider landscape is limited."*<sup>22</sup>
- 2.77. The LVA prepared by Tyler Grange accords with this position, with the findings summarising that the proposed development can be accommodated without undue detrimental effects on the wider landscape character area<sup>23</sup> and that:
- "Residential development is not uncharacteristic of the approach to the village from the west, where the existing settlement edge is already clearly apparent. The proposed mitigation planting proposed at the western boundary of the site will provide a softer settlement edge and will assist in assimilating the development into the wider landscape."* (paragraph 7.23)
- "Some localised adverse effects on visual amenity will arise and adjoining residents will experience a change in visual context in which their views over the fields on site are curtailed."* (paragraph 7.25)
- 2.78. In light of the above, I summarise the highly localised landscape and visual effects of the proposed development below, with reference to the LVA and my assessment of the landscape and visual baseline conditions as set out previously.

### Landscape Effects

#### **Local Landscape Character**

- 2.79. The development parameters have responded to the landscape context, incorporating landscape buffers to the western and southern boundaries, with a green development edge that reduces development to a maximum of two storeys, along with bungalow provision and increased use of detached properties. The proposals also incorporate a residential amenity area to the eastern boundary to provide a set-back from the existing properties and allow for landscape planting to mitigate impact on the amenity of existing residents.
- 2.80. As recognised both by the LVA and in the Committee Report<sup>24</sup>, the site itself does not contain any notable, rare or unique features or represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character of the Tove Catchment LCA or the wider

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<sup>21</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.23

<sup>22</sup> SNC Statement of Case, paragraph 7.1, page 9

<sup>23</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, paragraph 7.24, page 34

<sup>24</sup> CD5.01 Committee Report, paragraph 9.21



Undulating Claylands LCT. Those characteristics of the wider landscape that are typified within the site as recognised by the Council's landscape character assessment include the arable land cover and settled characteristics, with the site being situated adjacent to, and strongly influenced by the settlement edge at Greens Norton.

2.81. As described in the LVA when assessing the nature of landscape change at paragraph 6.24:

- *“There will be a loss of existing agricultural land within the site to residential development and short sections of hedgerows along Blakesley Hill to facilitate vehicular access into the site. The features to be lost as a result of development are characteristic of the LCA, but are not rare;*
- *The development will sit against the settled edge of Greens Norton, replacing a portion of agricultural landscape which is commonplace within the wider landscape. The development offset at the western and southern boundaries will soften the edge of the settlement and provide softer and more organic edge to the village;*

2.82. The LVA summarises the effects on the local landscape at paragraphs 6.26 where it states that:

*“Overall, the perception or distinctiveness of the wider LCA would not be compromised. The development would result in localised permanent loss of a single arable field on the settlement edge from agricultural use to residential development. This change in use would not be substantially uncharacteristic with the surrounding landscape, especially in light of the surrounding built development to the east and the scope for mitigation to ensure the settlement edge appears softened on the approach from the west.”*

2.83. I agree with this assessment of the effects of the proposed development upon the local landscape character and context.

2.84. The LVA goes on at paragraph 6.27 to emphasise that, whilst the land use of the site will change, the effects are highly localised, and include for the retention and enhancement of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and copses in line with the guidance contained in the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines which supports adopted policy. For woodland and trees within the Undulating Claylands LCT, the guidelines identify that:

*” Large woodlands are not a characteristic feature, although woodland in surrounding landscape types, small deciduous copses and hedgerow trees can together create the sense of a well-wooded character.”*

2.85. The guidelines include to:

*“Conserve and Enhance the smaller scale woodlands and copses and hedgerow trees that contribute to the changing pattern and mosaic of a perceived local enclosure within a wider open character.”*

2.86. As illustrated on the Landscape Strategy, the proposals allow for the enhancement of existing hedgerows and new tree planting to the site boundaries, reflecting these



characteristics and responding to the guidelines for the area. These will include for the reinstatement the tree-lined hedgerow to the southern site boundary, as shown on historic Ordnance Survey Maps from 1883<sup>25</sup>.

- 2.87. The proposed Landscape Strategy for the proposed development reflects a similar approach that has been adopted by the Mill Lane proposals for up to 76 dwellings (Planning Application No. S/2020/1340/MAO). A copy of the Illustrative Masterplan for the Mill Lane proposals is included at Appendix 1, and shows the boundary landscape planting, buffers and orientation of properties which follow a similar design approach to that for the proposed development at Blakesley Hill.
- 2.88. As illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 8 and recognised by the Council within the Mill Lane development Committee Report [CD8.04] development on Freemans Way approaching Greens Norton from the south provides a visually harsh edge, situated on elevated and prominent land on the approach to Greens Norton<sup>26</sup>.
- 2.89. The Mill Lane application was not refused on landscape grounds, having been reviewed by an independence Landscape Consultant appointed by the Council, who suggested changes to the layout and landscape scheme. With these revisions incorporated into the proposals, the Mill Lane Committee Report summarising that that the proposals provide a betterment in landscape terms that offsets loss of the existing site characteristics<sup>27</sup>.

### ***Relationship to the Settlement***

- 2.90. Having addressed the effects of the proposed development upon the landscape character and identified that the effects are highly localised and will not significantly impact upon the wider area, I consider the proposals and their relationship with the settlement of Greens Norton.
- 2.91. As set out above when considering the effects on the local landscape character, the proposed development relates well to the settlement edge, offering opportunities to provide an improved settlement edge, utilising guidelines as set out in the Council's published guidelines that support local policy.
- 2.92. This assessment is reinforced by the opinion of Officers as stated at paragraph 9.21 of the Committee Report, where it is stated that:
- "... Officers are satisfied that that the proposed development would generally be well-related in visual terms to the existing village."*
- 2.93. As described above and illustrated on the plans, aerial images (Figure 1) and Photoviewpoints, the appeal site is situated at the gateway to the village. Properties on Benham Road adjacent to the site and alongside Blakesley Hill combine with the footway,

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<sup>25</sup>CD1.10: Phase 1 ERA, Appendix 6

<sup>26</sup> CD8.04 - Land off Mill Lane (application S/2020/1340/MA)) Committee Report 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021, paragraph 9.24

<sup>27</sup> CD8.04 - Land off Mill Lane (application S/2020/1340/MA)) Committee Report 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021, paragraph 9.26



speed limit signs and telegraph poles to place the site within the influence of the settlement edge when entering and exiting Greens Norton.

- 2.94. The LVA recognises the influence of these elements on the approach to the village on Blakesley Hill at paragraph 6.24 (fifth bullet):

*“The character of the site is currently influenced by the existing residential context immediately adjacent at the settlement edge of Greens Norton. The presence of road signage which is present as you travel along Blakesley Hill at the gateway into the village also provides settlement edge characteristics and influences over the site.”*

- 2.95. The properties on Benham Road and Falcon View to the eastern site boundary provide an abrupt edge and impact on the character and perception of the site on the settlement edge. Bury Hill to the west of the site forms a defined boundary and clear transition between the edge of settlement landscape and the wider open countryside beyond. This is accentuated by the topography which falls away to the west and southwest of the and wider landscape to the west. As illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 12, this is apparent in views when travelling towards Greens Norton from the west.

- 2.96. The distinct division between the two areas is also illustrated by Photoviewpoints C and D at (Figure 3), with Bury Hill forming a robust and defensible boundary on the edge of the village.

- 2.97. The role of Bury Hill in forming a transition and boundary between the peri-urban / settlement edge landscape of the site and the wider landscape and open countryside to the west is recognised within the Committee Report, which states at paragraph 9.21:

*“The presence of Bury Hill to the immediate west of the application site would provide a substitute for Benham Road in terms of being a long-term defensible edge to the settlement.”*

- 2.98. The Committee Report goes on to recognise the opportunities that the development offers to provide an improved settlement edge:

*“It is also accepted that this edge could be developed in a higher-quality manner than the existing approach into the village, which is characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road. The indicative layout instead shows outward facing properties and managed landscaping, both of which could and would be secured to a high specification in reserved matters.”*

- 2.99. It is worthy of note that the development parameters include for the provision of the necessary landscape buffers, set back and green edges with restrictions on heights and delivery of detached properties and bungalows on the outward facing western and southern boundaries.

- 2.100. Given the above, the proposed development has responded to the character and context in a similar manner to the Mill Lane proposals that were considered acceptable in landscape terms, offering betterment to the character and settlement edge.



- 2.101. Further consideration of those specific matters raised within RfR2 and the Council's Statement of Case are considered further below. These include the setting and character of the settlement and tranquillity.

### **Visual Effects**

- 2.102. I consider the effects upon the views and visual amenity of those groups of people (visual receptors) identified above as having the potential to be affected by the proposed development. These reflect the localised extent of views of the appeal site and proposals. As explored within the LVA and illustrated by the Photoviewpoints, the extent of visibility is limited to views within approximately 800m to the north and west, with the majority of receptors adjacent to the site on Bury Hill and Blakesley Hill when passing the site. In wider views, the site is partially visible, experienced as part of expansive panoramas and in context with the existing settlement. As recognised at paragraph 7.20 of the LVA:

*“Views of the site from the local area are influenced by the existing settlement edge character. Where proposed development will be visible from the local area, it would be seen within the existing built context.”*

- 2.103. This is also reflected in the Committee Report, where Officers recognise that the proposed development would be well-related in visual terms to the existing village<sup>28</sup>.

### **Residents of properties adjacent to the Site on Benham Road and Flacon View**

- 2.104. As assessed by the LVA, the residents of properties adjacent to and overlooking the appeal site will experience adverse visual effects resulting from the loss of their existing views across the site. This would represent a high magnitude of change for these sensitive receptors.
- 2.105. The proposed development incorporates a set-back along the eastern boundary to respect the amenity of these residents and provide for landscape planting to soften and screen the development.
- 2.106. There have been no matters raised by the Council in relation to unacceptable impacts upon residential amenity. The visual effects on residents of Greens Norton will be highly localised and limited to residents of those properties adjacent to and with views of the site.

### **Users of the Public Rights of Way ref RN24 and RN25 (including a section of the Knightley Way) to the north**

- 2.107. For users of these footpaths, which I have assessed as being of a medium sensitivity to the proposed development due to the site forming a small part of wider expansive elevated and panoramic views will be seen in context with existing properties on the western edge of Greens Norton. As summarised by the LVA when considering the nature of visual change associated with the proposals<sup>29</sup>:

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<sup>28</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.21

<sup>29</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, paragraphs 6.4 and 6.48, page 32



*“The rooftops of dwellings at the existing settlement edge are seen sitting amongst existing vegetation, and additional settlement rooftops will not be an uncharacteristic feature in the overall visual context.*

*On completion, built form will be partially visible within a small proportion of an overall wider view which is dominated by the agricultural landscape and scattered vegetation. Upon establishment of the mitigation planting, parts of the development will be filtered from view by new trees.”*

- 2.108. Considering the above, the effects on the views and visual amenity of users of these Public Rights of Way within the wider countryside to the north will be minor.

