PARCEL NLP303, GOSWELL END ROAD, HARLINGTON

Landscape & Visual Appraisal
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<td>002</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION 1
3 BASELINE ASSESSMENT 2
3 POTENTIAL LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS 7
4 CONCLUSIONS 9

PLANS

ASPECT PLAN ASP1 LOCATION PLAN
ASPECT PLAN ASP2 SITE SETTING

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 VISUAL ASSESSMENT
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd has been appointed by Denison Investments Ltd to undertake a Strategic Landscape Appraisal relating to the potential exclusion of Parcel NLP303, Goswell End Road, Harlington from the Green Belt for residential development. The location and context of the site is illustrated on Plan ASP1 Site Location and Plan ASP2 Site and Setting.

1.2. This Strategic Landscape Appraisal (SLA) is not a detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) but seeks to reinforce the principle of development into the context of the existing landscape character and visual environment to assess the ability of the site to integrate future development. Within their publication ‘Site Assessment Technical Document – Appendix D: Preliminary Site Assessment Results’ (July 2017), Central Bedfordshire identifies the site as parcel NLP303. In this document the site has already been considered for allocation and is identified as being in need of being considered further as part of the Local Plan.

1.3. The assessment of potential effects has been derived from guidance provided within GLVIA3 (Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3 Edition) published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment in April 2013. The methodology is contained within Appendix 1 of this document.

1.4. This assessment should be read alongside the other supporting material which accompanies this report.
2. BASELINE ASSESSMENT

2.1. The site is located on the northern edge of built-up area of Harlington, to the north of Goswell End Road. It comprises a largely rectangular field of arable land of approximately 13.7 hectares. The site is located adjacent to the existing settlement edge of Harlington to the south, with an existing railway line lining the western site boundary. The site is located approximately 300m to the north of the Harlington Conservation Area, which is afforded a strong degree of containment by intervening development. The Chilterns AONB is located approximately 0.8km to the south west of the site, located beyond the wider settlement setting of Harlington.

2.2. The northern site boundary is defined by a mature established woodland, which affords a strong degree of visual and physical containment to the site, restricting views from the north. A mature mixed native treebelt defines the eastern site boundary, further restricting views from the north east and east of the site. The western site boundary is defined by an existing railway line, with its associated mature mixed native hedgerow containing views of the site from the west. The southern site boundary is also defined by mature vegetation structure, with occasional breaks allowing glimpsed, passing views into the site. The location and setting of the site is illustrated on ASP1 Site Location Plan and ASP2 Site and Setting.

2.3. The immediate and localised context to the site is made up of residential development to the south, to the south of Goswell End Road, associated with the northern settlement edge of Harlington. Harlington Upper School is located to the south east of the site, with its associated playing fields located adjacent to the eastern site boundary. The sites wider countryside setting is located to the north, west and east located beyond an existing woodland, playing fields and railway line respectively.

2.4. The site falls from the north east to the south west, from approximately 105m AOD to 86m AOD. The topography within the localised and wider landscape setting rises to the north east towards a localised ridgeline at
approximately 112m AOD, and continues to gradually fall to the west upon the approach to localised watercourses.

2.5. Due to the farmed nature of the site, the internal components of the site offer little in the way of landscape value. However, the more established vegetation structure and mature hedgerow and trees along the site’s boundaries, including the woodland to the north provide a strong degree of containment and visual separation from the site’s localised and wider setting.

2.6. A number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) are located within the immediate and localised setting of the site, including a PRoW which crosses the site running largely south to north between Harlington and Westoning respectively. The John Bunyan Trail Recreation Route is located to the north and east of the site, located beyond the school playing fields and existing mature vegetation.

