

Appendix 4 Extracts of Mr Cook's Proof of Evidence

Section 6 – Effect on Landscape Elements (Character of the Site)

Section 7 – Effect on Landscape Character Beyond the Site

Section 8 – General Visual Amenity (Appearance)

Section 11 – High Weald AONB

Section 15 – Summary and Conclusions



Landscape Proof of Evidence

Land adjacent to Hartley Road, Cranbrook, Kent

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An aerial, watercolor-style illustration of a residential neighborhood. The scene is dominated by numerous houses with red-tiled roofs, arranged in a dense, somewhat irregular pattern. A central feature is a large, open green space, possibly a park or a large lawn, which is surrounded by trees and a winding path. The overall color palette is soft and muted, with a lot of greens, browns, and greys. The text '6.0 Effect on Landscape Elements (Character of the Site)' is overlaid on the left side of the image in a green, sans-serif font.

6.0

Effect on Landscape Elements (Character of the Site)

Introduction

- 6.1
- This section of my evidence explains why the scheme would in overall terms result in a net substantial beneficial effect as far as landscape elements are concerned. Collectively, the elements define the character of the site which would be enhanced in overall terms.

- 6.2
- There are no off-site works associated with the scheme other than roadside pavements. This section assesses the effects of the scheme upon those landscape elements and features that currently characterise the site.

Hedgerows

- 6.3
- The scheme would involve minimal loss of trees and hedgerows. The landscape masterplan and masterplan show the scheme would deliver a substantial 'net gain' of additional native and ornamental trees and together with hedgerows within the landscape areas, landscape corridors and areas of public open space.
- 6.4
- To accommodate the proposed site access there would be as a result the loss of approximately 90m of the hedgerow alongside the A229 Hartley Road. The proposed development would also require the loss of some hedgerows located in the northern extent of the site, identified on the Phase 1 Habitat Plan prepared by BSG Ecology as H3, H6, and part of H4 and H5. The total estimated length of hedgerows which would have to be removed to accommodate the proposed development is approximately 290m. This calculation includes the partial loss of the hedgerow (H1) adjacent to the A229 Hartley Road to accommodate the site entrance, the removal of hedgerow H3 which equates to 70m, the removal of hedgerow H6 which totals 60m, 10m would be removed from hedgerow H4 and 50m from hedgerow H5.