***Motorists and people walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Road and the views obtained when travelling along these routes.***

*Motorists*

- 2.109. The LVA has assessed the sensitivity of motorists travelling along Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill as being of a medium sensitivity to the proposals, reflecting their focus being on the road and not the wider landscape. I agree with this assessment
- 2.110. When approaching Greens Norton on Blakesley Hill, the proposed development will be visible, set beyond Bury Hill and set against the edge of the village. Given that the existing settlement edge is visible as a backdrop on the skyline, the proposals will not be out of keeping with the character and composition of the views and elements within them. The mitigation planting within the landscape buffers and development offset to the western edge of the site will soften views of the built form. As recognised by the LVA<sup>30</sup> once established the planting to the boundaries will provide a greater extent of softening to the settlement edge than exists at present. Officers have considered that the edge could be developed in a higher-quality manner than at present and that this could be secured at reserved matters stage, including the indicative layout which shows outward facing properties and the landscape offsets and planting<sup>31</sup>.
- 2.111. The establishment of a softer settlement edge will assimilate the development into the wider landscape with the tree planting reflecting guidelines for the area and being characteristic of the landscape, including the reinstatement of trees and tree belts along field boundary hedgerows/, and with Bury Hill forming a defensible boundary to the village.
- 2.112. When approaching the edge of Greens Norton, the proposed development will be experienced as forming part of the gateway to the village, beyond the junction with Bury Hill and set beyond a landscape buffer, with the roadside hedgerows and trees retained, save for the site access. When entering and exiting the village, the proposals will reflect the current character and composition of the views at the edge of the settlement, as illustrated by Photoviewpoints A and B.

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<sup>30</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, paragraph 6.56, page 32

<sup>31</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.21



- 2.113. For motorists travelling along Bury Hill, the roadside hedgerows limit views across the appeal site. Where there are views into and across the site from the road, properties bounding the site and to the south on Benham Road and Flacon View provide a backdrop. This is illustrated by Photoviewpoints C – F, with the views across the wider landscape opening up to the west and southwest. In views from Bury Hill to the south, the site is not visible due to the intervening roadside hedgerows and rising topography, as illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 3.
- 2.114. The proposed development will introduce a new settlement edge and foreshorten views across the site obtained from Bury Hill. However, the context of housing experienced to the east of the road and as a backdrop in these views is established. The proposed mitigation planting wand offsets will filter views of development, with the houses fronting onto opens spaces and delivering a higher quality and less abrupt bult edge. The existing open views across the wider landscape to the west and southwest retained (Photoviewpoints E and F (Figure 3)).

### Walkers

- 2.115. Those people walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill as part of a recreational routes will be of a higher sensitivity to visual change associate with the proposed development than motorist. Their focus will be on views of the landscape with a greater emphasis on visual amenity.
- 2.116. As examined above in relation to the experience of people walking along the local roads and paths to the west and south of Greens Norton, the appeal site and proposed development will only be visible for short sections of the road along Blakesley Hill and when passing the site on Bury Hill.
- 2.117. Whilst the proposed development will result in the change of the appeal site from an agricultural field to a residential development, changes to views and the visual amenity of people walking these routes are in the context of the settlement edge and influence of the existing houses, infrastructure and traffic. Views across the wider countryside and landscape will be retained. Views towards the village from Public Rights of Way to the south, including those of the church spire (LVA Photoviewpoint 7 and Photoviewpoint I (Figure 3)) will be unaffected by the proposals.
- 2.118. When walking along the footway on Blakesley Hill to the north of the site the experience is within the context of entering or exiting the village and not as being within the countryside. Traffic using the road, signage, lighting columns and telegraph poles combine with the housing on Benham Road, that people using the footway will pass, to place the viewer within an edge of settlement context.
- 2.119. The proposals set back houses beyond the existing hedgerow and areas of open space incorporating additional tree planting. The road frontage to Blakesley Hill will retain the character of the approach to the village, although when travelling west out of the village the views across the site and filtered views of the wider landscape to the west will be replaced with the new development, set beyond the areas of open space and new tree planting.



- 2.120. The focus of the views from Bury Hill and Bradden Road are the elevated, panoramic views across the wider landscape to the west and south. These are recognised as characteristics of the local landscape by the Current Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy and Guidelines that are to be conserved and enhanced. The proposed development will not affect any of these outward views.
- 2.121. Views from Bury Hill and Bradden Road to the south are limited by the topography and roadside trees and hedgerows. Where there are views towards the site from these sections of road, they are in the context of the existing linear built edge formed by properties on Falcon View and paraphernalia within the open rear gardens of properties and agricultural yard and outbuildings.
- 2.122. Further to the south, views are enclosed by the topography and vegetation along the bridleway and within the Pocket Park. The proposed development will have no discernible effect on the visual amenity of users of the pocket park or people travelling along the rights of way south of Bradden Road.
- 2.123. The scheme includes for the provision of a circular walk within areas of open space, offering an alternative to walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill, with views between trees along Bury Hill out across the wider landscape retained and opportunities for natural play and areas of wetland habitat and grassland. The areas of open space with the proposed development offer a variety of informal recreation opportunities and amenities that are not currently available for people who use the local roads for walks.



# Section 3: Responding to the Reasons for Refusal and Disputed Matters

## Landscape Value

- 3.1. It has been established through the Planning Statement of Common Ground that the appeal site is not a valued landscape in respect of paragraph 170a of the NPPF. The site and surrounding landscape is not designated for its landscape quality or value at either a national, statutory level or local non-statutory level.
- 3.2. Furthermore, the Council's 2017 Review of Special Landscape Areas [CD6.21] found that the land surrounding Greens Norton did not meet the criteria thresholds to justify consideration for designation as a Special Landscape Area.
- 3.3. Agreement is sought in the LSoCG between the Council and the Appellant that the site does not contain any landscape characteristics that are particularly valued at a landscape character area scale for the Tove Catchment LCA or the Undulating Claylands LCT. This was recognised by Officers within the Committee Report [CD5.01]<sup>32</sup>
- 3.4. As recognised by the analysis in the LVA that uses the landscape value factors set out within published guidance at Box 5.1 of the GLVIA<sup>33</sup>, the site is generally ordinary and contains no features or attributes that raise it above being of local value and low importance. I provide an additional assessment of landscape value using the GLVIA Box 5.1 approach below when considering attributes of particular significance to the setting of Greens Norton.
- 3.5. Despite the above, RfR2 and the Council's SoC both identify that the proposals will harm the distinctive character of the landscape west of Greens Norton and conflict with JCS Policy R1 and LLP2 Policy SS2.
- 3.6. These policies require proposed development to:
  1. not affect open land which is of "*particular significance*" to the form and character of the village; nor
  2. result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of "*particular significance*" to the form and character of the settlement.
- 3.7. In order to address the emphasis placed upon those areas of land and views that are of "*particular significance*" to the form and character of the village, I give additional consideration to landscape value below, with reference to the following JCS and Local Plan

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<sup>32</sup> CD5.01 – Committee Report, paragraph 9.21

<sup>33</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (2013) The Landscape Institute and IEMA – Box 5.1 'Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes', page 84



evidence base documents. These include those that are mentioned within the supporting text to LLP2 Policy SS2 (1a):

1. The Review of Special Landscape Areas in South Northamptonshire [CD6.21];
2. Greens Norton Village Design Statement [CD6.10] a copy of which is included at Appendix 1 of this Proof of Evidence; and
3. The Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines [CD6.23]

## **South Northamptonshire: A Review of Special Landscape Areas**

### ***SLA Assessment Criteria***

- 3.8. The SLA Review sets-out a set of criteria and factors that were considered to establish whether the existing SLAs and candidate areas met the required threshold for designation<sup>34</sup>. These largely reflect the factors for identifying valued landscapes as set-out in Box 5.1 of GLVIA , comprising the following criteria and factors as set-out at the table at paragraph 2.3 of the Review:

1. *Distinctiveness*: The quality and distinctiveness of an areas landscape character that gives identity and sense of place.

Factors include:

- Distinct landform or typography forming a discreet and recognisable area
- Rare / unique landscape type or landscape / features in the local context
- Strongly representative or distinctive of South Northamptonshire's landscape

2. *Perceptual Character*: The qualities of the landscape experienced.

Factors include:

- Tranquillity, relative remoteness and lack of intrusion.

3. *Landscape and Scenic Quality*: Distinct scenic and aesthetic qualities which add value to the area and associations with special landscape and visual qualities associated with the local landscape.

Factors Include:

- Strong visual character with memorable, important or distinctive views

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<sup>34</sup> CD6.21 - South Northamptonshire: A Review of Special Landscape Areas, Table at paragraph 2.3 'Criteria, pages 6 and 7



- An intact landscape with characteristic elements in good condition.
  - Absence of incongruous elements or incongruous features not visually intrusive.
4. *Natural Character*: Special natural characteristics / designations which add value to the landscape value.

Factors include:

- Strong character linked to natural factors.
  - Strong degree of naturalness contributing to landscape quality – habitats / land cover.
5. *Cultural Character*: Landscape value which is enhanced through special characteristics and designations.

Factors include:

- Strong character linked to cultural factors which contribute to understanding of historic character.
6. *Function*: Features and aspects that contribute or give character to the local landscape context.

Factors include:

- Special function as a setting to designated landscapes.
- Visual backdrop
- Open gap.
- Aspects with special value for recreation and amenity.