Landscape Character

2.7. Central Bedfordshire Council Landscape Character Assessment identifies the site as being located within two Landscape Character Types. The majority of the site is located within 8C ‘Pulloxhill Clay Hills’. Key landscape characteristics considered to be of relevance include:

- Contains the two settlements of Harlington and Pulloxhill. Both settlements are focussed around village greens and located on the ridge top.
- …Modern estate development and infill has occurred within the villages – Harlington having extended significantly from the hill top and onto the slopes.
- Secondary roads cut through the hills. These are busy routes that visually and audibly dilute the overall rural tranquillity of the area.
- Predominantly open, but with some small areas of deciduous woodland including ancient woodland at Portabello Wood and Thrift Wood.
2.8. The Central Bedfordshire Council Landscape Character Assessment also identifies the south western part of the site as being located within Landscape Character Type 5B ‘Barton-le-Clay Vale’ which has the following key characteristics of relevance:

- Pylons and electricity lines cross the landscape - the concentration around the settlement of Chalton, for example, forming a cluttered skyline.
- The recreational routes of the Icknield Way Trail and the John Bunyan Trail connect the Vale with the adjacent Chalk Escarpment, Clay Hills and Greensand Ridge.

2.9. At a more site-specific level, Aspect has undertaken an assessment of the landscape character of the site and its immediate setting. This assessment identifies that the site is located within a settlement fringe landscape, being adjacent to existing built-up areas. The established vegetation structure which defines the site, including the woodland to the north creates a robust edge to the site and provides a strong degree of visual and physical separation between the site and its localised and wider setting. The proximity of existing residential development to the south, combined with the railway line to the west, localised road corridors, and Harlington Upper School to the south east reduces the perceived tranquillity and remoteness of the site, producing an urban edge character.

2.10. In terms of landscape quality, it is considered that the site is influenced by its proximity to the existing urban edge. The existing urbanising influences within the site’s immediate and localised setting detracts from the remoteness and tranquillity of the site. The established vegetation associated with the site and its immediate context, coupled with the sites topography creates a compartmentalised character, ensuring that the site is not apparent within the wider setting and as such does not contribute to the scenic quality of the area. There are no features associated with the site that are considered rare or representative in landscape terms. In terms of recreation value, it is acknowledged that a Public Right of Way crosses the site, however the rest of the site is not publicly accessible and as such it is considered that the recreational
value is medium. There are no known historic associations with the site or its immediate setting. The site is covered by a Green Belt designation, however, this is a planning designation which has no weight in terms of landscape value. To that end, it is considered that the value of the site is medium - low.

2.11. The site is distinctly separate from the wider Green Belt area that extends to the north, west and east and which has limited intervisibility with the site. The site’s localised setting is already largely developed and comprises multiple urbanising features. It is considered that the value of the site is medium - low, based on the above analysis. In terms of susceptibility to change as a result of residential development, it is considered that the settlement edge landscape, with the existing built edge, together with the terraced school playing field to the east established vegetation structure and the presence of urbanising features, means that the site has some capacity to accommodate change. It is considered that due to the largely compartmentalised nature of the site, it is more closely related to the existing settlement edge to the south, than the wider countryside setting. It is considered that the site has a medium susceptibility to change as result of sensitively designed residential development. To that end, it is considered that the localised landscape character, in which the site is set is of medium - low sensitivity. With regards to the site’s localised and wider landscape setting to the north, east and west, it is considered that the landscape sensitivity elevates to high, as the distance from the existing settlement edge, road corridors and railway line increases.

Visual Environment

2.12. A visual assessment of the site and its setting has been undertaken and a Photographic Record is included within Appendix 1 which illustrates the site within its setting. The photographs have been taken in accordance with published guidance from the Landscape Institute, from publicly accessible locations.

2.13. Viewpoints 1 and 2 are taken from the site’s localised and wider setting to the west. Both viewpoints look east, and illustrate the extent of existing vegetation associated with the site’s localised setting and the
existing railway corridor. This existing vegetation structure affords a strong degree of visual and physical containment to the site, restricting long distance views to the east and heavily filtering views of the site.

