



Land at Lower Road, Milton Malsor

Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

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Viridian Landscape Planning

June 2021

LPA reference S/2020/0599/MAO

On behalf of Hollins Strategic Land





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Project no. 2738

June 2021

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1	PROFESSIONAL STATEMENT.....	1
1.2	COMMISSION AND PLANNING APPLICATION.....	1
1.3	REASONS FOR REFUSAL.....	3
1.4	SCOPE OF EVIDENCE.....	4
2	POLICY CONTEXT.....	5
2.1	PLANNING POLICY.....	5
3	LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT.....	10
3.1	SCOPE OF THE LVIA.....	10
3.2	ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS.....	12
4	LANDSCAPE CHARACTER.....	15
4.1	PUBLISHED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER.....	15
4.2	CHARACTER OF THE SITE AND ITS SETTING.....	17
4.3	VILLAGE EDGE.....	18
4.4	CHARACTER OF VILLAGE AND THE CONSERVATION AREA.....	19
4.5	LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE SITE.....	22
4.6	APPROACH TO THE VILLAGE.....	24
5	LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND ENHANCEMENT.....	27
6	POLICY TEST.....	30
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	30
7	CONCLUSIONS.....	32
7.1	LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ISSUES.....	32
7.2	DESIGN ISSUES.....	32
7.3	DETERMINATION.....	33

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: FIGURES FROM LVIA

APPENDIX B: SITE CHARACTER AND VIEWPOINT PHOTOGRAPHS FROM LVIA

APPENDIX C: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS TABLES

APPENDIX D: FIGURES

APPENDIX E: ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS

APPENDIX F: VIEWPOINT 4 PHOTOMONTAGE AND METHODOLOGY



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROFESSIONAL STATEMENT

- 1.1.1 My name is Nigel Evers. From October 2013 until April 2017, I was Director of Landscape at Peter Brett Associates LLP (PBA) and before that a Director at Cooper Partnership Limited. I have been a Director of Viridian Landscape Planning Ltd (VLP), an independent landscape consultancy, since its formation in October 2017.
- 1.1.2 I hold a Diploma in Landscape Architecture; I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) and have been practising as a Landscape Architect since 1978. My professional experience has included a broad range of landscape planning and design projects, including major design schemes, new highways, and environmental impact assessments, preparing evidence for Public Inquiries, and acting as expert witness.
- 1.1.3 I have wide experience of landscape design and landscape planning throughout England, Scotland, and Wales. I have been responsible for projects with public clients, such as Bedford Borough Council, City and County of Swansea, South Gloucestershire Council and Mid Devon District Council; private clients include Taylor Wimpey, Kier, Edenstone, MF Freeman, Redrow Homes, Wainhomes, CALA Homes and Gryphonn Quarries; and community groups in Cardiff, Lincolnshire and Gloucestershire.
- 1.1.4 My evidence is set out below and is given in accordance with the guidance of the Landscape Institute, which is my professional institution. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

1.2 COMMISSION AND PLANNING APPLICATION

- 1.2.1 This **Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence** has been prepared on behalf of Hollins Strategic Land (HSL) in support of its appeal against the decision of West Northamptonshire Council to refuse planning permission for outline application S/2020/0599/MAO, for up to 65 dwellings with associated landscaping, open space and access. All matters are reserved other than access.
- 1.2.2 I have been involved with the project since March 2019, when VLP was commissioned to undertake a baseline study of the site and its context and the subsequent production of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the proposals. The LVIA considered the effects on landscape (including landscape character), and on people's views and visual amenity, as separate assessment components.
- 1.2.3 The following sets out the evolution of the scheme and my involvement in its development.
- April 2019: undertook photographic survey.



- January 2020: provided comments and input into the evolution of layout including open space, enhanced boundary treatment and consideration of effects on views, including from the north-west. Use of hedges and hedgerow trees to restore the landscape, break up expanse of field and reflect character of the greens around the church in the centre of village.
- Jan 2020 – March 2020: drafting LVIA and further evolution of layout.
- 16 April 2020 – application with LVIA submitted and validated.
- 8 July 2020 – email comments from LPA on principle, landscape/character, archaeology, noise, drainage, agricultural. Planning officer suggests a smaller scale of development.
- 28 August 2020 – submitted revisions to illustrative layout in the form of Parameter Plan in response to officer comments. VLP response to LPA comments on landscape character and visual issues alongside Addendum to Planning Statement including Parameter Plan.
- 2 October 2020 – letter from Hollins Strategic Land to Samuel Dix (Principal Planning Officer) in response to remaining planning issues in advance of planning committee report being issued: highway and access, noise, landscape, principle of development and housing supply. In relation to landscape, the letter said:

We note that you have discussed landscape with your team leader and concluded a specialist review would not be necessary as the amended parameters plan would result in a development that is better related to the settlement than the original indicative layout. New planting would also mitigate harms and soften the edge of Milton Malsor. As the parameters can be conditioned then landscape can be agreed
- 22 Oct 2020 – planning committee agenda and report published.
- Paragraph 9.21 set out that officers were of the view that:

a revised parameters plan has been provided that does not specify a detailed internal road layout but restricts the eastwards extent of development to be consistent with Stockwell Road and effectively widens the frontage along Lower Road so that the majority of the open space is to the rear of the site closest to the railway line. A revised LVIA concluded that the landscape and visual impacts of this form of development would be the same.
- At 9.22:

Officers consider that the revised parameters plan results in a form of development that would be more in keeping with the compact nature of Milton Malsor and its historic evolution, particularly in terms of the development now retaining the same gap to the railway as adjoining housing.
- The conclusion on visual and landscape impacts at 9.23 was that:

The parameters of the development have been revised to be more in keeping with the existing settlement and visual impacts are likely to be restricted to the immediate locality and not prominent within the wider landscape. However, the development would result in the irreversible loss of a presently open and undeveloped field that forms part of the rural setting to Milton Malsor, contrary to Policy R1(b) of the JCS and SS2 of the Part 2 Local Plan.
- 29 October 2020 – planning committee and Notice of Decision to Refuse.



- 10 March 2021 – appeal lodged.

1.2.4 VLP has been retained by HSL for its appeal against the Council's refusal of planning permission.

1.3 REASONS FOR REFUSAL

1.3.1 The proposed development is for:

Outline planning application for the erection of up to 65 no. dwellings with associated works and access.

1.3.2 The application was submitted in outline with all matters, other than means of access, reserved for consideration at a later date. The key aspects of the proposed development are:

- up to 65 dwellings, of which 50% would be affordable;
- vehicular and pedestrian access to the site off Lower Road;
- off-site highway improvements in and around Milton Malsor;
- associated landscape works;
- public open space; and
- ecological mitigation and enhancement.

1.3.3 At the committee on the 29th October 2020, members voted in accordance with the officer recommendation and refused the application. The Decision Notice was issued on the 29th October 2020.

1.3.4 Of the three Reasons for Refusal, Reasons 1 and 2 contain points which are relevant to landscape and visual issues and which read as follows:

1. The application sites lies outside the settlement confines of Milton Malsor as designated in the adopted South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2) and is therefore in open countryside. The adopted Development Plan seeks to focus new development within the settlement boundaries of settlements and be of an appropriate scale to the existing settlement. The development proposed would therefore conflict with an up to date and adopted Development Plan, in particular Policy R1(e) and R1(g) of the adopted West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2014 and Policies SS1 and LH1 of the adopted South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2). In addition, to permit the development would conflict with paragraphs 12 and 47 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. A development of the scale proposed would comprise a substantial new development that would erode the rural setting of Milton Malsor and adversely change the character of the village. The development would therefore conflict with Policy R1(b) of the 2014 West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, Policy SS2 of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2), and paragraph 170 of the NPPF.