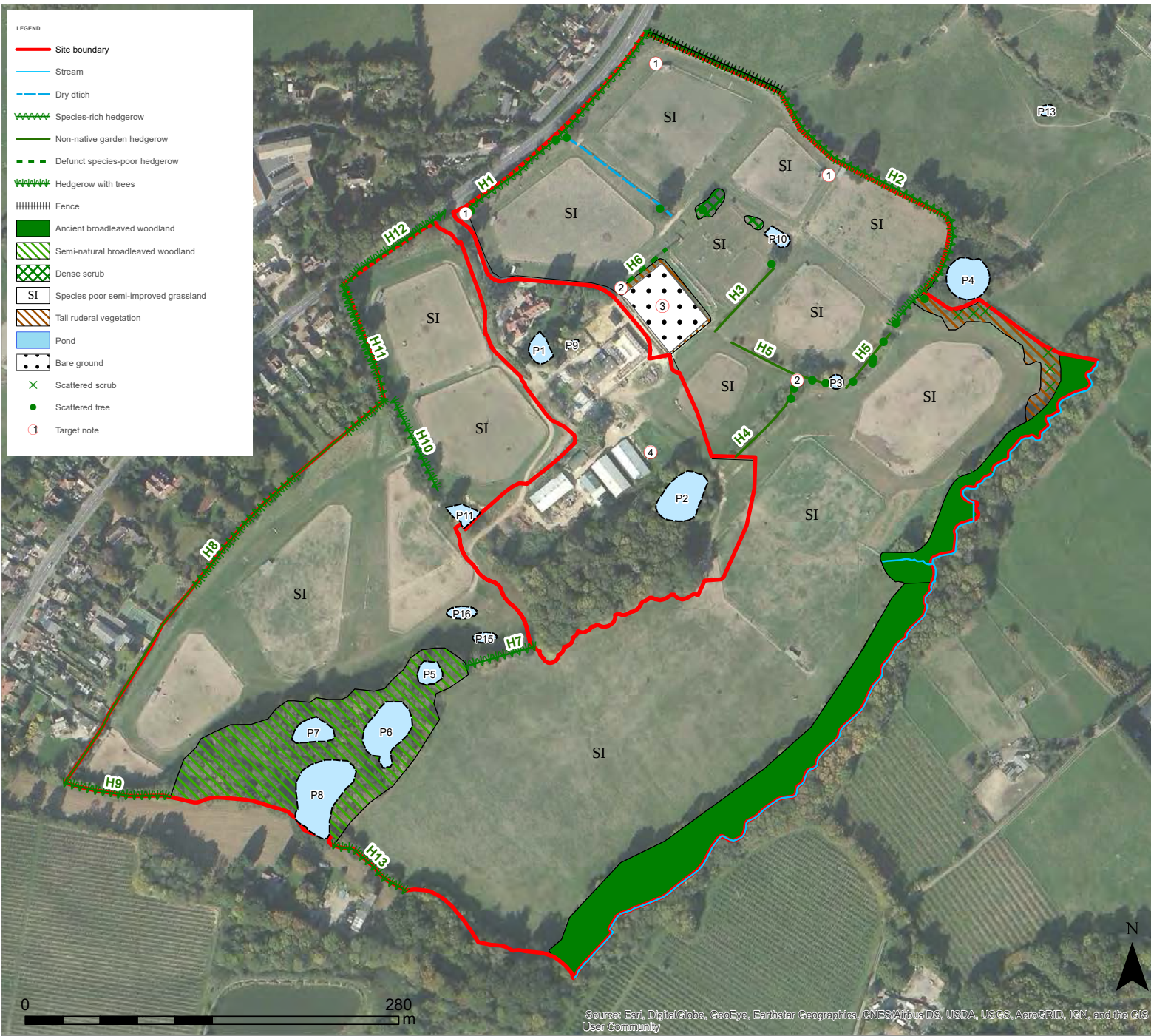


FIGURE 18: EXISTING LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS SHOWN ON PHASE 1 HABITAT PLAN, BSG ECOLOGY, 25/08/2020

- 6.5 As part of the proposals 90m of hedgerow H13 would be enhanced with native species rich hedgerow. A native species-rich hedgerow with trees would be reinstated behind the visibility splays at the proposed site access, and across the site 780m of species-rich hedgerow with trees would be proposed, along with a further 510m of native species-rich hedgerow.
- 6.6 Additional hedgerow planting within the wider landholding presents the opportunity to reinstate some historic field boundaries, which would reintroduce a smaller scale field pattern. Overall, the proposed new native hedgerow planting would total approximately 1.29km, which would substantially exceed the length of hedgerows removed resulting in a substantial net major beneficial effect with regard to the hedgerow resource on site.

Trees and treecover

- 6.7 With regard to the trees which would have to be removed to accommodate the proposed development, the Arboricultural Impact Assessment sets out in table 1 the tree removals. This summary identifies that one category U European ash tree is to be removed, as it is unsuitable to retain due to existing defects. The table also indicates that a group of category C trees, G5, comprised of a mix of European ash and hawthorn, would be removed to facilitate the construction of the spine road. A group of category C trees, G7, comprised of a mix of European ash and hazel are to be removed to accommodate the new site access. It is worth noting that these aforementioned groups of trees, identified as G5 and G7 are located within hedgerows H5 and H1 respectively. Finally, G18 is identified as having 90m2 removed to facilitate a new pedestrian access into development land to the north and to provide sufficient clearance with plot 102. Species recorded in G18 include blackthorn, hawthorn and dogrose.
- 6.8 The collection of three category A mature Pedunculate oak trees (T56, 57 and 58) would be set within one of the areas of public open space to allow for their future growth in the medium and longer term and their future growing conditions would improve with the proposed scheme.
- 6.9 The second area of public open space would accommodate a series of existing mature pedunculate oak, hawthorn, and ash trees of varying condition from category C to U. The two category U pedunculate that are to be retained would be managed so that 50% of their crowns are removed, with the trees being retained in situ for their ecological value. The proposed site layout would involve the construction of a low impact pedestrian footpath