### ***Assessment of Landscape Value against the SLA Criteria***

- 3.9. Greens Norton and the surrounding area, including land extending as far as Billesley 3.5km to the west, was assessed as an area considered for inclusion in the Catesby, Fawsley, Maidford & Litchborough SLA. However, the area did not reflect the character of the SLA or meet the criteria for designation.
- 3.10. The SLA Review identifies the criteria for the land within the Catesby, Fawsley, Maidford & Litchborough SLA as including the following (page 42):

#### ***Distinctiveness:***

- *“The area displays rural value with dispersed rural settlements and the use of ironstone for local buildings. The hedgerows define the field pattern area punctuated with mature*



*trees which meander through the landscape following the contours and give character and identity. A strong sense of rural place is created with the experience of the gentle undulations and shallow valleys throughout the landscape. “*

**Perceptual Character:**

- *“A strong sense of rural tranquillity given by the quiet and intimate settlements that dot the landscape which have no intrusion of larger development. The undulating landscape creates varying experiences of exposure and security, supported by the varied tree form of the landscape from mature hedgerows to woodland clusters.”*

**Landscape and scenic quality:**

- *“Undulations of rolling landform,*
- *Deep valley views across the landscape,*
- *Native hedgerows and hedgerow trees,*
- *Hedgerow trees of mature age.”*

**Natural Character:**

- *“Pockets of woodlands, Old Farm barns and farm houses”.*

**Cultural Character:**

- *“Small intimate villages,*
- *Churches in villages, the church spires punctuate / blend in with the skyline. “*

**Function:**

- *“Scattering of historical sites,*
- *Good network of public rights of way,*
- *Serves a network of wildlife sites and ancient woodlands.”*

3.11. **Landscape Qualities** identified by the Review that create a sense of place include:

- *“Big open views of the undulating landscape,*
- *Strong woodland features,*
- *The historical villages of Adstone, Maidford, Litchborough, Blakesly, Moreton Pinkney and Woodend. “*



## Summary

- 3.12. Given the above, it is apparent that the SLA Review identified the areas containing small, intimate and rural settlements and with intact and distinctive landscapes as meeting the criteria for designation as an SLA.
- 3.13. The Review also recognises the importance of the tranquillity of these smaller settlements and their quiet and intimate character, with no intrusion of larger development.
- 3.14. Settlements such as Greens Norton which include larger development were excluded from the SLA. It is apparent that the criteria were not met as these settlements and associated development were considered to influence the scenic quality of the landscape as well as the perceptual character, causing intrusion and influencing the tranquillity and relative remoteness of the landscape.
- 3.15. Modern development on the edges of Greens Norton, including that adjacent to the appeal site could be considered to be areas of “larger development” within settlements that influences the scenic quality and tranquillity of the landscape, as recognised by the SLA Review.

## Landscape Value of the Appeal Site

- 3.16. As recognised within the assessment of Landscape Value Indicators contained in the LVA<sup>35</sup> the appeal site is influenced by the adjacent settlement edge, with the site seen in the context of the existing residential properties, being well related to the built form and with the existing road network separating it from the wider landscape.
- 3.17. The landscape value factors are defined by GLVIA at Box 5.1 as follows<sup>36</sup>:
- *Landscape Quality (Condition)*: A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
  - *Scenic Quality*: The term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily, but not wholly the visual senses).
  - *Rarity*: The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type.
  - *Representativeness*: Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples.
  - *Conservation interests*: The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape as well as having value in their own right.

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<sup>35</sup> CD1.09 – Landscape and Visual Appraisal, paragraphs 6.6 – 6.19

<sup>36</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - Box 5.1, page 84



- *Recreational value:* Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.
- *Perceptual aspects:* A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and/or tranquillity.
- *Associations:* Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.

3.18. I provide a summary of the landscape value of the appeal site below, building on the LVA and using the factors as set-out in GLVIA Box 5.1:

### **1. Landscape Quality**

- The landscape quality of the appeal site is typical of agricultural land on the edge of the settlement, containing widely present characteristic features of the Undulating Claylands LCT and Tove Catchment LCA<sup>37</sup>, including managed hedgerows containing hedgerow trees.
- The abrupt settlement edge and influence of the village to immediate east, as well as residential gardens and horse paddocks to the south place the site in an urban fringe context.
- Bury Hill that bounds the site to the west provides separation with the wider landscape.

### **2. Scenic Quality**

- The scenic quality of the appeal site is influenced by the settlement edge.
- The site does not form part of any identified important views to or from the settlement.
- Views towards the church spire obtained from Blakesley Road are screened by intervening vegetation and built form whilst passing the site. Where the church is seen from the road, it is not across the site area.
- Publicly available elevated views across the wider landscape are obtained from Bury Road and Bradden Road looking west and south away from the site.
- The appeal site does not comprise land identified as an Important Open Space and is representative of edge of settlement agricultural land.

### **3. Rarity and Representativeness**

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<sup>37</sup> As defined by the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment (CD6.22)



- The landscape of the appeal site does not contain any rare or unusual landscape features or element. It is an agricultural field on the edge of the settlement, bounded by native hedgerows and trees. These are all recognised as typical features within the local landscape and the Tove Catchment LCA.

#### **4. Conservation Interests**

- The site is not identified as being of heritage or archaeological importance and is of limited value for wildlife, comprising arable land bound by managed hedgerows.

#### **5. Recreation Value**

- The appeal site has no public access and therefore is of no recreational value.
- Whilst the local roads and paths are used for walking around the village and accessing the local countryside, the site does not facilitate the use of these nor limit access to the landscape.

#### **6. Perceptual Aspects**

- As detailed above and illustrated by Photoviewpoints E, F and G (Figure 3), the appeal site does not contribute to or facilitate the characteristic unobstructed, open expansive views across the wider landscape that are obtained from Bury Hill and Braden Road across the wider landscape to the west and south of Greens Norton.
- The appeal site is experienced on the settlement edges and at the gateway to the village, relating to the current built development, separated from the wider countryside by Bury Hill.

3.19. None of the above indicate the appeal site is of any greater value than that considered by the LVA as being of Low – Local Importance and represents an ordinary field on the settlement edge.

3.20. Furthermore, as noted above, the criteria assessed within the Review of Special Landscape Areas include consideration of tranquillity, relative remoteness and lack of intrusion, with the areas excluded from the SLA including larger settlements such as Greens Norton. The perceptual character of the areas within the SLA is of quiet and intimate settlements which have no intrusion of larger development.

## **Attributes of Particular Significance to the Character and Setting of Greens Norton**

### **Contribution of the Appeal Site to Open Spaces and Important Views**

3.21. LPP2 Policy SS2 1(a) requires development to not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces or important views of particular significance to the form and character of the settlement. JCS Policy R1(b) reflects the requirements of Policy SS2,



requiring development to not affect open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village.

- 3.22. The supporting text to Policy SS2 refers to the use of Village Design Guides and Conservation Area Appraisals in identifying areas of land, open spaces and views of particular significance to the form and character of the settlements<sup>38</sup>. Those documents of relevance to Greens Norton are examined below.
- 3.23. There are no conservation areas within Greens Norton. An assessment undertaken by the Council in 2017 found that the village does not fulfil the criteria for designation<sup>39</sup>.

### **Greens Norton Village Design Guide**

- 3.24. The Greens Norton Village Design Guide (a copy of which is included at Appendix 2 of this Proof of Evidence) includes a map which identifies footpaths / bridleways, views, Important Open Spaces, listed buildings and other significant buildings.

- 3.25. The design guide states that:

*“Greens Norton is fortunate in having two attractive open spaces on its southern edge, both crossed by well used footpaths. More recently a pocket park has been created at the end of Bengal Lane on the site of an old brickyard where over 150 young trees have been planted. The village is also the focal point for two long distance footpaths where Grafton Way and Knightley Way come together.”*

- 3.26. As illustrated on the map contained within the design guide, the two identified areas of ‘Important Open Space’ to the south of the village are situated on land west of Mill Lane, comprising land extending to Bengal Lane, and on the southwestern edge to the north of Bengal Manor and south of properties on Smithfield Court.
- 3.27. The areas of Important Open Space are crossed by footpaths connecting with the village centre and wider public rights of way network, bounded by roads and tracks and contained within the extents of development on Bengal Lane which include properties at Bengal and Bengal Manor to the southwest. The open spaces are situated within areas of established vegetation, trees and woodland at the settlement edge.
- 3.28. The areas of opens space are situated to the south of the village and do not relate to the appeal site to the west of the settlement which is separated physically and visually by landform and vegetation.
- 3.29. A view looking southwest across the valley from the bridleway on the edge of the open space connecting Bengal Lane and Bradden Road is also identified. The view is orientated to look away from the appeal site, which is situated to the northwest.

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<sup>38</sup> CD6.04 - South Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2, 2011-2029 paragraph 3.3.2, page 28

<sup>39</sup> An Assessment of Greens Norton to consider whether it is suitable for Conservation Area Designation, 2017



- 3.30. The view from the bridleway is included at Photoviewpoint H (Figure 3) and highlights the importance place don views to the south away from the settlement and towards the wider rolling landscape, as emphasised by the Current Northamptonshire Landscape Strategy and Guidelines and as illustrated by Photoviewpoints E-H (Figure 3). The appeal site does not form part of any of these views.
- 3.31. As illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 7, taken from footpath RN18 west of Bengal, the site is screened in views from this location to the south of the village, set beyond intervening landform, trees and properties on Bradden Road.
- 3.32. The pocket park is situated to the southwest of Greens Norton, accessed along a Bridleway and is situated towards the bottom of the valley in an area that is distinct from and separated physically and visually from the western edge of the village where the appeal site is situated. This is illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoints 9 and 10.

### **The Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines**

- 3.33. I have also considered the Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines for the 'Undulating Claylands Landscape Character Type' to identify and particular features that may be of particular significance to the value of the landscape, character and setting of Greens Norton.
- 3.34. As set-out within the LSoCG, it is agreed with the Council that the site does not contain any landscape characteristics that are particularly valued at a landscape character area scale for the Tove Catchment LCA or the Undulating Claylands LCT.
- 3.35. One of the Key Landscape Character Features identified for the Undulating Claylands LCT is:
- “Wide panoramic views across elevated areas, although the undulating landform creates more contained and intimate areas.”*
- 3.36. The Landscape Strategy for the Undulating Claylands include that:
- “Intrusion of development onto the more elevated sections and interflues within the Undulating Claylands should be resisted to retain the open unobstructed views to the wider landscape.”*
- 3.37. The Landscape Guidelines in relation to Landform and Views are to:
- **“Conserve wide panoramic views across the landscape from elevated areas; and**
  - **Enhance the contrast between open elevated areas and more intimate and visually contained areas along shallow valleys by appropriate land management regimes and development planning.”**
- 3.38. As considered above and illustrated by Photoviewpoints E, F and G (Figure 3) there are wide panoramic views ac cross the landscape to the west and south of Greens Norton from



Bury Hill as it passes the appeal site (Photoviewpoint E) and further to the south (Photoviewpoint F), as well as from Bradden Road, looking southwards (Photoviewpoint G).