1.4 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

This Evidence uses as its basis the LVIA of March 2020 prepared for the planning application, which is summarised in section 3 below. The Statement considers the proposals in the light of the Reasons for Refusal.



2 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 PLANNING POLICY

INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1 A description of the landscape related planning policy context of the site is set out in 2.6 of the LVIA and is not repeated here. However, the opportunity has been taken to consider changes in policy and the policies cited by the Council in both the Reasons for Refusal and their Statement of Case of April 2021.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 2.1.2 Set out at paragraph 8 are three overarching objectives to achieve sustainable development, two of which are relevant to this case. They are:

b) a social objective - ... by fostering a well-designed...built environment, with accessible...open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) an environmental objective - ...to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently...

- 2.1.3 Under 'Open space and recreation', paragraph 96 explains that:

Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities.

- 2.1.4 Paragraph 98 sets out that:

Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.

- 2.1.5 Under: 'Achieving well-designed places', paragraph 127 states that planning decisions should ensure that developments:

a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting...;



d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;

e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space)...; and

f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible...

2.1.6 From 'Conserving and enhancing the natural environment', paragraph 170 states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, inter alia:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services...

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures...

2.1.7 Note that the requirement of criterion b) is to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The requirement to protect and enhance is only relevant to criterion (a). There is no blanket requirement to protect countryside for its own sake. However, there has been no suggestion that the site is part of a Valued Landscape, and that has been agreed as common ground (2.2.12); nor does the site have any statutory status or identified quality in the development plan.

ADOPTED DEVELOPMENT PLAN: RELEVANT POLICIES FROM REASON FOR REFUSAL

2.1.8 Reason for Refusal 1 cites Policies R1(e) and R1(g) of the adopted West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2014 and Policies SS1 and LH1 of the adopted South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2).

2.1.9 Policies SS1 and LH1 are not relevant to Landscape and Visual issues, whereas R1(e) and R1(g) are relevant in part.

2.1.10 Reason for Refusal 2 cites Policies Policy R1(b) of the 2014 West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, Policy SS2 of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2), and paragraph 170 of the NPPF, which are relevant in part to landscape and visual issues.

2.1.11 The parts of R1 that are cited require residential development in rural areas to, inter alia:

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



e) be of an appropriate scale to the existing settlement...

g) be within the existing confines of the village.

- 2.1.12 There is not protection of all open land in b), but the requirement to avoid adverse effects on land that is of particular significance to form and character, which requires an assessment as to whether the site has a particular significance to the form and character of the village; the Council has not undertaken such a study.
- 2.1.13 With regard to scale, at 7.3 in the SoC, the Council writes that the harmful landscape and visual impacts will be exacerbated by the “excessive size” of the proposal, although overall the issue in the SoC appears to relate to a policy or planning objection. Similarly, location of development within a settlement is a policy issue.
- 2.1.14 The proposals have been designed to integrate with the existing settlement pattern in a number of ways, as can be seen from the diagrammatic **Figure Ground Drawings L5**:
- As a result of the relationship of the development to the existing edge of Milton Malsor, aligning the eastern and western edges of the development with the existing late C20th development in the village, as suggested by officers at pre-application stage;
 - The development of a network of open spaces both within and along the perimeters of the proposals, reflecting the extensive open space within the core of the village and providing a green setting for the proposals; and
 - Providing a strong boundary along the northern edge of the site, clearly defining the new edge of the settlement in this area.
- 2.1.15 The proposal will also integrate the development into the wider landscape and provide a strong enhancement of the interface with the countryside in this area, when compared with the existing situation. I consider this issue further in Section 5 of this Evidence.
- 2.1.16 Policy SS2 covers General Development and Design Principles with 17 criteria against which planning permission will be granted, although the Council only specifically cites 1a which requires development to maintain:

the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts, does not result in physical coalescence that would harm this 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.

- 2.1.17 The Council's Statement at 7.6 states that:

Arising from its location in the open countryside, the proposal is in conflict with Policy SS2 and, more specifically, part 1a...



- 2.1.18 As I read it, that means that the location in open countryside results in conflict with the whole policy, and in particular (but not exclusively), 1a. There are 17 criteria in part 1 of the policy, although the Character and Appearance Statement of Common Ground narrows specific conflict to parts 1a, 1b, 1d and 1p.
- 2.1.19 1a refers not only to settlements surrounded by open countryside, but also their distinctive parts, so it can apply to areas within towns and villages as well as the land between them.
- 2.1.20 7.6 quotes from 1a which requires proposed development not to:
- 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...*
- 2.1.21 The Council does not specifically cite any issues of coalescence from 1a, nor has any been alleged; the site was part of an Important Local Gap covered by Policy EV8 in the 1997 Local Plan, but that policy has been replaced by SS2, where no gaps are identified. The LVIA at 4.4.4 found no significant harm to the gap, which was policy at the time, or any issues of coalescence.
- 2.1.22 Dealing with the other aspects of 1a, there has been no study prepared by the Council of which I am aware, that has included the site as:
- undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement.*
- Nor has the site been identified as having the qualities included in R1 b) that cover:
- open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village.*
- 2.1.23 Equally, there has been no assessment of such roles in any of the correspondence or reports prepared by the Council in connection with these proposals.
- 2.1.24 The Conservation Area Appraisal focussed on the designated area and some outlying open spaces, which did not include the site.
- 2.1.25 The officers, when considering the parameters plan, stated at paragraph 9.22 that it:
- ...results in a form of development that would be more in keeping with the compact nature of Milton Malsor and its historic evolution, particularly in terms of the development now retaining the same gap to the railway as adjoining housing. However, the development would still result in the loss of undeveloped land that forms the rural setting of Milton Malsor, a matter exacerbated by the size of the proposals.*
- 2.1.26 In my view, the site does not display any characteristics that are of particular significance to the form and character of Milton Malsor. In the absence of an analysis from the Council that identifies how the site provides those roles and qualifies as of particular significance to the form and character of the settlement, it is difficult to



understand that assertion. Indeed, it is of note that the Council has not, to-date, engaged with the LVIA prepared as part of the planning application.

- 2.1.27 It is common ground (2.3.1) that the site is largely featureless. It is simply an ordinary field that is adjacent to existing development, with existing houses facing onto Lower Road to the west, and houses backing on to it to the south. There is no positive relationship between the houses to the south and the site, merely rear elevations, rear gardens with assorted suburban planting and garden structures, as well as various boundary treatments.
- 2.1.28 With regard to locally important views, it is common ground (2.5.1) that no key views have been identified in the area in any study. It is also common ground (2.5.2) that the LVIA identified representative viewpoints, none of which I would regard as key views. Some of those representative views are of the largely featureless site, adjacent to relatively recent development with largely geometric edges. The Conservation Area, which includes the important open spaces (and specifically excludes C20th development) is not included in any of those views. The church spire, on the edge of the Conservation Area, only appears in Viewpoint 5, which is from Towcester Road and some 0.49km from the site boundary. The Conservation Area and the distinctive village centre are separated from the viewpoints by the late C20th housing.
- 2.1.29 The test in the policy is not that any of the features it describes occur or need to be protected if they do exist, but that they have to be of particular significance. There is nothing in published studies or my assessment that identifies any particularly significant role that the site plays in the form or character of Milton Malsor, to elevate the importance of the site above simply ordinary, in contrast to the open spaces within the heart of the village.
- 2.1.30 It is also common ground (2.2.12) that the site is not part of a Valued Landscape.