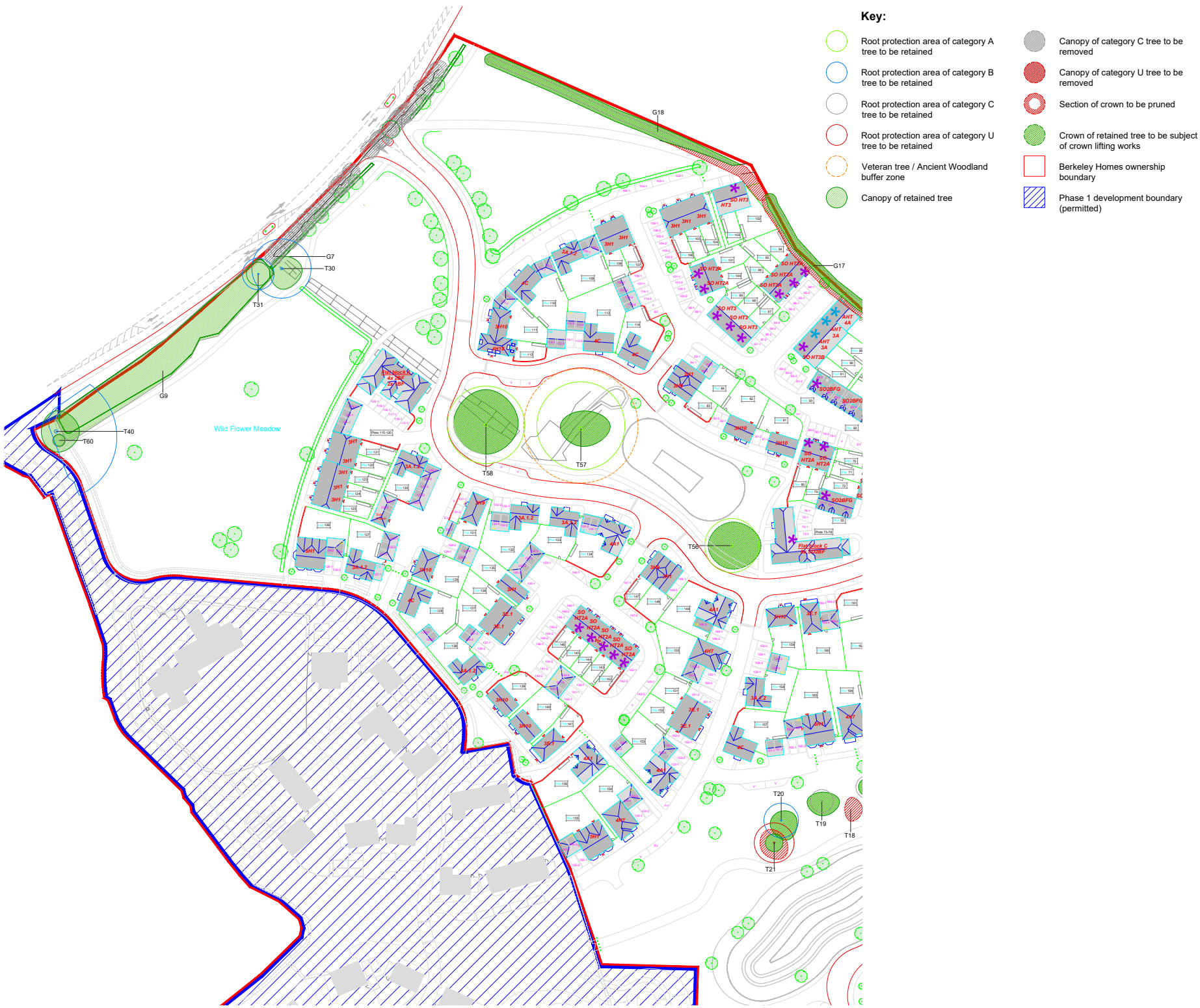


FIGURE 19: TREE RETENTION PLAN, PJC CONSULTANCY, 25/08/2020

- within the root protection areas of T56, T57 and T58. Due to the condition and amenity value of these trees, sensitive solutions would be provided to minimise the impact of construction works.
- 6.10 Forming an integral part of the design, it is proposed to introduce a substantial amount of tree cover across the whole site significantly more than what is presently the case. As part

of the landscape proposals, 126 new trees will be planted within the developable area, and a further 38 trees and 1.15 hectares of native woodland planting within the wider landholding .