- 3.39. The proposed development will not impact upon these unobstructed, open views and will conserve these key landscape characteristics in line with the guidelines.
- 3.40. The existing settlement edge to the west of Greens Norton sits on the elevated land and forms a backdrop in views from the surrounding landscape. The appeal site is perceived within the built edge context and does not share the characteristic openness of those elevated areas within the wider undeveloped landscape.
- 3.41. Whilst the appeal site and land on the western edge of Greens Norton are influenced by the built context, the proposals will retain the contrast that exists with the character and views to and from the lower-lying valley areas to the south of Greens Norton including the Pocket Park. The woodland and trees within the park and hedgerows and trees along the Public Rights of Way and to field boundaries create an intimate and enclosed character. In views out of these areas to the north, the appeal site is screened by intervening topography, vegetation and built form. The proposed development will be set beyond these, with mitigation tree planting to the site boundaries, strengthening the treed skyline.
- 3.42. The Landscape Guidelines for the Undulating Claylands LCT also include for:
- “Conserving and enhancing small scale woodlands, copses and hedgerow trees.”*
- 3.43. The proposed development conserves the existing boundary hedgerows and hedgerow trees, save for that required for access on Blakesley Hill. These will be enhanced with further tree planting within areas of open space and development set-backs alongside the site boundaries. As detailed above, this includes the reinstatement of a line of hedgerow trees / tree belt to the southern site boundary as shown on historic mapping,
- 3.44. As illustrated on the landscape strategy contained in the LVA, the proposed mitigation planting will strengthen the treed skyline as experienced from lower-lying areas to the south and provide an improved transition to the wider landscape through the softening of the settlement edge. This has been identified by Officers within the Committee Report as a higher-quality edge than exists at present<sup>40</sup>.

### Summary

- 3.45. The review of evidence base documents that support the Development Plan has also identified that:
1. There are no areas of Important Open Space on the western edge of Greens Norton. As illustrated on the plan at Appendix 2, those areas that are identified within the Greens Norton Village Design Guide are situated to the southern edge of the village and are physically and visually separated from the appeal site.

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<sup>40</sup> CD5.01 - Committee Report, paragraph 9.21



2. The design guide also identifies the pocket park to the south of the village at the end of Bengal Lane<sup>41</sup>. As illustrated by LVA Photoviewpoint 9) and examined at Section 2 of this proof of evidence the appeal site is not intervisible with the pocket park due to enclosing trees and woodland and the valley landform which rises to the north.
3. Important Views identified by the Design Guide look to the southwest, away from the appeal site (see Photoviewpoint H (Figure 3)). The site is not visible in views from areas identified as Important Open Spaces to the south of Greens Norton, or the footpaths and bridleways that cross the area due to intervening landform, vegetation and development (see LVA Photoviewpoint 7).
4. Wide panoramic views across the landscape from elevated areas are a key characteristic of the Undulating Claylands LCT. Guidelines for the area are to conserve these views<sup>42</sup>. As demonstrated through the analysis of the landscape and visual context at Section 2 and illustrated on Photoviewpoints E, F and G (Figure 3), there are unobstructed open and expansive views across the wider landscape to the west and south of Greens Norton from Bury Hill and Bradden Road. The appeal site does not feature in these views, which look out across the wider landscape and away from the settlement edge.

3.46. The appeal site and land to the west of Greens Norton is not positively identified within any of the documents that I have reviewed, and which support the development plan as being of “particular significance” to the character and setting of the village. Indeed, those areas that are of significance are identified as being to the south of the village where there are several open spaces, including the pocket park and several Public Rights of Way crossing the open spaces and connecting with the wider rights of way network.

3.47. Officer’s comments made in the Committee Report support the above, recognising at paragraph 9.21 that:

- Development on the appeal site would be well-related in visual terms to the existing village;
- The site does not represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character area (the Tove Catchment of undulating claylands); and
- The existing approach to the village is characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road. There are opportunities to develop the settlement edge in a higher-quality manner.

***The Council’s approach to identifying Particular Significance – Land off Mill Lane***

3.48. The above features associated with the appeal site and land west of Greens Norton closely reflect those set-out within the committee report for the Mill Lane application, which at paragraph 9.24 identifies the application site as not being considered of “particular

<sup>41</sup> CD6.10 - Greens Norton Village Design Guide, page 1, fourth paragraph

<sup>42</sup> CD6.23 - Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines, Undulating Claylands (pages 30-34)



significance” to the character of Greens Norton or the wider character of the Tove Catchment. These include:

- Elevated and prominent entrance to the village; and
- Modern housing on Freeman’s Way providing a visually harsh edge with side and rear elevations facing the open countryside with limited landscaping.

3.49. The Mill Lane committee report goes on to then consider that the proposals, which include for outward facing dwellings, copious amounts of landscaping that would create a more defensible edge, making the countryside less susceptible to future development and representing a betterment. The proposals are also recognised as providing a more sympathetic edge south of Greens Norton<sup>43</sup>.

3.50. When considering whether the site at Mill Lane is of any “particular significance” to the character of Greens Norton, Officers do not appear to give any weight to the fact that the site at Mill Lane is traversed by a public footpath that forms part of the Grafton Way long distance footpath, and being situated opposite one of the areas identified as an Important Open Space on the approach to the village along Mill Lane (see Village Design Guide at Appendix 2) .

3.51. The appeal site at Blakesley Hill does not share any of these attributes or sensitivities. It is therefore not clear how the Council have arrived at a different conclusion for the appeal site and land west of Greens Norton, which their Statement of Case identifies as “significant to the form and character of Greens Norton”<sup>44</sup>.

3.52. This demonstrates an inconsistency in approach taken by the Council in their application of policy and weight that is given to the supporting evidence base.

### **Tranquillity of the Appeal Site**

3.53. The Committee Report (paragraph 9.23) and Council’s SoC (paragraph 7.3) both consider that the approach to the western edge of Greens Norton is relatively more tranquil than other approaches into and out of the village and is therefore more susceptible to the harmful effects of development than other greenfield land located on the edge of the village.

3.54. JCS Policy S1D (4) states that: *“New development in the rural areas will be limited with the emphasis being on... (4) Respecting the Quality of Tranquillity.”*

3.55. However, neither the Committee Report nor Decision Notice cited tranquillity conflict with Policy S1 as a Reason for Refusal. This reflects the influence of the settlement edge and roads upon the tranquillity of the appeal site, with the Committee Report identifying that,

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<sup>43</sup> CD8.04 - Land off Mill Lane (application S/2020/1340/MA)) Committee Report 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021, paragraph 9.24

<sup>44</sup> Council Statement of Case, paragraph 7.6



although in the Councils' opinion the western edge of the settlement is of relatively higher tranquillity, the prevailing context limits harm:

*"It is commonly accepted by all parties that this western edge of Greens Norton is more tranquil than other approaches into/out of the village, and is thus more susceptible to harmful effects from development. However, Officers are of the view that the reduction in size of the development and prevailing context is such that wider landscape harm is limited, as per the findings of the submitted LVIA."* (paragraph 9.23)

3.56. It should be noted that it is unclear which parties the Committee Report is referring to when it states that it is "commonly accepted by all parties" that the western edge of Greens Norton is more tranquil than other approaches. To the best of my knowledge, is not a matter that has either been accepted, or agreed by the appellant.

3.57. Despite the above, the Council's SoC states that the proposal conflicts with Policy S1D (1) and (4): "... by virtue of its harm to the distinctive character of the landscape west of Green Norton and harm to tranquillity". (paragraph 7.5)

3.58. The Council's SoC, considers the context within which tranquillity may be affected as being the experience of local people using the local roads for walking, stating that:

*"Paths and roads near the site are well-used by members of the public for amenity purposes. In particular, walking along Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Road is a logical circuit for local residents to enjoy the rural environs of their village. Development of the site would urbanise and reduce the tranquillity of this amenity."* (paragraph 7.3)

3.59. The SoC does not provide any further details setting out the quality of the tranquillity experienced by those walking along these local roads. However, at paragraph 7.9, the SoC summarises that:

*"... the development will result in localised landscape harm via the permanent loss of a tranquil, undeveloped field that forms an area of transition between the edge of Greens Norton and open countryside."*

### **Relative Tranquillity of Approaches into and out of Greens Norton**

3.60. No further details of what is meant by the relative tranquillity of the western edge of Green Norton in the context of the "approaches into / out of the village" are given in either the Committee Report or Council's SoC. The emphasis appears to be upon the approach to Greens Norton on Blakesley Hill and the volume of traffic using the local roads. This is supported by the Committee Report for the Mill Lane application<sup>45</sup> (Ref. S/2020/1340/MA)) which states that:

*"The approach into the village on Mill Lane is also less tranquil than, for example, Blakesley Hill to the west where a separate major housing proposal was recently considered. Mill Lane*

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<sup>45</sup> CD8.04 - Land off Mill Lane (application S/2020/1340/MA)) Committee Report 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021, paragraph 9.24



*is well-trafficked being the main route between the A433 trunk road and the urban area of Towcester.”*

- 3.61. The traffic data included within the Traffic Assessment<sup>46</sup> [CD1.16] indicates that during peak hours there is not a substantial variance in the two-way traffic flow data for the various roads in and out of Greens Norton. The data, which was obtained on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, shows the following:
- Blakesley Hill AM peak = 205 vehicles; PM peak = 183 vehicles
  - High Street (South of Towcester Road) AM peak = 290 vehicles; PM peak = 282 vehicles
  - Towcester Road (East of High Street) AM peak = 313 vehicles; PM peak = 278 vehicles
- 3.62. The data shows that the difference between Blakesley Hill and the High Street, south of Towcester Road is less than 100 vehicles an hour (85 fewer on Blakesley Road during the morning peak between 7.45am – 8.45am, and 99 fewer between 4.30pm and 7.30pm). This equates to fewer than two vehicles less per minute during the busiest times of day.
- 3.63. I consider that this relative difference in traffic volumes would not make the western edge of Greens Norton and the appeal site perceptibly less tranquil than other approaches to the village as experienced by users of local paths and roads.

### **Tranquillity of the Appeal Site**

- 3.64. I set out below an assessment of the tranquillity of the site and its environs and consider the impacts of the appeal proposal upon the tranquillity as may be perceived by people using the local roads for recreation and amenity purposes. The Council’s SoC identifies Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Road as a logical circuit for local residents to enjoy the rural environs of the village.
- 3.65. As recognised by the Review of Special Landscape Areas<sup>47</sup> larger villages, including Greens Norton do not reflect the rural tranquillity associated with the quiet and intimate settlements within the wider landscape that have no intrusion of larger development. The hard linear edge and modern housing developments in Greens Norton influence the rural character and tranquillity on the edges of the settlement.
- 3.66. As described in Section 2 and illustrated by Photoviewpoints A and B (Figure 3), the appeal site is situated at the gateway to Greens Norton when travelling along Blakesley Hill. Properties on Banham Road form an abrupt, defined edge and backdrop in local views of the site. To the east of the junction with Bury Hill (north of the site), speed limit signage, lighting columns, telegraph poles and the surfaced footway set into the roadside verge along Blakesley Hill combine with the housing and traffic using the road to reinforce the

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<sup>46</sup> CD1.16 - Transport Assessment, Hub transport planning (report T20510 Rev B0 15.07.2020 – Appendix A: Traffic Survey Data

<sup>47</sup> CD6.21 - South Northamptonshire: A Review of Special Landscape Areas, June 2017, pages 41-45



edge of settlement context and reduce the sense of tranquillity experienced by people walking along the roadside footway or entering or exiting the village.