3 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

3.1 SCOPE OF THE LVIA

3.1.1 For convenience and ease of reference for the inquiry, the LVIA is summarised below, but it can be read in full in the application documents.

3.1.2 The LVIA and the Addendum present the methodology, context and results of the landscape and visual appraisal process and the Landscape and Visual Effects Tables, including aims and objectives of the proposed landscape strategy, which underpins the proposed landscape design for the scheme.

3.1.3 There were no requests for additional viewpoints, nor were there any concerns communicated to me by the Council concerning the methodology used. It is common ground that appropriate representative viewpoints have been selected for the LVIA (2.5.2). The Council confirmed in the report to committee at 9.23, repeated in the Statement of Case at 7.3, that:

visual impacts are likely to be restricted to the immediate locality and not prominent within the wider landscape.

3.1.4 This is confirmed at 7.2 in the SoC, where the issue appears to be the visual effects along the:

...main thoroughfare into / out of the village.

3.1.5 The figures from the LVIA are included as **Appendix A** of this Evidence, and the accompanying photographs, taken in April 2019, form **Appendix B**. Note that foliage on trees provides the most favourable filtering and screening effects but when the photographs were taken there were few leaves on the trees. As a result, the photographs show the 'worst case' basis for the assessment.

3.1.6 The following figures were prepared (**Appendix A**):

- L1: Topography;
- L2: Landscape Planning Context;
- L3: Landscape Character;
- L4: Viewpoint Location Plan; and
- L5: Existing, Consented and Proposed Strategic Development.

3.1.7 The LVIA considered:



- Features of the site and its context;
- Landscape-related planning designations;
- Landscape character, the character of the site, and its relationship to its surroundings;
- Views towards the site;
- A landscape strategy designed to integrate the proposed development into its surroundings; and
- Changes to landscape features, landscape character and views arising as a result of the development proposals.

3.1.8 The LVIA also included the Landscape Effects and Visual Effects Tables.

3.1.9 Typical views towards the site were assessed from publicly available viewpoints, and are illustrated by the panoramic photographs from **Viewpoints 1-6** in **Appendix B**. The location of these photograph viewpoints is shown in **Appendix A** on **Figure L4: Viewpoint Location Plan. Site Character Photographs A and B** illustrate the existing character of the site. The photographs were taken in April 2019 when there were few leaves on the trees and hedges, and the screening function of the vegetation was limited.

3.1.10 Visual receptors (viewers) are people, and the site work showed that, in this case, the key receptor groups are motorists (**Viewpoints 3, 4 and 5**) and pedestrians (all viewpoints) using local roads and footpaths, and adjacent residents (**Viewpoint 3**).

3.1.11 There are no published or designated key views within the vicinity of the site, and the site does not fall within any designated key views.

3.1.12 As a result of the desktop study and site work, representative viewpoints have been selected as shown on the **Visual Effects Table** at **Appendix C**. The baseline description for each viewpoint, including information about the type and relative numbers of people likely to be affected, is set out within the **Visual Effects Table**.

3.1.13 Site work showed that the only publicly available views of the site comprise a number of local views (which are views under 0.5km away from the site boundary) and one medium distance view (0.5km to 1km away). No long-distance views (more than 1km away) were found. The site has limited visibility from the wider landscape, largely as a result of the relatively flat landform (which gently rises to the east at a gradient of about 1:11), the hedges on or adjacent to the site and in the wider landscape, and development around the edge of Milton Malsor.

3.1.14 In paragraph 7.3 of their SoC, and as is common ground (2.5.3), the Council agrees with our assessment of the generally local nature of the views:



Visual impacts associated with the proposed development are likely to be restricted to the immediate locality and it will not be prominent within the wider landscape.

- 3.1.15 Although there are no published or designated key views in the vicinity of the site, the Council states that there are views of significance to the form and character of the settlement, whilst at the same time failing to identify viewpoints in the LVIA, or their own viewpoints, that accord with the criteria from 1a. It is not credible to claim that the presence of views that are important to the form and character of Milton Malsor are a factor in refusing planning permission, without identifying those views and then describing them. As at 1.2.3 above, although the Council considered seeking professional landscape advice during the determination of the application, it chose not to do so.
- 3.1.16 None of the receptors who experience views in which the site is visible, have high susceptibility to change, in accordance with my methodology, as they are either travellers on transport routes where the view is fleeting and incidental to the journey (in the case of the site, the local roads) which have low susceptibility, or where the view is moderately important to the quality of the journey (people walking on streets or local public rights of way, with moderate interest in their visual environment) with medium susceptibility.
- 3.1.17 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment concluded that the indicative development would have a limited impact in landscape terms, as it would be viewed against the existing backdrop of dwellings on Stockwell Road, and is nevertheless screened from the surrounding area by the railway line to the east and partly by farm buildings to the north-west. The LVIA also considered the fact that the wider landscape is not designated as of any particular value and that the site is typical of any undeveloped land on the edge of a rural village.
- 3.1.18 Full details of the landscape and visual effects are set out in the **Landscape and Visual Effects Tables** in **Appendix C**, which is the only full assessment before the inquiry which is guided by GLVIA3.

3.2 ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS

- 3.2.1 The most significant landscape effects during construction would be to the character of the site, which would be Moderately Significant adverse effects due to the disturbance caused by construction activities.
- 3.2.2 On completion, adverse landscape effects of Moderate Significance remain for the landscape character of the site as, although construction activity would have ceased, the mitigation planting would not have matured sufficiently to reduce the magnitude of effects arising from the newly constructed buildings and access road.
- 3.2.3 At 15 years after completion, landscape effects would reduce to Minor Significance for the landscape character of the site, as the proposed mitigation planting would be maturing and becoming effective by this stage.



- 3.2.4 However, for trees and hedges on site, a beneficial effect of Moderate Significance has been assessed, as there would be substantially increased planting throughout the site, as well as management of existing trees and hedges for landscape and ecological objectives, rather than agricultural objectives.
- 3.2.5 No visual effects of Severe or Major Significance are predicted for any time period.
- 3.2.6 Effects of Moderate Significance are predicted for pedestrians and residents at **Viewpoint 3**, owing to the open view of construction activities close to the viewpoint.
- 3.2.7 On completion, effects of Moderate Significance are predicted to remain for pedestrians and residents at **Viewpoint 3** as, although construction activity would have ceased, the mitigation planting would not have matured sufficiently to reduce the magnitude of effects arising from the newly constructed buildings and access road.
- 3.2.8 Residual visual effects are those remaining 15 years after completion, when the proposed planting would have had the benefit of over 15 years' establishment, and trees would be about 7-9m in height, depending on the species and their initial planting height.
- 3.2.9 Visual effects for pedestrians and residents at **Viewpoint 3** are predicted to reduce to Minor Significance, and for motorists to Not Significant, and from **Viewpoint 4** from Minor significance to Not Significant for motorists and pedestrians, as the new planting would be mature and effective by this stage.
- 3.2.10 The effects set out above are what would be expected for a residential development on the edge of a settlement, and on a site and in a context which has no particularly sensitive receptors.

RESPONSE TO COUNCIL'S COMMENTS: VLP LETTER OF 28 AUGUST 2020

- 3.2.11 I responded to the Council's comments in their email of 8 August 2020, by writing to Mr Harris on 28 August 2020 setting out my views. Apart from summarising the LVIA, the letter also considered the potential changes to the findings of the LVIA as a result of the introduction of the Parameters Plan (PARAM01).