2.14. Viewpoint 3 is taken from the junction between Goswell End Road and Westoning Road, and illustrates the extent of vegetation associated with the road corridors, and the southern site boundary. The mature existing vegetation structure at this point affords a strong degree of containment to the site. Existing built form associated with the northern settlement edge of Harlington forms a notable urbanising feature within the context of viewpoint 3, with existing residential development forming a key characteristic of the receiving streetscene.

2.15. Viewpoint 4 is taken from the entrance of the Public Right of Way on the southern site boundary. The viewpoint illustrates the extent of vegetation which defines the site boundaries, and the compartmentalised character of the site. The vegetated site boundaries restrict views into the site forms the wider site setting.

2.16. Viewpoints 5 and 6 are taken from the John Bunyan Trail Recreational Route to the east of the site, located beyond the playing fields associated with Harlington Upper School. The viewpoints illustrate the extent of vegetation associate with the eastern site boundary, which contains views of the site from this elevated position. The wider settlement setting of Harlington forms a notable feature within the receiving landscape fabric, alongside the built structures associated with the sports pitches.

2.17. In summary, it is considered that the site is largely well contained. The existing vegetation structures associated with the site boundaries and localised field boundaries affords a very strong degree of visual containment to the site. It is considered that views of the site are therefore restricted to areas directly adjacent to the site boundaries, and roads / footpaths within the site’s immediate setting.
3. **Potential Landscape and Visual Effects**

**Landscape Character**

3.1. Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition (GLVIA3) prescribes the need for a site assessment to determine whether there are physical qualities or components of the site of value.

3.2. In terms of landscape quality, it is considered that the site is influenced by its proximity to the existing settlement edge, detracting from the remoteness and tranquillity of the site. The established vegetation associated with the site and its immediate context, coupled with the sites topography ensures that the site is not apparent within the wider setting and as such does not contribute to the scenic quality of the area. It is considered that the localised landscape character, in which the site is set is of medium-low sensitivity. With regards to the site’s localised and wider landscape setting to the north, east and west, it is considered that the landscape sensitivity elevates to high, as the distance from the existing settlement edge, road corridors and railway line increases.

3.3. It is acknowledged that the development of this site for residential use would extend built form into previously undeveloped field. The site is however well related to the existing settlement edge of Harlington and is enclosed by either mature vegetation or urbanising features, and a such it is considered that the introduction of development into the site would not introduce new or uncharacteristic features into the receiving landscape fabric. Within the site’s localised and wider setting, it is considered that the proposed development of the site would not have a significant impact on the receiving landscape character.

**Visual Environment**

3.4. Within the context of the existing visual environment, it is considered that the site can integrate appropriately designed residential development without compromising the amenities or qualities of the localised setting. As shown within the visual assessment, views of the site are highly localised, with views largely restricted to the site’s immediate setting. Where views of the site are available, it is seen
within the context of existing built form and other urbanising features, ensuring that any proposed development would not introduce new or alien features into the receiving visual environment.

3.5. Therefore, it is considered that sensitively designed proposals can be integrated without significant harm to the visual environment and related receptors. Any views of the proposed residential development would be highly localised and seen within the context of existing built form.

Review of Site Allocation within Emerging Local Plan Process

3.6. The site has already been considered for allocation within ‘Site Assessment Technical Document Appendix D’ produced by Central Bedfordshire Council, and it is considered that the principle of development is considered acceptable. The proposed exclusion of the site from Green Belt will not contribute to the coalescence between Harlington and Westoning to the south and north respectively. The existing mature vegetation within the site’s immediate and localised setting affords a strong degree of containment, and creates a compartmentalised character, which will ensure that the openness of the green belt is not adversely effected.

3.7. The site is assessed in the Central Bedfordshire ‘Site Assessment Technical Document – Appendix D: Preliminary Site Assessment Results’ (July 2017). The above-mentioned document reports that the site has failed at the Stage 1B of their assessment due to the potential coalescence it would cause between the settlements of Flitwick and Ampthill.