- 3.67. When experiencing the landscape from Bury Hill to the west of the site, the focus upon the open expansive views to the west and southwest provides a connection to the wider landscape and contribute to tranquillity. However, the influence of the built edge and properties on Benham Road and Falcon View is present and discernible as an abrupt transition adjoining the fields to the east of the road, thus placing those walking along Bury Hill within the settlement edge context. Vehicles using Bury Road, as well as those audible and visible using Blakesley Hill and Bradden Road further reduce the sense of tranquillity.
- 3.68. Travelling along Bury Hill towards Bradden Road to the south, the settlement edge becomes less apparent due to the topography and enclosure by roadside hedgerows. Similarly, when walking along Bradden Road, the views outwards to the south across the wider landscape and tall roadside hedgerows limiting views to the north create a more tranquil experience, although the settlement edge and views between gates to gardens and properties on Falcon View have an increasing influence to the east when travelling towards the village. The appeal site is not experienced a spart of these more tranquil stretches of the loop walk along Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Road, being situated beyond intervening hedgerows and beyond the sloping landform north of the lane.
- 3.69. As described above, whilst there is some variance in the levels of tranquillity that may be experienced when walking a route along Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Road, walkers are within an area that is influenced by the settlement edge and traffic, relating the experience more to the village environs than the wider landscape and open countryside beyond. The main elements and experiences that contribute to tranquillity are the expansive, open views that can be obtained when looking out across the landscape from Bury Hill and Bradden Road.
- 3.70. Areas of higher tranquillity may be experienced to the south of Greens Norton within the more enclosed and intimate valley with the pocket park and Rights of Way passing between fields of pasture, grazing and meadows and set within areas of woodland. There is a greater sense of being in the countryside with less intrusions and greater sense of peace and quiet.
- 3.71. The proposed development will not impact upon the tranquillity of these areas, that are separated from and not intervisible with the site.
- 3.72. James Parker of Hub Transport Planning has prepared a technical note responding to highway issues raised by Rule 6/Third parties. Mr Parker identifies that the majority of traffic generated by the proposed development will travel into the village along Blakesley Hill (paragraph 1.9) and that this will result in a negligible impact on the operation of the highway network through the village, even during peak hours (paragraph 1.11).
- 3.73. The low levels of additional traffic generated by the development, combined with most of these vehicles using Blakesley Hill to the east travelling in and out of the village will have a negligible effect on the perceived tranquillity of Bury Hill, Benham Road and Blakesley Hill to the west of the settlement.



- 3.74. Whilst the proposed development will result in the development of the site, extending the settlement along Blakesley Hill and towards Bury Hill, the uninterrupted outward views and connections with the wider landscape will not be affected. People using the local roads for recreation will still be able to enjoy the countryside on the edge of the village and continue along the roads to the south to enjoy the more tranquil areas in the valley to the south and explore the rights of way network.
- 3.75. The setting back of development from the site boundaries beyond new tree planting and areas of open space including meadow grassland and attenuation ponds managed for wildlife will provide a soft transition and appropriate edge to the settlement. Users of the roads will continue to experience the landscape within an edge of settlement context with the associated vehicles and houses along the routes.
- 3.76. The appeal site is not situated within a tranquil landscape. The proposals will not significantly affect tranquillity as perceived by these walkers, with the main positive contributors to tranquillity including views across the wider landscape and natural landscape and trees being retained.

### ***Susceptibility***

- 3.77. As set-out above, the Council consider the western edge of Greens Norton to be more susceptible to the harmful effects of urbanising development than other approaches into and out of the village due to being more tranquil.
- 3.78. GLVIA defines susceptibility to change as:
- “... the ability of the landscape receptor (whether it be the overall character or quality / condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element and/or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and / or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies.”* (paragraph 5.40)
- 3.79. As set-out in the GLVA definition above, it is important to determine the susceptibility of the landscape to the specific proposals being considered. This allows for the assessment to take account of the local context and how the proposed development fits within it.
- 3.80. It is unclear as to how the purported relatively greater tranquillity associated with lower traffic levels on Blakesley Hill makes the western edge of Greens Norton more susceptible to harm from the urbanising development. As set-out above, the traffic flow data contained in the Transport Assessment has demonstrated that there is not a substantial difference in traffic movements on the various roads in and out of Greens Norton during peak hours.
- 3.81. The settlement edge west of Greens Norton formed by properties adjoining the appeal site is abrupt and defined, being visible on the approaches to the settlement, and therefore reduces tranquillity. The regular use of the roads and paths for recreation and walking by local residents will also serve to reduce tranquillity to some extent.



- 3.82. As well as tranquillity the landscape susceptibility of the western edge of the village to the proposed development will also relate to the nature of the settlement edge, the interface with the adjacent countryside and recognised strategies and policies, including retaining outward views across the wider landscape and protecting areas of important open space and recognised views.
- 3.83. The LVA assesses the site and local landscape as having a “Medium” susceptibility to the proposed development (paragraph 6.23). The LVA defines medium susceptibility as:
- ” The proposed development has a degree of consistency with the existing scale, pattern, grain, land use of the prevailing character, although mitigation may be appropriate to enhance assimilation.”*
- 3.84. This reflects the influence of the adjacent settlement upon the character and perception of the site, its relationship to the settlement at the gateway on Blakesley Hill and separation from the wider landscape and containment by Bury Hill.
- 3.85. Those key characteristics and open, expansive views across the wider landscape identified by the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Strategies and Guidelines as experienced when travelling along Bury Hill and Bradden Road will not be impacted on by the proposed development. The appeal site and proposals will not affect the character and experience when using the pocket park and travelling along rights of way to the south of the village, nor impact important views and areas of open space identified in the Greens Norton Village Design Guide.
- 3.86. Furthermore, the proposals have been designed to respond to the landscape context to include the incorporation of a development offset to the west and south incorporating a landscape buffers, tree planting and open space.

### **The Extent of Harm to the Local Landscape Character Setting to the West of Greens Norton**

- 3.87. RFR2 states that the proposed development would result in localised landscape harm arising from the loss of the appeal site that forms part of the “open countryside setting” of Greens Norton. The Committee Report and SoC both consider that the existing settlement edge and interface formed by properties on Benham Road is well established. The SoC embellishes this description by stating that the appeal site is a “tranquil”.
- 3.88. As recognised by Officers within the Committee Report, the proposals will be well-related visually to the settlement and offer opportunities to provide an improved settlement edge alongside the defensible boundary of Bury Hill and which will include outward facing properties overlooking and fronting onto areas of open space and with reinforcement of the existing planting to provide a transitional edge with the wider landscape.
- 3.89. As established above and informed by a review of the evidence base (Greens Norton Village Design Guide, and Landscape Character Guidelines and Strategies), the appeal site is not of any particular significance or value to the setting and character of Greens Norton.



- 3.90. The site does not comprise or contribute to any Important Open Spaces or identified Important Views.
- 3.91. The existing settlement edge to the eastern boundary of the site is abrupt, with properties backing onto the field providing a hard, linear boundary and unsympathetic transition.
- 3.92. The appeal site is typical of the agricultural land within the Undulating Claylands and Tove Catchment character areas and does not contain any rare features. Characteristic elevated views across the wider landscape to the west are obtained from Bury Hill on the western site boundary.
- 3.93. The appeal site is situated at the gateway to the village. Properties on Benham Road adjacent to the site and alongside Blakesley Hill combine with the footway, speed limit signs and telegraph poles to place the site within the influence of the settlement edge when entering and exiting Greens Norton.
- 3.94. The tranquillity of the appeal site is affected by the presence of the settlement edge to the eastern boundary, Blakesley Road and associated signage, telegraph poles and traffic to the north, Bury Road to the west and residential gardens and urban fringe land uses including paddocks and associated stable boxes and sheds to the south. The regular use of the paths and roads bounding the site for recreational walks also reduces tranquillity.

### **Form and Character of Greens Norton**

- 3.95. In considering the form and character of Greens Norton, the growth of the settlement has historically occurred along the roads extending from the High Street, with modern development extending along Towcester Road to the east and Blakesley Hill to the west. The development of the appeal site as proposed will continue the pattern of growth south of Blakesley Hill, with the new settlement edge formed by the robust and defensible boundary of Bury Hill.
- 3.96. The proposed development is a logical extension to the village that reflects the form and character of the settlement, whilst offering opportunities to create an improved settlement edge on the approach from the west.
- 3.97. The pattern of growth is illustrated on Figure 6 'Stages of Growth Plan' contained within the DAS<sup>48</sup> which shows that the settlement extended westwards on land between Blakesley Hill and Bradden Road from the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with more recent development since 2000 infilling to the east of the development that marks the western edge of the village and adjoins the site.
- 3.98. As referenced in Mr Loma's evidence, an appeal in 2014 on land north of Towcester Road, Greens Norton [CD7.08] considered the pattern of development in the village. The Inspector stated in his decision letter that:

*"26... I consider that the proposal would depart from a clear pattern to development in the village and could set an unfortunate precedent for further housing development. At present,*

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<sup>48</sup> CD1.04 - Design and Access Statement, page 20



*there is little in the way of residential development to the north of either of the main approaches to/from the village, from east, along Towcester Road, or the west, along Blakesley Hill. To that extent, both roads presently serve to provide a defined edge to the village, with modern housing development extending beyond the village core to the south of these roads.”*

3.99. The Inspector goes on to consider that:

*“27. New housing on any significant scale to the north of Towcester Road would depart from this pattern to an extent which would erode the clear break from the built-up area to predominantly open land that presently exists and that the road, in so far as it serves as a boundary to development, maintains.”*

3.100. The Inspectors conclusions highlight that the pattern of growth south of Blakesley Road would be more appropriate and highlights the role of roads serving as boundaries to development which limit the potential for further development beyond.

3.101. Bury Hill provides a suitable boundary to the west that would be robust and serve to limit the potential for further westwards expansion. The proposed development includes opportunities to provide an improved settlement edge, set back from Bury Hill beyond an improved, soft landscape settlement edge. The transition to the wider countryside would be retained, along with the characteristic elevated, expansive views across the landscape to the west.