- 3.2.12 The letter concluded as follows:

The submitted scheme and the parameters set for the revised scheme have been assessed, and there is likely to be no difference in terms of landscape and visual effects between the two. Both provide enhancement in terms of planting and management, as well as providing a better edge and setting to development when compared with the existing, in both layout and landscape design. The site as existing has no landscape features of note, apart from the boundary hedges. With both the submitted and the revised schemes, there would be significant benefits to trees and hedges because of:

- *the planting of new woodland, along the eastern boundary, which would create a wooded skyline;*



- *hedge planting within the open spaces to subdivide them into fields and greatly increase the length of new hedges;*
- *new tree planting along the existing and proposed hedges, which would help compensate for the decline of hedgerow trees in the wider landscape, as well as enhance the landscape of the currently barren, bleak site;*
- *new planting at the entrance to the site from Lower Road, providing a new gateway to the village and reflecting open space in the core of the settlement; and*
- *provision of new wildflower meadows across the open spaces, managed to enhance biodiversity.*

The tree planting would accord with the desire, expressed in the Parish Plan, to increase tree planting within the village.

There would inevitably be changes to the character of the site and in some views, but that is to be expected with any greenfield development. In any event, the few moderate effects would be reduced as the mitigation planting matures, and there would be long term benefits to trees and hedges.



4 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1 PUBLISHED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1.1 The published landscape character assessments relevant to the site and its setting are considered in some detail in 2.7 of the LVIA. The Current Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), produced by Northamptonshire County Council is the most local and therefore the most relevant to the site and its setting. It is common ground (2.4.1 and 2.4.2) that the key characteristics set out in the LVIA are correct.

4.1.2 The site is in the eastern part of Landscape Character Type 13: Undulating Hills and Valleys, of which the key characteristics relevant to the site and its context are:

- *Extensive undulating and productive rural landscape stretching across the west of the county;*
- *cohesive and recognisable unity of character despite scale and extent...*
- *mixed farming predominates across the landscape...*
- *hedgerow trees, within the strong hedgerow network, contribute to the perception of a well treed landscape...*
- *numerous villages linked by winding country lanes contribute to rural character.*
- *communication routes and urban influences and infrastructure have, where present, eroded local rural landscape character...*

4.1.3 More specifically, the site falls within the eastern tip of Landscape Character Area 13b: Bugbrooke and Daventry which extends from the southern edge of Northampton to west of Daventry. The description for this area includes, on pages 136 and 137:

- *Land cover in the area is a combination of both arable and pastoral farmland in fields of varying size...*
- *There is, however, a predominance of improved pastures with grazing cattle and horses surrounding the settlements dispersed through the character area...*
- *A number of well treed field boundaries also contribute to the overall woodland cover and often emphasise the undulating landform...*
- *Views along the undulations are generally long and open, although landform and vegetation frequently limit more extensive, panoramic views...*
- *The landscape is well settled... Smaller settlements have both a linear and clustered form.*

4.1.4 The separate Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines for the Undulating Hills and Valleys Landscape Character Type states, at page 67:

New development... should be controlled to conserve and enhance the balance of the rural elements that contribute to the intrinsic character of this productive agricultural landscape. In particular, the scale and pattern of the fields enclosed by a robust hedgerow network, the woodland mosaic, and village form and setting and their relationship with the undulating



landform should be retained. Wherever possible, the distinctive and strong hedgerow network should remain intact, particularly where historic field patterns are evident, and conserved and managed to encourage species diversity and enhanced wildlife habitats...

- 4.1.5 The Northamptonshire Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study (NLSGIS) (Living Landscapes Consultancy for the River Nene Regional Park CIC, 2009) sets out at 1.22 the limitations of the study:

...based on a desktop review of various sources of information compiled by other agencies that focus on green infrastructure and landscape issues in and around Northampton. In addition...several site visits were undertaken...to supplement the information available, and in particular to gather evidence in support of the landscape character and visual assessment analyses that form part of this assessment. The site visits were limited to the consideration of strategic issues, rather than detailed issues pertaining to individual sites. Further work would be required to assess visibility and character issues at the local scale as part of more detailed site-specific assessments such as those conducted as part of Environmental Impact Assessments for proposed new development.

- 4.1.6 On Figure 24 of the Northamptonshire Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study, Milton Malsor village is shown as of medium Landscape and Visual Sensitivity within Area 3, whereas the land just outside the north-eastern side of the village, where the site is located, is of low sensitivity, although there are no definitive boundaries between categories which merge one into another. It is reasonable to assume that the site is in a medium to low sensitivity area, although the text does not use such a categorisation for this part of Area 3.

- 4.1.7 The Northamptonshire Urban Fringe Landscape Character and Sensitivity Study (NUFLCSS) (Chris Blandford Associates for Northampton Borough Council, 2018) states in the third paragraph of the Executive Summary that, although the Study Area incorporates landscapes and townscapes within Northampton Borough, it also:

encompasses rural landscapes within the neighbouring authority areas of [inter alia]... South Northamptonshire District. This evidence was commissioned by Northampton Borough Council. It should not be considered to be a material consideration for planning applications relating to land outside Northampton.

- 4.1.8 It is therefore a recent independent professional study, published by a predecessor authority within West Northamptonshire, which is of relevance to the site.

- 4.1.9 Milton Malsor is in Local Landscape Character Area 13g, Milton Malsor (i.e. the eastern part of County LCT 13: Undulating Hills and Valleys), which is given medium-high Landscape Sensitivity to development-led change, defined as:

a landscape that has some important components or is an area that is of medium-high value, and has some limited tolerance of the changes that would result from development without undue negative consequences.



- 4.1.10 It describes Milton Malsor as having a dense historic core around some minor roads, with more modern development to the north and east, and some modern infill. It states (at 2.5.50) that:

Key features contributing to the character of Milton Malsor are the open pastures and paddocks. Two open green spaces, one which sits to the north of Rectory Lane, and one to the north of Collingtree Road, give the whole village a rural character despite its proximity to Northampton.

- 4.1.11 The green spaces mentioned above do not form part of the site, are not adjacent to it and would not be directly affected by development on the site. In fact, they are the spaces described in the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 4.1.12 There is tolerance within the broadly drawn landscape considered in 13g which did not consider the particular field subject to this appeal.

4.2 CHARACTER OF THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

- 4.2.1 The landscape planning context for the site is shown on **Figure L2** in **Appendix A**. The site is not within any national designation, such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or more local designation such as a Special Landscape Area or Green Gap. Additionally, at no point in the consideration of the application has the Council suggested that the site is part of a Valued Landscape, nor has the Council undertaken an objective exercise at the Local Plan stage to establish if the site or the surrounding landscape should be considered valued. It is common ground that the site is not part of a Valued Landscape (2.2.12).

- 4.2.2 Paragraph 7.2 of the Council's Statement of Case reads as follows:

The appeal site comprises a physically large parcel of land (5.1 hectares gross, of which 2.5 hectares net is developable) that forms a significant part of Milton Malsor's rural setting. The site is entirely open and elevated above a main thoroughfare into/out of the village and it has particular value in emphasising the rural character of the village. Open spaces at the settlement edge of Milton Malsor contribute to the special character of the village and help to define its setting. The village's open-countryside setting takes on a particularly expansive quality in the environs of the appeal site, i.e. where the village's rural context is most easily appreciated.