3.8. The site is located within a small portion of the Green Belt. Following the appraisal undertaken by Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd, it is considered that the scale of the site would be sufficient to provide appropriate green buffers. In that regard, the north-western part of the site is identified as an area where a robust landscape strategy should be implemented (refer to Viewpoint 2). Assuming that this area would be dedicated to a permanent public open space (Refer to Plan ASP2)
incorporating a strong green strategy, the site would preserve an appropriate buffer. Furthermore, the landscape proposals associated with this area would allow the site self-containment and mitigate the views towards the proposals as perceived from Froghall Road.

3.9. It is therefore considered that, if designed appropriately, the development of the site would constitute a logical urban extension to the settlement and would not contribute to the coalescence of Flitwick and Ampthill. The site presents opportunities to accommodate a carefully designed residential development within the localised context of the northern part of Flitwick that can be integrated without harm to the wider landscape setting. Therefore, from a landscape perspective, it is considered that the site could accommodate a sensitively designed development.

Green Belt Review

3.10. As identified within section 2 of this report, the site is located within the Green Belt. Within the NPPF, Paragraph 80 identifies that the Green Belt serves five purposes. These are outlined as being:

- “to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land”.

3.11. In addition, Paragraph 85 states that “When defining boundaries, local planning authorities should:

- “ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
- not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
- where necessary, identify in their plans areas of ‘safeguarded land’ between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to
meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;

- make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;
- satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and
- define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.”

3.12. It is considered that the proposed development of the site would form a logical extension to Harlington, with existing development located to the south of the site. Existing residential development to the south and south-east of the site already forms a notable urbanising feature within the site’s localised and wider setting, and any proposed development would be seen within this context. The proposed development would not breach the current limits to Harlington formed by the railway line and woodland within the site’s localised context. These act as suitable defensible Green Belt boundaries.

3.13. Alongside any proposed development, it is considered that substantial offsets will be provided to existing field boundaries and tree belts which already afford a strong degree of containment to the site from the wider setting to the west. Inclusion of robust landscape buffers, woodland blocks and open space will be provided where breaks in boundary vegetation occur. The proposals would accord with the NPPF paragraphs 85 and 80, ensuring boundaries are redefined utilising physical and permanent features such as the treebelts and roads with landscape buffers to define the new Green Belt edge. A suitable undeveloped ‘gap’ would be maintained between the redefined Green Belt edge and settlements located within the localised setting. Proposals would ensure that the separate settlements within the site’s localised and wider context will not merge through the use of the physical and permanent features as well as maintaining a substantial undeveloped ‘gap’, and development of the site would therefore not result in
coalescence. This also ensures that the setting and separate characters of the settlements are preserved.

3.14. The third purpose of the Green Belt is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. New development proposals will inevitably require some green field land, however the site is not of particularly high landscape value, is influenced by its urban fringe setting and is well contained by adjoining residential development. It is considered that the extent of mature vegetation within the site’s localised and wider setting would ensure that any impact upon the wider countryside as a result of development would be localised. It is considered that whilst proposed development of the site would develop some green field agricultural land on the edge of Harlington, it would not represent a significant encroachment into the countryside, being contained by the existing urbanising features that are already characterised by the urban edge, and the opportunities that are provided to form a new logical Green Belt boundary along the northern boundary of the site through reinforced and new planting.

3.15. In terms of the fourth purpose, this is not considered relevant for this particular site. In terms of the fifth purpose of Green Belts to assist in urban regeneration, at a prima facie level it seems that the use of a Green Belt site is likely to discourage rather than encourage the use of derelict and other urban land. However, Councils are struggling to meet development targets on previously developed land alone and as such some green field sites of lower landscape value need to be considered particularly in terms of the opportunity to meet housing needs and provide a comprehensive scheme with wider social and economic benefits. Consequently, it is considered that the fifth purpose of Green Belts is not being materially compromised by any proposed development within the site.