- 6.11 This tree planting would create a strong physical and visual framework in the short, medium and longer term. It is proposed that the trees planted throughout the development area would provide visual interest within the areas of public open space and frame the main spine road as it enters the site. The principle is to introduce native tree species, some with an ornamental character such that tree cover would enhance the general visual amenity of the new neighbourhood.
- 6.12 The entirety of the ancient woodland situated along the site’s southeast boundary will be retained as part of the proposed development and protected from root compaction during the construction phase by the implementation of a minimum 15m development exclusion buffer along the boundary, in line with NE’s standing advice. Within this zone a 5m wide defensive buffer, woodland edge planting would be established, with the remainder sown as species-rich tussock grassland. The ancient woodland within the wider landholding would also be enhanced by additional woodland edge planting. The Hennickers Pit woodland in the wider landholding would be enhanced by additional tree planting and scrub planting (reference W3: Site Wide Betterment Plan) to increase the woodland edge and encourage the natural regeneration of woodland including a section of woodland shaw along the historic alignment to the south-western edge of the development area.



FIGURE 20: BETTERMENT PLAN FROM THE DAS ADDENDUM (AUG 2020)

- 6.13 The impact on trees during the construction Phase is addressed in the CO Report at paragraph 10.68 and notes tree removals include tree groups G5 and G7 (C2 rated ash, hazel and hawthorn) will require removal in order to create the new access from Hartley Road and the main spine road through the development. In addition, a 90m section of group G18 (C2 rated group of hawthorn, blackthorn and dogrose) would require removal to provide the new access into development land to the north and to provide sufficient clearance with plot 102. It goes on to note trees T16 (oak), T18 (ash) and T21 (oak) are being categorised U by the tree surveyor as they have predicted future life expectancy of less than 10 years owing to poor physiological condition, die back and/or damage.
- 6.14 Tree T18 is advised to be removed on the grounds of sound arboricultural management due to defects rendering it unsuitable for retention regardless of the proposed development. Trees T18 and T21 have also been categorised U. All remaining arboricultural features are to be retained and incorporated into the development. Access facilitation pruning involves trees T24, T28, T29 and T56 requiring minor crown lifting. The crown of linear group G17 requires lateral reduction to its southern crown aspect to provide sufficient clearance with plots 88, 94 and 102.
- 6.15 The CO Report notes that the creation of the village green will also require soft landscaping within the root plates of trees T56, T57 and T58. All remaining areas of construction would avoid the roots of retained trees to maximise tree retention. I note that there would be a limited loss of trees, as a direct result of the proposed development though would be significantly outweighed by replanting with the soft landscaping phase of the development. Furthermore, mitigation for the ancient woodland would be addressed through improved management and buffering. The LBO considers this to be an effective buffer zone as proposed.
- 6.16 I note that the LBO considers the woodland will benefit in particular from the removal of the intensely managed pasture replaced with semi-natural habitats forming the new proposed woodland edge planting. There would be no actual loss of ancient woodland proposed. I consider when the whole scheme is viewed in the round there would be an overall significant gain plus the ancient woodland areas would be actively managed in a more sustainable way in the long term. There would be a net major beneficial effect on the tree resource within the site.

Former Grazing Land/Consented Development Land

- 6.17 The site is comprised of 21.04 hectares (ha) of grassland, which was predominantly used for grazing horses. Whilst the proposed development would result in the loss of 12.34ha of grassland to accommodate the development area, the proposed scheme would bring about areas of naturalistic grassland including species rich grassland, tussocky grassland, wetland wet meadow, native shade tolerant meadow and. species rich grassland is proposed

for some areas of open space within the Development Area, such as the village green the central green corridor, the ancient woodland buffer. Areas of pasture are also proposed within the fields in the southwest of the site. Across the scheme 6.56ha of the existing grassland would be retained, 1.92ha enhanced and 4.62ha proposed, and as such there would be a moderate (beneficial) effect upon the grassland of the site with reduction in area and enhanced quality and value with that created.

Topography

- 6.18 The topography of the site gently slopes away from a high point of approximately 110-115m AOD, which is situated along the northern boundary adjacent to the A229 Hartley Road to the Crane Brook in the south-southeast part of the site which is approximately 85-95m AOD. The sloping landform across the wider landholding within the site would continue to be legible with the scheme in place. The scheme has been designed to work with the existing site levels to minimise cut and fill. The sloping nature of the terrain means that for some parts of the site a regrading exercise would be needed to create appropriate development platforms, changing the levels in places across the developable area by up to 300-400mm. The levels within two fields in the southwest, beyond the proposed development area, would be raised by 450-460mm.
- 6.19 I note that a cut and fill land regrading exercise is proposed for the development area to achieve suitable development platforms to facilitate the proposed development. This exercise would produce an excess of cut material (top and subsoil) that is proposed to be spread in the area of agricultural/equestrian land within the site to the southwest of the development area. The material amounts to approximately 24,403m3.
- 6.20 I note that the applicant proposes that the soils generated from the cutting would be spread over an area of approximately 9.4ha of the wider application site and this would increase levels by approximately 45cm over this area. The soil would be graded to follow the existing land contours and exclude ponds, existing trees and hedgerows. Once the land raising works are completed, the area would be seeded with species-rich grass seed and trees planted.
- 6.21 I note that in terms of the development area, the levels of development broadly correspond with the existing site levels save for areas of localised cut and fill.
- 6.22 As such the legibility of the topographic profile of the site would continue to remain and prevail with the scheme in place, and as such there would be a minor (adverse) effect upon the topography of the site. My analysis takes into account the slightly raised ground levels across part of the wider landholding.