- 4.2.3 An important point is the relative size of the site compared with the area that is proposed to be developed. The site is 5.1ha, but only 2.5ha is proposed to be developed, within which there will be additional undeveloped areas of open space. As can be seen from the **Figure Ground** drawing (**Figure L8**), the area of development proposed represents only a small extension to the overall settlement. However, what is seen on plan is not what is seen on the ground, within the landscape. Given that there is already continuous development along the western side of Lower Road and



that the developed edge of Milton Malsor is clearly visible along the southern boundary of the site, the extension of the village would be in a largely developed context, bringing the development edge part way across the field.

- 4.2.4 The interface between the northern edge of Milton Malsor and the field that comprises the site is typical of many urban edges in lowland England. Because it is on the edge of a village rather than, say, a town, and as a result the whole of the urban edge is visible, the scale is much more modest, but it is still a straight, relatively hard edge where dwellings on a geometric layout, typical of the time, back onto fields, with all of the domestic paraphernalia of rear gardens.
- 4.2.5 It is not clear how the Council identifies the site as a significant part of the village's rural setting. It is rural, in that it is an agricultural field, but it is common ground that it is largely featureless. However, there are much more satisfactory and rural edges to the village, which I consider below.

4.3 VILLAGE EDGE

- 4.3.1 I have undertaken an additional photographic survey considering other edges to the village and the relationship to its setting, included in **Appendix E**, and the locations of which are shown on **Figure L7** in **Appendix D**.
- 4.3.2 EA 1 is from Barn Lane to the south of the village. It is a no-through road that is also a permissive footpath and leads into Collingtree Road. Properties in Rectory Lane are visible amongst the trees and the lane is lined with trees and hedges.
- 4.3.3 EA 2 is on footpath KX8, which also approaches from the south, where the large house identified as 'Mortimers' is seen amongst mature trees and across the field which perhaps was once part of its park.
- 4.3.4 EA 3 is from Rectory Lane, north of EA 2, showing the wall that strongly defines the village edge along this part of the lane.
- 4.3.5 EA 4 is from Towcester Road, to the west of the village where the village edge is clearly identified by the walls, buildings, trees and hedges on the eastern side of the road.
- 4.3.6 EA 5 is further to the west on Gayton Road, and the same properties are seen within the wider countryside, integrated into the landscape by the mature trees and their irregular forms.



- 4.3.7 EA 6 is from Collingtree Road, east of the village, adjacent to the village park and showing a road lined with trees and hedges leading towards Milton Malsor.
- 4.3.8 In all of those cases, the relationship between the village and its rural setting are clear, with the buildings, walls and trees defining the village edge, sometimes strongly with brick or stone walls as an element, but more often by the softening effect of trees and hedges and organic and irregular arrangement of buildings. They are all in contrast to the current situation along the southern boundary of the site, with its relatively regular properties backing onto the field and the treatment of the boundary depending on the actions of residents.

4.4 CHARACTER OF VILLAGE AND THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 4.4.1 The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (South Northamptonshire Council, undated) explains at 1.1 that the Conservation Area:

incorporates the historic core of the village, along with the paddocks, the church and the larger houses on Rectory Lane.

- 4.4.2 Key characteristics are identified at 1.2:

- *Large open paddocks which create a rural atmosphere.*
- *Closed and intimate views in the core of the village.*
- *High stone and brick boundary walls.*
- *Vernacular style buildings fronting the road, which in the majority of cases are parallel to the highway. This creates a feeling of enclosure.*
- *A consistency in the materials of the buildings, primarily ironstone, which creates an attractive street scene.*
- *An informal arrangement of highways which gives the village a more intimate atmosphere.*

- 4.4.3 As can be seen from **Figure L2** in the LVIA and Figure 1 in Conservation Area Appraisal, the boundary has been carefully drawn to exclude C20th cul de sacs and other similar development. The Conservation Area Appraisal describes the relationship of C20th development at 4.7:

The post war years saw a number of small housing developments around the edge of the village, which has been exacerbated by the proximity to Northampton. There were a number of developments in the village in the last half of the 20th century, and these buildings are particularly apparent when located next to the traditional cottages of the 17th century. The larger housing developments which have grown up in the last 50 years are primarily located to the north of the village and do not affect the historic core significantly. They are not included in the conservation area.



The conservation area also wraps round modern developments such as Milton Court and Orchard Close to exclude them from the area, although due to their proximity to the conservation area they do still have a significant impact on the surrounding area...

4.4.4 Under 5.1 Settlement Form, the Conservation Area Appraisal describes how:

Milton Malsor is clustered in shape with no precise road pattern, although on the whole the roads tend to be curvilinear, creating closed views in the village. The settlement has built up around a central core, focussing on the High Street and the U shaped loop of Green Street. This densely built area contrasts to the outlying areas which are more spacious and on the whole have larger plot sizes. The church sits separated from the built up core of the village, out to the west, and due to its position on the highest point of the village geographically, it means that the church looks down on the rest of the village. This is a significant part of the character of the conservation area, and therefore settlement which surrounds the church should be carefully considered.

Prior to late 20th century developments there would have been an even higher proportion of open space, running through the centre of the village. This has unfortunately been lost and the form of the village has therefore changed somewhat.

4.4.5 Figure 13 is titled 'Important Spatial Features in Milton Malsor' and identifies, amongst other features important views and important open spaces, some of which are outside of the Conservation Area and near to the site. The site does not include any of those features nor does it appear as an important open space, despite Figure 13 identifying important open spaces which are outside of the Conservation Area.

4.4.6 Paragraph 7.2 of the Statement of Case refers to how:

Open spaces at the settlement edge of Milton Malsor contribute to the special character of the village and help to define its setting.

4.4.7 Further into the village, the character at the historic core is relatively rural because, despite unsympathetic C20th incursions that have cut off the links with the wider countryside (see CAA at 4.7), the disposition of paddocks provides a setting for the buildings which create spaces, reinforced by walls, hedges and trees, with grazing stock and modest agricultural buildings.

4.4.8 On page 17 of the Options for a Neighbourhood Plan (2013) document published by the Parish Council, question 10 of the Parish Council Worksheet provided by the local authority is:

Do you have any green spaces within the village you wish to see protected from development?



4.4.9 The response is as follows:

Yes – there are two vitally important central fields which are in the conservation area. These provide the pleasant open, tranquil character of the village. One also provides a vital open area along the stream linking to the open countryside and affords attractive views of the church. Development proposals for this site with housing this have been rejected for housing development proposals three times including on appeal. There is also a large grass area fronting the Greyhound Inn and its pond. The village also has a well-used village park and football club...

4.4.10 The site was not identified as a green space to be protected.

4.4.11 I have undertaken a photographic survey of some of the open spaces within the village, most of which have been identified as Important Open Spaces in the Conservation Area Appraisal and are shown on the Location Plan for Additional Viewpoints (L9) along with the Conservation Area boundary.

4.4.12 Image references OS 1a, OS 1b and OS2 show the two most important spaces in the village, which are either side of Collingtree Road and include the church. It is remarkable how these pastoral scenes occur within the settlement and despite unsympathetic C20th incursions, they provide a strong and attractive setting to the Conservation Area and the village. In OS 1a, houses face on to narrow village roads such as Green Street, and in OS 1b there are views across the grazed meadow with its modest agricultural buildings to the church on a slight rise and amongst mature trees. Stone walls line most of the surrounding the streets. The churchyard is also part of the open space, enclosed mostly by stone walls with its grass left in parts to grow with wildflowers, its stone gravestones scattered, and some standing at angles around the Grade II* listed building. Some of the headstones and chest tombs are Grade II listed.