3.16. It is therefore considered that the exclusion of the site from Green Belt will not significantly affect the characteristics of the surrounding Green Belt designation.
3.17. While it is acknowledged that the development of this site would extend built form into greenfield land, the site is well related to the existing urban edge, with development to the south with a number of urbanising influences extending further to the south. The site presents opportunities to provide sustainable land for residential use within the localised context of the northern settlement edge of Harlington that can be integrated without harm to the wider landscape setting or Green Belt purposes. Opportunities exist for a redefined Green Belt boundary that could create a more robust and enduring Green Belt edge through the use of tree planting along the site boundaries. It is considered that development of the site for residential uses comply with the aims and objectives of the NPPF, and would not significantly affect the characteristics of the surrounding Green Belt designation. It is therefore considered that the site could be developed in accordance with landscape policies and it is a suitable site in landscape and visual terms for residential development.
4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd has been appointed by Denison Investments Ltd to undertake a Strategic Landscape Appraisal relating to the potential exclusion of Parcel NLP303, Goswell End Road, Harlington from the Green Belt for residential development.

4.2. The site has already been considered for allocation within ‘Site Assessment Technical Document Appendix D’ produced by Central Bedfordshire Council, and it is considered that the principle of development is considered acceptable. The proposed exclusion of the site from Green Belt will not contribute to the coalescence between Harlington and Westoning to the south and north respectively. The existing mature vegetation within the site’s immediate and localised setting affords a strong degree of containment, and creates a compartmentalised character, which will ensure that the openness of the green belt is not adversely effected.

4.3. It is acknowledged that the development of this site would extend built form into greenfield land, however the site is well related to the existing urban edge, with development to the south with a number of urbanising influences extending further to the south. The site presents opportunities to provide sustainable land for residential use within the localised context of the northern settlement edge of Harlington that can be integrated without harm to the wider landscape setting or Green Belt purposes. Opportunities exist for a redefined Green Belt boundary that could create a more robust and enduring Green Belt edge through the use of tree planting along the site boundaries. It is considered that development of the site for residential uses comply with the aims and objectives of the NPPF, and would not significantly affect the characteristics of the surrounding Green Belt designation. It is therefore considered that the site could be developed in accordance with the adopted and emerging policies of the Local Plan.

4.4. Within the context of the existing visual environment, it is considered that the site can integrate appropriately designed residential development without compromising the amenities or qualities of the
localised setting. As shown within the visual assessment, views of the site are highly localised, with views largely restricted to the site’s immediate setting. Where views of the site are available, it is seen within the context of existing built form and other urbanising features, ensuring that any proposed development would not introduce new or alien features into the receiving visual environment.

4.5. It is acknowledged that the development of this site for residential use would extend built form into previously undeveloped field. The site is however well related to the existing settlement edge of Harlington and is enclosed by either mature vegetation or urbanising features, and a such it is considered that the introduction of development into the site would not introduce new or uncharacteristic features into the receiving landscape fabric. Within the site’s localised and wider setting, it is considered that the proposed development of the site would not have a significant impact on the receiving landscape character.

4.6. Therefore, it is considered that the proposed development of the site for residential development can be supported from a landscape and visual context and the site would be appropriate for taking forward.
ASPECT PLANS
APPENDIX 1
VISUAL ASSESSMENT
Site located beyond intervening vegetation associated with the railway line
Existing development to the west of the site

Infrastructure associated with the railway line which lines the western site boundary

Cemetery to the west of the site

N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 35mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 65° and when printed at A2, should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through the same radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be substituted for visiting the viewpoint.
N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 35mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 68° and when printed at A3, should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through the same radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be substituted for visiting the viewpoint.
Playing fields associated with Harlington Upper School

Wider settlement setting of Harlington

Site located beyond intervening vegetation

N.B. IMAGES TO ILLUSTRATE THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE CONTEXT ONLY. Panoramas are created from multiple photographs taken using a digital equivalent of a 35mm camera with 50mm lens in line with best practice and current guidance. Images illustrate a horizontal field of view of 65° and when printed at A3 should be viewed at a distance of 330mm curved through the same radius in order to correctly illustrate the existing landscape context. To ensure considered judgements are accurately assessed, images should not be substituted for visiting the viewpoint.