- 6.23 Paragraph 10.142 of the CO Report (CD7.1) addresses the matter concerning proposed soil amounts and notes that LBO was previously of the view that soil spreading in the area adjacent to Turnden Farm would only be a minor addition to the adverse effects identified. Noting how it is to be landscaped the report concludes that the retention of the spoil on site is likely to be preferable to disposal elsewhere. It goes on to note in paragraph 10.43 with regard to the comments from the LBO that the additional landscaping, they now consider that the additional adverse effects would be slight, very localised but over time would diminish as to be not significant. Overall, subject to appropriate controls for the handling of the soil, agreed methods of working and remediation the LBO does not have any objection to the retention of spoil on site as proposed. In overall terms I consider that there would be a minor adverse effect on the topography within the site and is consistent with the LBOs assessment.



FIGURE 21: EXTRACT LEVELS THROUGH PROPOSED AREA OF GRASSLAND TO NORTH WEST. DRAWING BULK EARTHWORKS TURNDEN PHASE 2 SECTIONS 19-012/P201 CD 1.2.105

Public Rights of Way and Recreational Opportunities

- 6.24 Public Right of Way (WC115) would be retained on its existing alignment, with slight changes in gradient at its northern and southern ends where it ties back into the existing levels. At the southern end, the gradient would be steeper, seeing a change from approximately 1:30 to 1:20. At the northern end, the proposed levels would result in the footpath running across level terrain (1:100) for a longer stretch of the route, before descending the hillside at a similar gradient as the existing footpath (1:30).
- 6.25 As part of the proposed development a series of permissive paths are proposed which will significantly increase the recreational opportunities across the wider landholding, as a result there would be a major (beneficial) effect with regard to this element.
- 6.26 I note that Kent County Council Public Rights of Way and Access Services responded to the application (CD6.10.1-3) with regard to the effect on public footpath WC115. I note at paragraph 7.70 the CO Report with regard to the response noted that it is understood that the excess spoil from the construction work would be distributed across the area which would permanently change the topography of the landscape and effect the gradient of the public footpath WC115. It goes on to note that while KCC do not object to this work, the maximum gradient along the right of way should not exceed 1:20. It goes on to note it is anticipated that a temporary path closure would be requested by the applicant to enable the landscaping work to be completed safely. It goes on to note in paragraph 7.72 of the CO Report that a durable path surface should therefore be provided along the new permissive paths and public footpath WC115. The provision of a compacted self-binding stone surface along these paths would ensure they are accessible to the public throughout the year. It goes on to note that on balance, KCC have no objection to the proposal provided the considerations are taken into account and that the public right of way network is not obstructed by the development.
- 6.27 In recreational resource terms the green infrastructure would extend over 4.75ha and would be managed via a LEMP including designated open spaces of 1.65ha and accessible land with recreational access within the wider landholding of 6.12ha.
- 6.28 In overall terms, there would be a major (beneficial) effect with regard to public access and recreational opportunities within the site.