4.4.13 OS 2 has hedges on the slightly elevated boundaries to the east, and gently slopes to a small stream which the streets cross on stone bridges, the stone walls continuing from the bridge parapets westwards along the streets. A public right of way crosses the stream on a timber footbridge. A variety of dwellings face onto the open spaces across the streets; some of the buildings are listed, many are in traditional materials. There are trees within the meadow and along the hedges.

4.4.14 OS 3 lies west of the church, off Stockwell Way, and provides an offset between the churchyard and the C20 houses. The church and its churchyard trees dominate the space.

4.4.15 OS 4 and 5 show areas also identified as Important Open Spaces in the Conservation Area Appraisal, and are in the Stockwell Way development, which lies between the



Conservation Area and the site. Although the development has been criticised in the Appraisal, it is interesting that the spaces within it have been identified as important as they clearly provide an attractive setting to the houses, which overlook them. As a result, the trees and grass provide relief from the roads and houses, providing space and a sense of scale, reducing the dominance of the buildings.

- 4.4.16 OS 6 shows a green within the Conservation Area, at the junction of High Street and Green Street, with its trees and grass unifying the buildings and reducing the dominance of the roads and parking.
- 4.4.17 OS 7 shows a field at the western edge of the village, which is within the Conservation Area but has not been identified as an important open space. Although largely hidden from the adjacent roads, I believe it is an important meadow that adds to the character of the village and provides a setting for the adjacent converted barns and houses, varying the developed edge of the village, and the hedge contrasting with the comparatively hard lines of the stone wall to the north seen in EA 4.
- 4.4.18 Of the open spaces considered above, OS 1, OS 2 and OS 7 give the core of the village its rural character as they are fields managed for agriculture with boundary hedges or lengths of wall, yet set within the historic settlement and, where traditional and informal development edges remain (unlike some of the late, largely regularly spaced C20th development specifically excluded from, but immediately adjacent to, the Conservation Area). In contrast to the spaces identified above, the ordinary, largely featureless site does not play any meaningful role in identifying the character of the village or in helping to define its setting. It lacks the richness of the spaces shown in OS 1a, 1b and 2 which have listed or traditional buildings in or adjacent to them, most particularly the church; mature trees; stone walls; a stream; bridges; attractive meadowland with (at the time the photographs were taken) the appealing sight of flowering buttercups; and cattle grazing, adding animation to the scene.

4.5 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE SITE

- 4.5.1 The site comprises a largely featureless rectilinear and sloping field, with mainly trimmed boundary hedges to the north and west (as shown on **Viewpoint 3**) and sections of outgrown hedge along the eastern parts of the northern and southern boundaries (as shown on **Site Character Photograph A** and **B** respectively).
- 4.5.2 The rear gardens and elevations of residential properties on the northern edge of Milton Malsor are partially screened by mature garden trees and shrubs. The site has no trees within it, and there are few trees in the boundary hedges. The tree survey identified no category A trees and that the site had mostly category C trees with low or moderate amenity value. One category U tree has decayed and requires removal.
- 4.5.3 Owing to the low hedge along the northern boundary, the site is effectively open to the adjacent countryside, which has largely open fields with low boundaries. Although



the site is pastureland, it displays none of the other key characteristics of LCA 13b, although its context includes the clustered village form.

- 4.5.4 In the view of the local authority, as set out in their Statement of Case, at paragraph 7.2, the site:

...forms a significant part of Milton Malsor's rural setting. The site is entirely open and elevated above a main thoroughfare into/out of the village and it has particular value in emphasising the rural character of the village. Open spaces at the settlement edge of Milton Malsor contribute to the special character of the village and help to define its setting. The village's open-countryside setting takes on a particularly expansive quality in the environs of the appeal site, i.e. where the village's rural context is most easily appreciated.

- 4.5.5 There are several issues here that need to be addressed concerning the significance of the site as part of the rural setting of the village. It is not clear how the Council arrives at that significance or what is the degree of significance. Nevertheless, it sets out a number of factors that appear to result in their assessment of 'significant'.

- 4.5.6 The first is that the site is entirely open. That is set out in the LVIA. The adjacent fields are also open, although the openness of the landscape in the area is curtailed by the landform gently rising to the east and to the railway partly on embankment; whilst to the north, the corridor of the M1 and the land rising beyond to the edges of Northampton restricts the openness. These open fields are characteristic of the area.

- 4.5.7 The second is that the site is elevated. The site is on land that rises gently to the east, but so is the northern edge of Milton Malsor, that the Council seems to think is entirely appropriate to be set on the same landform. It is overstating the situation to refer to the site as elevated. The LVIA at 2.4.1 describes the elevation of the site as follows:

...the site is at an elevation of approximately 75m AOD at its western end, rising to just over 85m AOD at its north-eastern corner..

- 4.5.8 This means that at its western end the site is more or less at the level of Lower Road, and rises by about 10 metres across its entire width. However, not all of the site is proposed to be developed, and the current proposals exclude the highest, eastern part from being built on, between 82 AOD and 85m AOD. L1 of the LVIA shows the topography of Milton Malsor and makes clear the site is no more elevated than the rest of the settlement. The Parameter Plan shows development consolidated to the west nearest Lower Road where the topography is lower.

- 4.5.9 The third point deals with a main thoroughfare in and out of the village, which presumably is Lower Road. Lower Road does not have any particular qualities in terms of its relationship to the village. Whilst signage for entering Milton Malsor is located along Towcester Road, there is no sense of having passed through a gateway or of approaching an historic settlement; there is simply C20th development fronting the western side of Lower Road and on the gently rising ground to the south of the site.



- 4.5.10 The fourth point gives the site particular value in emphasising the rural character of the village. It is not clear which of the foregoing points give the village a rural character as, in the vicinity of the site, the village has a suburban character.
- 4.5.11 The fifth point alleges that open spaces at the settlement edge contribute to the special character of the village and help define its setting, without any information of which spaces are being referred to, or how they achieve the objectives set out. If the point is referring to the fields on this edge of Milton Malsor, they are not open spaces but part of the pattern of open fields that occur to the north of the village.
- 4.5.12 The preceding paragraph (7.1) of the Statement of Case, whilst recognising that the site is not within the Conservation Area, quotes from the Conservation Area Appraisal which refers, appropriately, to some aspects of the village that are beyond the Conservation Area. However, many of the statements about the whole village lack examples outside of the Conservation Area, which of course represents the historic core of the village and which the CAA examines in some detail. The CAA has included areas of Important Open Space including, not surprisingly, the pastures and paddocks that form a fundamental part of the character of the historic core of the village, but also some of the areas of roadside grass on Stockwell Road and Stockwell Way, south of the site. The site is included as one of those spaces.
- 4.5.13 The Council's Statement of Case quotes from 5.3 of the CAA:
- Open spaces, trees, hedges and other natural features represent essential elements which help us understand the development and significance of the settlement, contribute to its special character and help define its setting.*
- 4.5.14 In my view, there is no doubt that the paddocks and pastures at the core of the Conservation Area are essential elements of the village and accord with the attributes in 5.3. However, the Council seems to have transferred some of those attributes to the site without any evidence as to how it demonstrates the attributes. The site is part of the ordinary countryside at the edge of the village, and cannot be compared with the strong character of the open spaces at the heart of the village, which provide a striking setting for the listed and other buildings that surround them.

4.6 APPROACH TO THE VILLAGE

- 4.6.1 Paragraph 7.2 of the Statement of Case states that:

The site is entirely open and elevated above a main thoroughfare into/out of the village...