3.102. The LVA summarises the nature of change at paragraph 6.24, recognising that proposals respect the character of Greens Norton and the local landscape:

- *“Residential development is characteristic of the LCA which is described as ‘well settled’. The scale of the proposals is in keeping with the rest of the village and the existing adjoining residential edge has an influence over the site.*
- *There will be a loss of existing agricultural land within the site to residential development and short sections of hedgerows along Blakesley Hill to facilitate vehicular access into the site. The features to be lost as a result of development are characteristic of the LCA but are not rare.*
- *The development will sit against the settled edge of Greens Norton, replacing a portion of agricultural landscape which is commonplace within the wider landscape. The development offset at the western and southern boundaries of the site will soften the edge of the settlement and provide softer and more organic edge to the village.*
- *Whilst there will be a direct loss of agricultural land to development, and short sections of existing hedgerow, the Illustrative Masterplan demonstrates the majority of existing vegetation will be retained, including most of the existing boundary hedgerows. Where vegetation is lost as a result of access into the site, new tree planting is proposed throughout the scheme to provide additional characteristic landscape features and mitigate any loss.*



- *The character of the site is currently influenced by the existing residential context immediately adjacent at the settlement edge of Greens Norton. The presence of road signage which is present as you travel along Blakesley Hill at the gateway into the village also provides settlement edge characteristics and influences over the site. The introduction of new residential development to adjoin the existing settlement edge, together with the incorporation of a green buffer within the development offsets to the south and west of the site, and the provision of open space throughout will be in keeping with the character of the village, and visually well contained by the surrounding intact vegetation structure and undulating ground levels.*
- *The immediate character of the site is influenced by the presence of the existing built edge, and although glimpsed views of the spire of St Bartholomews Church (a key characteristic of the LCA) can be seen through the existing residential properties, the site is influenced more by the presence of 20th century development overlooking its eastern boundary. The inclusion of a landscape buffer along Blakesley Hill will assist in retaining views of St Bartholomews Church spire from within the development.*
- *The provision of a high quality, appropriately scaled residential development that references local character and implements congruent boundary treatments is not considered to represent an uncharacteristic addition at the settlement edge in this location.”*

## **The effects of the Proposed Development upon Visual Amenity**

- 3.103. Although the Council recognise the limited extent of visual effects of the proposals, the Council’s SoC identifies that the amenity of people walking along the local roads (Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Road) and using paths near the site will be affected, urbanising the rural environs.
- 3.104. The views of residents of properties adjoining and overlooking the site on Benham Road and Falcon View will be curtailed by the proposed development, although there are no matters raised in relation to unacceptable impacts upon residential amenity.
- 3.105. LPP2 Policy SS2 requires development to not result in the unacceptable loss of locally important views.
- 3.106. The appeal site and land to the west of Greens Norton does not form part of any identified important views or open spaces as identified within the Village Design Guide, Landscape Character Assessment or published documents that form part of the evidence base to the development plan.
- 3.107. With reference to the identified views and visual receptors within the LVA and review of “important views” identified in my assessment of value, I have demonstrated the limited visual effects that the proposals will have upon the amenity of the users of local roads, public rights of way and public open spaces.
- 3.108. Unobstructed expansive views across the wider landscape are identified as a key character feature for the landscape within the Undulating Claylands LCT and guidelines contained



within the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Guidelines and Strategies are to conserve these views. The elevated views to the west and southwest from Bury Hill are the main focus when walking along the road and will be retained as experienced by people walking along the road as part of recreational walks. The setting back of development from the road and planting of trees within areas of open space will provide a soft transition and filter views of the settlement edge.

- 3.109. Beyond Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill, the proposed development is largely screened by intervening landform, roadside hedges and development. Views from Bradden Road across the valley to the south will be retained, as will views to the south of the village for users of bridleways and public footpaths connecting areas of open space and the pocket park.
- 3.110. As illustrated by Photoviewpoint H, identified important views to the south of the village look south across the wider landscape. LVA Photoviewpoint 7 demonstrates the context of views looking towards the appeal site, which is set beyond intervening house and trees. Views across areas of open space to the south of the village include those towards the church spire, set within a well tree context (Photoviewpoint I (Figure 3).
- 3.111. The assessment within the LVA and this proof of evidence has demonstrated that the proposed development will have limited and localised impacts on the views and visual amenity of users of local roads and paths, including those people walking along Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Road as part of a recreational route.
- 3.112. Even when passing the Site on Bury Hill, the key outward views that are enjoyed across the wider landscape will be retained, with the houses set beyond a generous set back incorporating tree planting and a landscape buffer. Recognised important views and the visual character experienced within open spaces south of Greens Norton will be retained.



# Section 4: Conclusions and Compliance with Policy

- 4.1. My evidence deals with landscape and visual matters in relation to an appeal by Richborough Estates against the refusal of an outline application for up to 69 dwellings with associated access, landscape and drainage infrastructure (all matters reserved save for access) on land adjoining the western edge of Greens Norton, south of Blakesley Hill.

## Proposed Development

- 4.2. The appeal site comprises a single field of 2.87 hectares on the western edge of Greens Norton, bounded by residential properties on Benham Road and Falcon View to the east, Blakesley Hill to the north, Bury Hill to the west and residential gardens and paddocks to the south. The properties to the east back onto the site and form a well-defined, abrupt and linear edge to the settlement and a backdrop in local views from the west. The site lies at the gateway to the village on Blakesley Hill, with the lane and roadside trees and hedgerows along Bury Hill containing the site and to the west and separating it from the wider countryside. The appeal site is strongly influenced by the above factors and is well related to the settlement edge
- 4.3. The application was accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Tyler Grange. The LVA informed the design principles which are embedded into the development parameters and illustrative masterplan proposals.
- 4.4. Although the character, layout and landscaping are reserved matters, the development of the proposals has been landscape led, informed by the findings of the LVA and design inputs by chartered Landscape Architects. This has ensured that the development respects the landscape character and setting of Greens Norton, minimising landscape and visual effects and retain existing landscape features. The parameters plan for the proposed development includes for a landscape buffer to the north, west and southern boundaries incorporating retained trees and hedgerows, drainage features and opportunities for additional landscape planting.
- 4.5. The parameters also identify a 'green development edge' to the southern and western edges of the proposed development. Within these areas, development is to be limited to two storeys, with bungalow provision in this area and an increased use of detached properties. There is also a 'residential amenity area' that runs alongside the eastern boundary adjacent to existing properties to include set back and boundary treatments to mitigate impacts on the amenity of residents of these properties.
- 4.6. Through the above measures, the parameters have responded to the landscape and visual context of the site, ensuring that the proposed development retains existing boundary vegetation and allowing opportunities for additional planting within the landscape buffer and areas of open space as well as space for the maturation of existing hedgerow trees.



- 4.7. The lower density, less formal development frontage to the western and southern boundaries within the green development edge will combine with the retained and additional planting in the landscape buffers to provide a defensible and softer settlement edge that will provide an improved transition and more positive interface between Greens Norton and the surrounding countryside than currently exists.
- 4.8. In addition to the parameters plan, an illustrative masterplan has been prepared to test the design principles and capacity of the site. Whilst the masterplan is not fixed as part of the outline proposals, it demonstrates how the site may be developed sensitively and to provide a good contextual fit and gentle transition to the wider countryside to the west and south, including outward looking development frontages, single and two storey dwellings to the edges of the site and a rural edge character utilising irregular building lines and deeper setbacks. The LVA contains a landscape strategy plan that shows indicative native tree planting to boundaries and within the buffers to the north, west and south, as well as areas of wildflower meadow, attenuation features managed for wildlife.

## **Landscape and Visual Effects**

- 4.9. With reference to the LVA and my own assessment, I have considered the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development and conclude that the effects will be limited and localised, without detrimental effects on the wider landscape character area. As summarised by the LVA:
- Residential development is not uncharacteristic of the approach to the village from the west where the existing settlement edge is already clearly apparent;
  - The proposed mitigation planting at the site boundaries will provide a softer settlement edge and assist in assimilating the development into the wider landscape; and
  - Some localised adverse effects on visual amenity will arise and adjoining residents will experience a change in visual context with views over the site curtailed.

### **Landscape Effects**

- 4.10. As set-out above, the development parameters have responded to the landscape context, incorporating landscape buffers to the western and southern boundaries and green development edge with lower heights and densities.
- 4.11. The site does not contain any notable, rare or unique features or represent particularly valuable characteristics of the Tove Catchment LCA or Undulating Claylands LCT. Overall, the perception and distinctiveness of the wider LCA will not be compromised by the proposal. As recognised by the LVA:

*“The development would result in localised permanent loss of a single arable field on the settlement edge from agricultural use to residential development. This change in use would not be substantially uncharacteristic with the surrounding landscape, especially in light of*



*the surrounding built development to the east and scope for mitigation to ensure the settlement edge appears softened in the approach from the west.”*

- 4.12. The proposals also retain and enhance hedgerows and hedgerow trees and provide opportunities for new tree planting in line with the Council's Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines that support the development plan.
- 4.13. The proposed development relates well to the settlement edge and is situated at the gateway to Greens Norton on Blakesley Hill. The existing settlement edge forms an abrupt edge and impact on the character and perception of the site on the settlement edge. Bury Hill provides a defined boundary and clear transition between the edge of settlement landscape and the wider countryside beyond. This is accentuated by the topography which falls away to the west of Bury Hill. The proposals provide an improved settlement edge and transition with the wider countryside, with Bury Hill forming a long-term defensible edge to the settlement.
- 4.14. It should be noted that the proposed development and landscape strategy reflects the approach adopted by the application at Mill Lane to the south of Greens Norton (Planning Application No. S/2020/1340/MAO). This has been identified by the Council as providing betterment to the settlement edge that offsets the loss of the existing site characteristics.

### **Visual Effects**

- 4.15. The extent of visibility of the site and proposed development is limited to views within approximately 800m to the north and west, with the majority of receptors being people adjacent to the site on Bury Hill and Blakesley Hill when passing by the site. In wider views, the site is partially visible, experienced as part of expansive panoramas and in context with the existing settlement.
- 4.16. There would be a high magnitude of change for residents so properties adjacent to and overlooking the site. There have been no matters raised by the Council in relation to unacceptable impacts upon residential amenity. The visual effects on residents of Greens Norton will be highly localised and limited to residents of those properties adjacent to and with views of the site.
- 4.17. For people walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill as part of recreational routes, the changes to views when passing the site will be experienced in the context of the settlement edge and influence of existing houses, infrastructure and traffic.
- 4.18. When walking along the footway on Blakesley Hill to the north of the site, the experience is in the context of entering or exiting the village. The proposals are set back development from the hedgerow beyond open space, retaining the character of the approach to the village.
- 4.19. The focus of views from Bury Hill and Bradden Road are the elevated, panoramic views across the wider countryside and landscape to the west and south, which are recognised as characteristics of the local landscape by the Landscape Character Strategy and



Guidelines and are to be conserved and enhanced. These outward views across the wider landscape will not be affected by the proposed development.