- 4.6.2 The location of the approach to the village in the vicinity of the site has not been agreed by the parties. The Council's case is that the approach to the village is along Lower Road. In my view, to the north-west, in character terms, the village is reached at the junction of Lower Road and Towcester Road, and Lower Road is part of the village.



- 4.6.3 I have produced a series of photographs taken in May 2021 that demonstrate the point and how Lower Road is part of the settlement.
- 4.6.4 From the LVIA, **Viewpoint 5** shows the approach to the village from the north along Towcester Road. Further along this view, signage on Towcester Road (180m north of the Lower Road junction) indicates one is entering Milton Malsor and the national speed limit reduces to 40mph. The properties on the southern boundary of the site can clearly be seen across the fields, with the spire of the church above. The properties along Lower Road are also visible with the village extending part of the way across the low horizon in this relatively flat landscape. Lower Road is about 400m away. Those fields to the left of the photograph, which lie north of the site, will remain as fields and be the rural setting for the settlement in the area.
- 4.6.5 My new photographs start with **LR 1** which is taken from Towcester Road at its junction with Lower Road. In my view, this is not an approach but in character terms is when the traveller turns into Lower Road and the settlement is reached. The existing development on Lower Road changes its character from rural, as in LVIA **Viewpoint 5**, to suburban village edge. This is not a strong arrival in the sense that one passes between buildings through a gateway, but the character is in contrast with **Viewpoint 5**, where the village is at a distance and in front of the traveller. In the case of **LR 1**, the buildings, domestic boundaries and gardens along Lower Road, combined with those along Towcester Road, do not indicate countryside, but settlement. This character is reinforced by the signs either side of Lower Road, reducing the speed limit to 30 mph, and street lighting, electricity poles, front gardens, car parking and other features typical of a settlement. The house and large sheds of Spring Farm are visible on the north side of Lower Road, locally extending development across the road. The houses on the southern edge of the site can be seen across the fields, extending the village across the skyline.
- 4.6.6 As with **Viewpoint 5**, those fields to the left of the photograph which lie north of the site, will remain as fields.
- 4.6.7 **LR 2** is from Lower Road, just beyond Towcester Road, and the entirely developed character of the southern side of Lower Road becomes more apparent with the houses more prominent and parking on drives, garden fences and domestic planting reinforcing the developed character. However, the southern edge of the site is no longer visible owing to the roadside hedge, but the rather suburban Spring Farm is still visible on the other side of the road.
- 4.6.8 **LR 3** and **LR 4** show more houses, parking and garden boundaries. The properties on the southern edge of the site, on Stockwell Road, become visible again.
- 4.6.9 **LR 5** and **LR 6** are closer to the site, and the existing houses along the southern boundary are more clearly visible and, on the southern side of Lower Road, development in depth can be seen beyond the houses that front Lower Road. The extent of development beyond can be clearly seen on **Figure L9: Location Plan for Additional Viewpoints**.



- 4.6.10 **LR 7** and **8** complete the sequence, clearly showing both development in depth and the developed context of the site.
- 4.6.11 Towcester Road is the approach to Milton Malsor from the north and south, and although it does not enter the village, it runs alongside its western edge. When the traveller turns into Lower Road, in my analysis they have entered the settlement.
- 4.6.12 Other approaches are along Collingtree Road from the east and Gayton Road to the west, which lead directly into the village, whereas with Towcester Road, there is a transition from open countryside to settlement.



5 LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND ENHANCEMENT

- 5.1.1 Landscape design has been an integral part of the proposal from its earliest stages, as shown on the timeline of events at 1.2.3, and the objective has been to provide an improvement to the edge of the village. That would be achieved by having a more sympathetic and organic edge to development than is currently the case, which would integrate the scheme into the landscape rather than impose it upon the landscape.
- 5.1.2 The landscape proposals sub-divide the proposed open space with hedges and trees to reflect the character of the greens around the church in the centre of the village, introducing a more intimate scale and character. The planting would also help break up the development in views from the north-west, providing an informal, organic and more traditional development edge.
- 5.1.3 As shown on L6, the **Landscape Masterplan**, articulated front elevations of new dwellings would face outwards, looking over an enhanced landscape setting of new hedges, hedgerow trees, grass and meadowland, extending from:
- the new northern edge of development to the existing hedgerow along the northern boundary, which itself would be enhanced with new hedgerow tree planting to reflect the pattern of the wider landscape; and
 - eastwards towards the boundary of the railway with new planting which, as it matures, would form a new woodland belt which would provide a sense of scale as well as a backdrop to the new development along the skyline. The area would be subdivided by hedges, increasing the length of hedges and the connectivity across the site and including a community orchard, planted with traditional species of fruit trees, with wildflower meadow below the trees.
- 5.1.4 The proposed landscape treatment to Lower Road would provide an interface between the road and the new houses, setting the houses behind an area of open space which would contain new tree planting, a drainage attenuation pond and would have boundaries of hedges.
- 5.1.5 The proposed open spaces would reflect the character of the meadows within the Conservation Area, that give the central part of the village its strong character.
- 5.1.6 The native hedges would contain native trees, a proportion of which would be of oak and native lime, to provide a legacy of large, mature trees with room to grow and without suffering from conflicts with agricultural management. As can be seen from the photographs in the LVIA, there are very few hedgerow trees in the agricultural landscape of the area, and most are in decline. A network of hedges and hedgerow trees defining smaller scale fields was part of the historic character of the wider area. I have demonstrated this on **Figure L10** by indicating on the 1884 map (from the Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment for the project, RPS January 2020), which hedges and hedgerow trees may have been removed between then and now.



Many of those hedges would have had hedgerow trees along them. There was an area of woodland on the western edge of the site that has been removed since 1884 and which would be partly replaced by the planting associated with the access from Lower Road. The development is an opportunity to locally reverse that decline.

- 5.1.7 The tree planting would accord with the desire, expressed in the Parish Plan, to increase tree planting and green infrastructure within the village.
- 5.1.8 There would inevitably be changes to the character of the site and in some views, but that is to be expected with any greenfield development. In any event, the few moderate adverse effects would be reduced as the mitigation planting matures, and there would be long term benefits to trees and hedges.
- 5.1.9 The proposal would be a sympathetic extension to the settlement, which would be an enhancement when compared with the bleak arable field that is the baseline, and the rear of properties and their gardens on Stockwell Road and Stockwell Way, which is the current edge to development. It would also provide a carefully considered and designed setting to the edge of development, integrated into the landscape by both the design of the development and the diverse landscape in which it would be set.
- 5.1.10 However, the landscape proposals would not have the objective of providing a screen to the development through planting dense woodland, which would be out of character. Instead, it would integrate development with the existing edge of Milton Malsor, undeveloped parts of the site and surrounding countryside, and reduce its visual impact on local views.
- 5.1.11 I have worked closely with a visualisation specialist to produce an image of the view from **Viewpoint 4** as shown in **Appendix F**, along with the methodology. It shows two images:
- the baseline, with no proposed development shown; and
 - the photomontage showing the development with 15 years of plant growth.
- 5.1.12 The photomontage shows how the proposal would be in front of the current rear elevations of houses on Stockwell Road, on the southern boundary of the site, and the mitigation as it matures would integrate the development into the landscape and provide a new, stronger edge to Milton Malsor, which is more substantial and effective than currently exists either south of the site or along Lower Road. The tree planting along the existing boundary extends onto the horizon, merging with the proposed woodland that runs parallel with the railway.
- 5.1.13 Detailed proposals will include a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan, conditioned as part of these proposals and to be agreed with the local authority as part of detailed design. It will ensure the long-term ongoing maintenance, enhancement and stewardship of the landscape, which under the current agricultural regime the site does not currently have. That would be a benefit.



5.1.14 Paragraph 7.3 of the Council's SoC, after accepting the localised nature of views, states that:

the development would urbanise an attractive, open, undeveloped field that contributes to the rural setting of Milton Malsor...

5.1.15 It is inevitable that development for housing would change the character of its site. However, as set out in the LVIA and above, the proposals address the character of the landscape by retaining vegetated boundaries and avoiding the highest part of the site, whilst over the substantial areas of open space, which represent 51% of the site area. According to the Biodiversity Net Gain Calculator by Collington Winter Environmental, based on the Parameters Plan, and which is found as Appendix EP17 in Mr Harris' s proof of evidence:

The DEFRA 2.0 Metric has been used to calculate the % Net Gain on the site as a result of development. The DEFRA 2.0 Metric is the latest and only metric tool used by professional ecologists in calculating the level of biodiversity pre- and post-development. The tool is advocated for use by Natural England and is a key part of the government's emerging legislation framework for new developments to demonstrate at least a net gain of 10%. My approach to calculation is in accordance with the DEFRA guidance.

Use of the metric finds that the proposed development can achieve a +25.25% increase in net gain on site, as well as a +65.08% gain in hedgerows on site. This is concluded as a substantial gain for biodiversity within the site and goes over and above current and upcoming policies with relation to Biodiversity Net Gain. In my professional experience, this level of net gain which I have evidenced would represent a significantly better outcome compared to other sites I have worked on across the country and I consider it should be given significant weight in the overall planning balance.

5.1.16 To provide context, it has been estimated that there has been the loss of 21% of UK hedgerows between 1984 and 1998 (Northamptonshire Biodiversity Partnership website).

5.1.17 The proposals will also greatly enhance the landscape diversity of the site, when compared with the ordinary arable field that is its present use.



6 POLICY TEST

6.1 INTRODUCTION

- 6.1.1 The proposal would achieve the sustainable objectives of the NPPF (paragraph 8) by producing a well-designed built environment with accessible open spaces and protecting and enhancing the natural environment, by retaining and improving the existing trees and hedges, and by recognising the intrinsic character of the countryside by the selection of the most appropriate land on the site for development, protecting and retaining the northern and eastern parts as open space.
- 6.1.2 It would achieve the objectives of paragraph 96 by providing access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity, which is important for the health and well-being of communities, and the objectives of paragraph 98 providing access to new paths and, concerning the protection and enhancement of public rights of way and access, by supplementing the existing rights of way network. Whilst the proposals are in outline, except for access, the Parameter Plan and the extent of open space will be conditioned, as will a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan. These conditions will ensure that the positive elements of the proposal are carried through to reserved matters and, indeed, the local authority will have input into that process.
- 6.1.3 It will also accord with paragraph 127 by adding to the overall quality of the area for the lifetime of the development; would be visually attractive as a result of good layout and appropriate and effective landscaping, based on the Parameters Plan and the Landscape Masterplan which, along with the architecture, will be subject to reserved matters; it would be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting; would establish a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit; optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development including public space; and would create places that are inclusive and accessible, in this case to both the occupants of the development and the village community as a whole. This would be in contrast to the current access to the important open spaces either side of Collingtree Road in the centre of the village; only the southern one is accessible to the public, and then only along the public right of way.
- 6.1.4 The proposals also accord with paragraph 170 by contributing to and enhancing the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, through the relationship of the proposals to the wider landscape and the enhancement of the edge to the village, and by providing 25% net gain for biodiversity.
- 6.1.5 The proposals accord with the parts of R1 that are relevant to landscape and visual issues, as the site is not open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village, and the development would be perceived as an appropriate



scale to the existing settlement as it would appear overall as a relatively minor extension in viewpoints to the north and west, and in the context of existing development both along Lower Road and Stockwell Road.

- 6.1.6 With regard to Policy SS2, the Council only specifically cites 1a; the proposal accords with 1a as the site is not of particular significance to the form and character of the settlement, which can be clearly seen when compared with other land which I have identified in para ref 4.4.12 to 4.4.17.
- 6.1.7 Considering the aspects of R1 B) that cover open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village, there has been no assessment of such roles in any of the correspondence or reports prepared by the Council in connection with these proposals. In undertaking my analysis of the site and its setting, I have not come across anything that leads me to believe that the site performs any particularly significant role,



7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ISSUES

- 7.1.1 The landscape and visual aspects of the proposals have been subject to a thorough analysis through the preparation of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, including Landscape and Visual Effects Tables. All those documents have been prepared in accordance with recognised professional guidelines and, in particular, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition. Neither in consultations with the Council nor in the Officer's Report did professional officers question my approach or offer an alternative, systematic analysis.
- 7.1.2 In character terms, the site has no unusual or special defining characteristics. It is common ground that the site is not part of a Valued Landscape. The site clearly contrasts with the important open space around the village identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal which have characteristics not identified within the site.
- 7.1.3 The Council has not designated the site as being of any landscape importance or value, and the Parish Council's 'Options for a Neighbourhood Plan' document does not identify it as being important or part of any view corridor, gap or, apart from the northern footpath, green infrastructure.
- 7.1.4 The conclusion of the Landscape and Visual Effects Tables was that the development would not have any significant residual adverse effects on any of the assessed landscape receptors, and indeed would have beneficial effects on trees and hedges owing to the ability to manage and monitor those features and ultimately ensure their replacement. That would not happen in the absence of sensitive development that provides sustainability for those features, as well as additional planting to increase the tree cover in the area.
- 7.1.5 In terms of visual effects, development would only be locally visible, generally only to receptors of low sensitivity, and would not result in adverse visual effects of significance. The analysis submitted to the Council did not identify any adverse effects beyond those associated with an ordinary field on a settlement edge.

7.2 DESIGN ISSUES

- 7.2.1 The design was based on my initial appraisal of the area and the site within it, modified after consultation with the planning officer and other specialists from the Council. The northern and eastern parts of the site remain free from development, and any future reserved matters application will accord with the extents of open space identified on the Parameter Plan as a condition.
- 7.2.2 With the proposal, large parts of the site become part of the wider green infrastructure of the area. This is achieved by not only the generous open spaces on



the site expanding the village's green infrastructure, but also with new public access to and across the site which, via roadside footpaths, would link to the wider local footpath network.

7.2.3 Other enhancements include:

- the way that the open spaces would be managed, bringing about significant net ecological gain on what is currently a field with little biodiversity interest;
- the management of the site and its trees and hedges for landscape and ecological reasons, which is currently not the case;
- the supplementing of the existing vegetated new boundaries with new hedges, legacy trees, an orchard and woodland to increase the landscape and ecological interest; and
- the opportunities for linkages across the wider landscape.

7.2.4 Of probably the greatest importance, in my view, is the provision of a long-term management plan which would ensure that the existing and proposed landscape assets of the site would be sustained for the future.

7.2.5 Those enhancements are important benefits that need to be balanced against the limited harm which I have shown to be, in LVIA terms, not significant.

7.3 DETERMINATION

7.3.1 I believe that my Evidence shows that the Appeal Site is suitable for the development proposed, which has evolved through an iterative design process, to take account of landscape and visual parameters from the outset. There are no significant adverse effects on landscape or visual receptors, and indeed benefits have been identified. No landscape or visual designations would be adversely affected. The proposals respond to the site and its setting. I believe that permission should be granted.