- 4.20. Views towards the site from Bury Hill and Bradden Road to the south are limited by the topography and roadside trees and hedgerows. The proposed development will be set beyond trees and hedgerows to the southern boundary and experienced in context with the properties and gardens of Falcon View, agricultural sheds and yards.
- 4.21. To the south of Greens Norton, views are enclosed by the topography and vegetation, including along the bridleway and within the pocket park. The proposed development will have no discernible effect on the visual amenity of users of the pocket park or travelling along rights of way south of Bradden Road.

## **Main Issues**

- 4.22. Within the Committee Report, Officers agree with the findings of the LVA, recognising the limited and localised impacts of the proposed development and opportunities for improvements to the settlement edge west of Greens Norton. This includes the following:
1. The appeal site is not subject to any formal landscape designation and is not a valued landscape under Paragraph 170 of the Framework;
  2. The appeal site does not represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character area within which it is situated;
  3. Landscape harm arising from the proposal is limited and localised, relating to the change of the site from an agricultural field on the settlement edge to residential development
  4. The appeal scheme would be well-related in visual terms to the existing village;
  5. Visual impacts arising from the proposed development would be restricted to the immediate locality without a prominence in the wider landscape significantly greater than existing settlement edge;
  6. The provision of new public open space is a benefit of the proposal, contributing to the social aspect of sustainable development;
  7. Bury Hill to the immediate west of the site would provide a substitute for Benham Road in terms of being a long-term defensible edge to the settlement;
  8. This edge (along Bury Hill) could be developed in a higher-quality manner than the existing approach into the village, which is characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road; and
  9. The indicative layout shows outward facing properties and managed landscaping, both of which could be secured at reserved matters.



4.23. The Council's Statement of Case also recognises the limited nature of effects, stating that:

*"The appeal site is located on relatively elevated land and is visible from several approaches by road to the village. The existing interface between the village and surrounding countryside is well established here and is not appreciable over long distances. The proposed development would be relatively self-contained. Visual impact is largely restricted to the immediate locality; impact on the wider landscape is limited."* (paragraph 7.1)

#### **Reasons for Refusal and Council's Statement of Case**

4.24. Despite the above and the recognition by Officers and the Council that any harm associated with the proposed development is limited and localised, and that the proposal provides an opportunity to provide an improved settlement edge, the application was refused on grounds of localised landscape harm, and adversely affecting the character of this part of the village.

4.25. The Statement of Case identifies localised landscape harm resulting from the loss of a tranquil, undeveloped field that forms an area of transition between the edge of Greens Norton and open countryside and concludes that the identified harm is not outweighed or mitigated by the potential for a high quality design-led approach to landscaping, layout, building mass, siting and form at reserved matters stage.

4.26. Local Plan policies referenced in RFR2 are:

- JCS Policy R1(b) 'Spatial Strategy for the Rural Areas'.

Paragraph (b) requires development in Rural Areas to: *"Not affect open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village"*

- LPP2 Policy SS2 (1a) 'General Development and Design Principles'.

Paragraph (1a) states that planning permission will be granted where proposed development: *"Maintains the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts, does not result in physical coalescence that would harm its identity and does not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement"*

1.57. The Council's Statement of Case introduces the following:

- *Harm to the distinctive character of the landscape west of Greens Norton (JCS Policy S1D (1)); and*
- *Harm to tranquillity (JCS Policy S1D (4))*

4.27. As identified in my evidence, I have identified the following key matters that relate to the reason for refusal and Council's Statement of Case:



## **Landscape Value**

- 4.28. The appeal site is not situated within a landscape that is designated at either a national, statutory level nor at a local, non-statutory level. The land surrounding Greens Norton was assessed as a potential candidate Special Landscape Area (SLA) within the Council's Review of Special Landscape Areas [CD6.21] and was excluded having been assessed as not meeting the identified criteria thresholds.
- 4.29. As set-out within the appellant's SoC and examined further within Section 3 of this proof of evidence, the appeal site is of ordinary value, comprising a field on the edge of Green Norton that is influenced by the existing abrupt built edge formed by adjacent properties, placing it within an urban fringe at the transition between the settlement and the wider countryside situated beyond Bury Hill to the west.
- 4.30. The appeal site does not contain any rare or unusual landscape features and does not contribute to any identified important local views or opens spaces. The boundary hedgerows have been managed as part of the use of the land and adjacent fields for agriculture, including the removal of former hedgerow trees and tree belts.
- 4.31. The influence of the built edge, containment of the appeal site by roads (Bury Hill to the west and Blakesley Hill to the north) and adjacent land use for residential gardens combine to reduce the quality and condition of the site.
- 4.32. The above conclusions are supported by the assessment of landscape value contained within the LVA, as well as further analysis contained in my evidence.

## **Attributes of particular significance to the character and setting of Greens Norton**

- 4.33. A review of the Council's evidence base and supporting documents to Local Plan Policies R1 and SS1, has found that the appeal site does not contribute to any attributes of particular significance to the character and setting of Greens Norton.

### *Greens Norton Village Design Guide*

- 4.34. The design guide identifies areas of Important Open Space to the south of the village, between Bradden Road and Bengal. These areas are crossed by public rights of way and comprise enclosed areas of land that are separated physically and visually from the land west of Greens Norton and the appeal site.
- 4.35. The Design Guide also mentions the pocket park that is located to the south of the village, off Bengal Lane. The park is situated towards the valley bottom south of Bradden Road, is well wooded and is separated from the appeal site by the rising topography and hedgerows.
- 4.36. The guide also identifies a view looking southwest from a bridleway north of Bengal Manor. The view looks away from the direction of the appeal site. The site is not visible from the location indicated due to intervening vegetation and built form on the southwestern edge of the village.



### Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines

- 4.37. The landscape character strategy and guidelines identify key character features and associated guidelines for these. One of those is the elevated and expansive views across the landscape from elevated land. The guidelines are to conserve and enhance these views.
- 4.38. There are characteristic open expansive views across the wider landscape from Bury Hill to the west and southwest, as well as views the south Bradden Road. These views do not look across the appeal site and will not be affected by the proposed development.

#### **Tranquillity of the appeal site**

- 4.39. As examined within my evidence and the LVA, the appeal site is strongly influenced by the abrupt settlement edge west of Greens Norton formed by adjacent properties and is situated at the gateway to the village on Blakesley Hill. The site is within an edge of settlement context, on the entrance to the settlement and is not a quiet, tranquil location.
- 4.40. With reference to the Transport Assessment and evidence prepared by James Parker of Hub Transport Planning, it has been demonstrated that there is no significant difference in traffic flows between Blakesley and other approaches into the village, and that the proposed development will have a negligible perceived affect ton the tranquillity of the lanes and roads west of Greens Norton.
- 4.41. For people using Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Road as a recreational route, the main indicator of tranquillity are the expansive views across the wider landscape obtained when looking towards to the west and south and the connection that these have with the countryside beyond the village. The proposed development will not impact upon these views, with the houses set back from Bury Hill beyond landscape buffers and areas of open space containing new tree planting, meadows and wildlife ponds. The proposed development will not significantly affect the tranquillity of the adjacent lanes for those people using them for recreation and amenity.
- 4.42. Areas to the south of Greens Norton, including the pocket park, rights of way and areas of open space around Bengal are of a more tranquil, rural character and will not be affected by the proposed development.

#### **The extent of harm to the local landscape character setting to the West of Greens Norton**

- 4.43. As supported by the analysis within Design and Access Statement and the Appeal Decisions for proposals on Land North of Towcester Road, the pattern of growth of Greens Norton has been along the roads leading out from the centre of the village. This includes the modern development to the east of the site and along Falcon View that forms an abrupt and hard edge to the settlement.
- 4.44. As explored within the LVA and my evidence, the proposed development will provide an improved settlement edge, with properties fronting areas of open space and landscape buffers incorporating new trees planting, combining with retained trees and hedgerows



along the western boundary with Bury Hill to provide a defensible, long-term boundary to the settlement and soft transition.

- 4.45. The expansive open views across the wider landscape experienced from Bury Hill and Bradden Road will be retained in proximity to the site and western edge of the settlement.

### **The effects of the Proposed Development upon Visual Amenity**

- 4.46. As summarised above when considering visual effects of the proposed development, the site and proposed development will only be visible from a small area, with any visual effects being highly localised.
- 4.47. There would be a high magnitude of change for resident so properties adjacent to and overlooking the site.
- 4.48. For people walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill as part of recreational routes, the changes to views when passing the site will be experienced in the context of the settlement edge, with the focus of views being across the wider countryside and landscape to the west and south. These outward views across the wider landscape will not be affected by the proposed development.
- 4.49. The visual amenity for people using the wider rights of way and open spaces around the village will not be affected by the proposed development, being physically and visually separated by the intervening topography, built form and vegetation.

### **Compliance with Policy**

- 4.50. Matters relating to Planning and Policy are dealt with fully by Mr Lomas in his evidence. I provide commentary on those policies that are pertinent in the case of the appeal in relation to landscape matters and how the appeal scheme has responded to, and accords with the policy requirements, as supported by the Council's evidence base and assessment contained within the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Tyler Grange to support the application, as well as my own assessment and professional judgements contained in this proof of evidence.
- 4.51. As relates to RfR2 and the Council's SoC, the following national and local landscape-related planning policy are relevant to the appeal.

### **National Planning Policy Framework**

- 4.52. As already established, it is common ground that the appeal site does not constitute a valued landscape under the provisions of paragraph 170a of the NPPF.
- 4.53. Paragraph 107b of the Framework states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: *“recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside...”*



4.54. The proposed development lies adjacent to the existing settlement edge which is formed by residential properties on Benham Road, providing an abrupt and hard edge. As set-out within the Committee Report [CD5.01], Officers are satisfied that:

*“... the proposed development would generally be well-related in visual terms to the existing village and that the site does not represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character area in which it is situated”* (paragraph 9.21)

4.55. Further, the report goes on to confirm that Bury Hill would provide a long-term defensible edge for the settlement, with Officers accepting that this edge could be developed in a higher-quality manner than the existing approach into the village, acknowledging that:

*“The indicative layout instead shows outward facing properties and managed landscaping, both of which could and would be secured to a high specification in reserved matters.”* (paragraph 9.21)

4.56. The Committee Report concludes that, in relation to landscape and visual impacts the proposals would be:

*“... relatively self-contained with visual impacts restricted to the immediate locality without a prominence in the wider landscape significantly greater than the existing settlement edge.”* (paragraph 9.4)

4.57. This reflects the findings of the LVA which concludes that the proposals will not be uncharacteristic in the landscape, being situated adjacent to the existing settlement and offering mitigation to soften the built edge.

4.58. Any changes to the wider landscape character as identified by the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment [CD6.22] for the Tove Catchment Landscape Character Area will be limited and localised, with the scheme retaining and enhancing hedgerows and hedgerow trees in line with published guidance contained in the Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines [CD6.23].

4.59. Furthermore, as examined in my evidence contained in this proof of evidence and illustrated by the Photoviewpoints at Figure 3 (Volume2) the unobstructed expansive panoramic views across the wider landscape experienced from Bury Hill and Braden Road will remain unaffected by the proposed development.

4.60. Given the above, it is evident that the proposal will give rise to highly localised impacts limited to the development of a single field on the settlement edge and contained from the wider countryside by Bury Hill to the west. The proposed development maintains the hedgerows and trees bounding the site, save for a short section of hedgerow on Blakesley Hill at the gateway to the village. As recognised by the Council, the development offers opportunities to provide an improved edge to the settlement, with mitigation planting and landscape buffer to the western and southern boundaries, and properties facing onto these to create a higher quality edge than that formed by properties on Benham Road and Flacon View that back onto the site.



4.61. Through the retention of existing features, provision of an improved settlement edge at the transition with the countryside west of Greens Norton, and preservation of the elevated, expansive views across the wider landscape<sup>49</sup> obtained from Bury Hill and Bradden Road, the proposed development demonstrably recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and is therefore commensurate with Paragraph 170(b) of the Framework.

#### **West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1), 2014**

4.62. The following JCS Policies are cited in the Reasons for Refusal and Council's SoC:

#### ***Policy S1 – Distribution of Development – D (1) and (4)***

4.63. At Point D, Policy S1 states that: *“New Development in the Rural Areas will be limited with the emphasis being on:*

*1 - Enhancing and maintaining the distinctive character and vitality of rural communities; and*

*4 - Respecting the Quality of Tranquillity.*

4.64. I consider each of these separately below:

#### ***Enhancing and maintaining the distinctive character and vitality of rural communities***

4.65. The supporting text to Policy S1 helps clarify that the emphasis of the policy is upon the overall rural character of the area, whilst enabling the provision of homes within sustainable settlements within the rural settlement hierarchy.

4.66. Despite the assertions within the Council's SoC that the site makes a positive and appreciable contribution to the rural setting of the village and forms a positive part of the village's transition to the open countryside, the analysis within the LVA and my evidence has demonstrated that the site is strongly influenced by the adjacent edge, contained by Bury Hill to the west and at the gateway to the village on Blakesley Hill to the north.

4.67. Furthermore, and as examined further below in relation to JCS Policy R1 and Local plan Policy SS21a, the proposed development will not affect any areas of particular significance that are recognised by the Council's evidence base, including important open space spaces, identified views and landscape strategies and guidelines.

4.68. This is also recognised by Officers within the Committee Report that where it is stated that:

- The proposed development would be well-related in visual terms to the existing village;

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<sup>49</sup> As recognised by the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines (CD6.23) as a key characteristic feature of the Undulating Claylands LCT



- The site does not represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character area; and
- Bury Hill to the west of the site would provide a substitute to Benham Road as a defensible edge to the settlement that could be developed in a higher-quality manner than the existing approach into the village which is characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road.

4.69. For these reasons, I consider that the proposals comply with Local Plan Policy SS2 (1a), maintaining the character of Greens Norton and offering opportunities for improving and enhancing the settlement edge and providing betterment.

4.70. The acceptability of this approach has been recognised by Officers in relation to the proposals on land off Mill Lane, south of Greens Norton where the improved settlement edge formed by new hedgerow and tree planting has been considered adequate to override any localised landscape harm associated with the development of the greenfield site.

4.71. It should be noted that the land at Mill Lane is not defined by an existing robust boundary, as is the case of the appeal site to the west of Greens Norton which is contained by the road and hedgerows along Bury Hill.

*Respecting the Quality of Tranquillity.*

4.72. The supporting text to Policy S1 (para 5.15) states that the JCS provides a framework for a rural settlement hierarchy that will ensure that new development is focused in sustainable settlements, whilst:

*“... protecting the overall rural character of the area including the tranquillity of areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason<sup>1</sup>.”*

4.73. It is therefore clear that the emphasis on respecting the quality of tranquillity in Policy S1 D(4) is in relation to undisturbed, rural areas that are of a high recreation and amenity value.

4.74. As detailed within my analysis of the Council’s Review of SLA’s at Section 3 of this proof of evidence, the land around Greens Norton did not meet the criteria threshold for inclusion in the Catesby, Fawsley, Maidford & Litchborough SLA, The SLA is recognised as having a strong sense of tranquillity associated with quiet and intimate settlements that have no intrusion of larger development.

4.75. Larger settlements including Greens Norton do not reflect these qualities and do not fit with the description of areas undisturbed by noise and prized for amenity and recreation as set out within the supporting text to Policy S1.

4.76. In summary:

1. The appeal site on the settlement edge is not a tranquil, quiet or intimate location;



2. The qualities that relate to the perceived tranquillity of recreation routes around Greens Norton, including for those walking on Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill adjacent to the site will be retained;
3. There will be no appreciable increase in traffic using these local routes;
4. The open expansive views across the wider countryside from Bury Hill and Bradden Road will be retained; and
5. The more intimate, secluded and tranquil rural character of the valley and pocket park to the south of the village will not be affected by the proposals.

4.77. For these reasons, the proposed development does not conflict with JCS Policy S1D(4).

***Policy R1 – Spatial Strategy for the Rural Areas***

4.78. Paragraph (b) requires development in Rural Areas to: *“Not affect open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village”*

4.79. This policy wording reflects that of Local Plan Policy SS2(1a) that requires development not to result in an unacceptable loss of areas of undeveloped land, open spaces or important views of particular significance to the form and character of settlements.

4.80. The appeal site does not comprise land which is identified within any of the Council’s evidence base or supporting documents of being of particular significance to the form and character of Greens Norton.

4.81. The appeal site lies adjacent to the hard linear edge formed residential development backing onto the fields west of the village that has extended westwards from the high street, south of Blakesley Hill. As recognised by Officers, the site is contained by Bury Hill which provides an opportunity to provide a long-term defensible edge to the settlement. The proposal also provide an improved transitional edge incorporating landscape buffer planting and houses fronting open space

4.82. The proposed development of the appeal site will not affect land which is of particular significance to the form and character of Greens Norton, as supported by a review of the Council’s evidence base. As recognised by Officers, the proposals offer opportunities provide a robust new settlement edge that is of a higher quality than currently exists to the west of the village. For these reasons, I consider the proposed development to comply with JCS Policy R1((b).

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***Policy SS2 (1a) ‘General Development and Design Principles’***

4.83. Policy SS2 is cited in RfR2. Paragraph (1a) states that planning permission will be granted where proposed development:



*“Maintains the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts, does not result in physical coalescence that would harm its identity and does not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement”*

#### Coalescence

- 4.84. Under the heading ‘Setting and Coalescence’ (paragraph 3.3.2) the supporting text to Policy SS2 states that the spaces between buildings, groupings and settlements are an integral part of the character of the district and that distances between these elements could lead to a loss of distinctiveness.
- 4.85. The supporting text goes on to state that: *“In considering land which is considered to be of local importance to communities’ reference will be made to Conservation Area Appraisals, Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Plans.”*
- 4.86. The Council have not raised any concerns within the Committee Report, Reasons for Refusal or Statement of Case relating to the coalescence of settlements or the individual identity of settlements or various “parts” of Greens Norton.
- 4.87. This reflects the fact that the appeal proposal would not result in any physical or visual coalescence between neighbouring settlements or distinct parts of Greens Norton, including the open spaces south of Bradden Road at Bengal and Mill Lane or the centre of the village on High Street.

#### Undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance

- 4.88. The purported non-compliance with Policy SS2 therefore relates to the loss of open land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement.
- 4.89. Despite the assertions within the Council’s SoC that the site makes a positive and appreciable contribution to the rural setting of the village and forms a positive part of the village’s transition to the open countryside, the Reasons for Refusal, SoC and Committee Report do not make any reference to the Greens Norton Village Design Statement or other published documents within the evidence base.
- 4.90. The analysis within my evidence has demonstrated that the appeal site does not contribute to the
- 4.91. Furthermore, as supported by the analysis within Design and Access Statement and the Appeal Decision for proposals to the north of Towcester Road, the growth of Greens Norton has been along the roads leading out from the centre of the village. This includes the modern development to the east of the site and along Flacon View that forms an abrupt and hard edge to the settlement.
- 4.92. As explored within the LVA and my evidence, the proposed development will provide an improved settlement edge, with properties fronting areas of open space and landscape buffers incorporating new tree planting, combining with retained trees and hedgerows along



the western boundary with Bury Hill to provide a defensible, long-term boundary to the settlement and soft transition.

- 4.93. This is also recognised by Officers within the Committee Report that where it is stated that:
- The proposed development would be well-related in visual terms to the existing village;
  - The site does not represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character area; and
  - Bury Hill to the west of the site would provide a substitute to Benham Road as a defensible edge to the settlement that could be developed in a higher-quality manner than the existing approach into the village which is characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road.

- 4.94. For the above reasons, I consider that the proposed development complies with Local Plan Policy SS2 (1a).

## Summary

- 4.95. Having undertaken a review of the landscape and visual context and main issues relating to the appeal including the value, tranquillity and character of the landscape and character and setting of Greens Norton, I have demonstrated that the proposed development in accordance with the parameters submitted with the outline planning application would comply with both national and local policy.
- 4.96. The appeal site is not situated within a landscape that is designated for its quality of value at either a local or national scale and is not a valued landscape under the provision of NPPF paragraph 170. The site represents an ordinary landscape and does not share any characteristics or features of particular value as recognised by published landscape character assessments.
- 4.97. The site is situated on the settlement edge and is strongly influenced by the abrupt linear edge of adjacent to properties on the western edge of Greens Norton and the gateway to the village on Blakesley Hill to the north.
- 4.98. The site does not share any features of characteristics of particular significance to the character and setting of Greens Norton. Areas identified as Important Open Space and views are situated to the south of the village at Bengal and the pocket park and are separated from the site and western edge of the settlement.
- 4.99. The proposals would result in limited, localised landscape and visual effects, whilst offering opportunities to improve the quality of the built edge, providing a soft transition to the countryside and a defensible boundary formed by Bury Hill.
- 4.100. The proposals will retain existing trees and hedgerows to the southern and western boundaries, which will be enhanced through new tree planting within landscape buffers and



hedgerow trees. Open Space, including circular walks and opportunities for wildflower meadows and wildlife features associated with attenuation features will provide public amenity and recreation benefits.

- 4.101. Elevated and expansive views across the wider landscape from Bury Hill and Bradden Road will be maintained. The amenity of people walking along Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Hill will be respected, with housing set beyond areas of open greens space and new landscape planting.
- 4.102. For these reasons and those set out within my evidence, I am of the professional view that there are no appropriate grounds for refusing this appeal on the basis of landscape and visual matters.