FIGURE 22: PUBLIC FOOTPATH ACROSS SITE

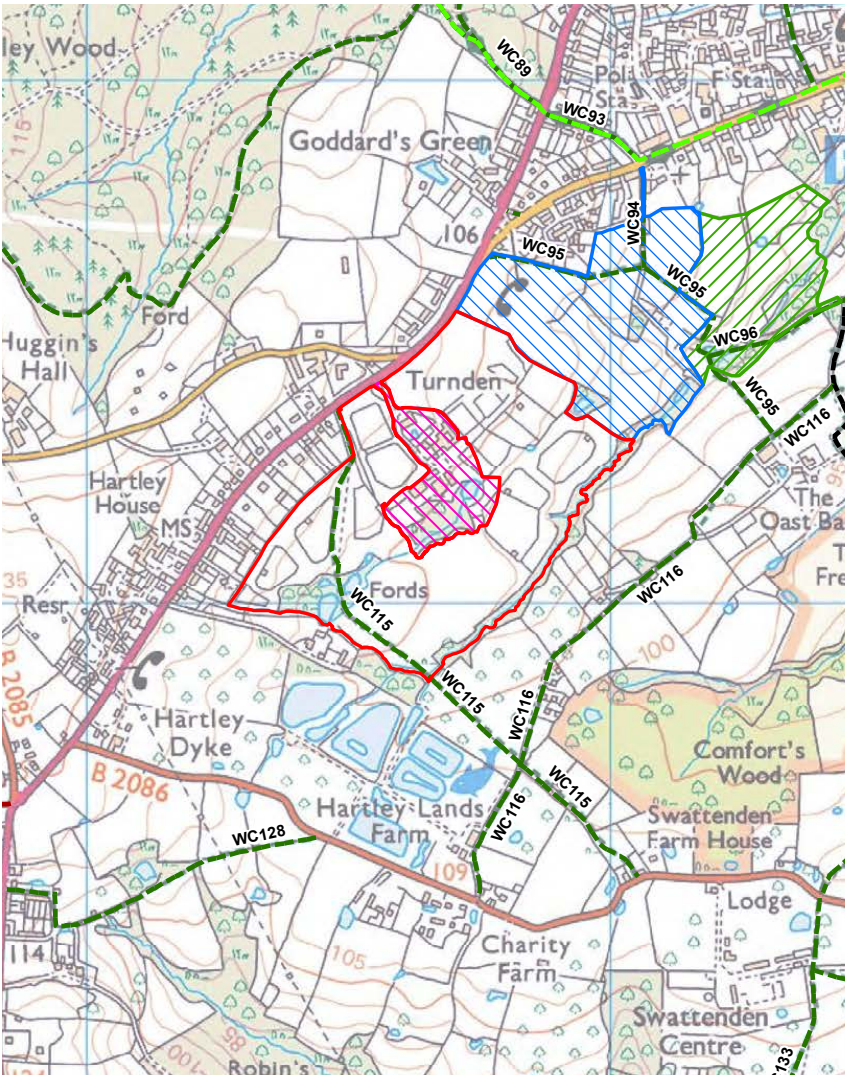


FIGURE 23: PUBLIC FOOTPATH ACROSS SITE

Water Features

- 6.29 The existing ponds, drainage ditches and wet depressions within the site would be retained and enhanced to improve their ecological value. The landscape proposals, including drainage features and waterbodies, are designed to provide blue infrastructure connections and reflect the pattern of landscape features, such as shaws, ditches and ponds, all characteristic of the site, the wider landscape and the AONB. I consider that the proposals would result in a net gain in water features such as ponds across the site resulting in a moderate (beneficial) effect.

Summary

- 6.30 I have set out below in a table a summary of effects upon landscape elements that collectively define the character of the site.

Element	Proposed Scheme
Trees	Major (beneficial)
Hedgerows	Major (beneficial)
Land Use (Grassland)	Moderate (beneficial)
Topography	Minor (adverse)
Public Access	Major (beneficial)
Water Features	Moderate (beneficial)
Overall	Major (beneficial)

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF EFFECTS

- 6.31 In overall terms, the scheme would result in a major net beneficial effect with regard to the overall landscape elements that currently define the landscape character of the site. The site would change from derelict horse paddocks to a high-quality design residential neighbourhood set within an attractive substantial landscape framework. The elements that currently contribute to defining the character of the site, namely trees, shrubbery and hedgerows would all be strengthened and form a more prominent element in the medium and longer term, but I recognise this would be in the context of a new residential neighbourhood.

Landscape Character of the Site

- 6.32 Collectively, if one draws the different elements of the site together, it defines the overall character of the site itself. In summary, the site is characterised by the former field boundaries and derelict horse paddocks but significantly influenced visually by the adjacent consented development site, approved Turnden Farmstead site for 36 dwellings and the outline consent for Brick Kiln Farm. The site is framed to the west by Hartley Road and existing residential development fronting this highway and is currently significantly affected by the substantial urbanising influences of this adjacent development. The site in terms

FIGURE 24: DRAINAGE STRATEGY PLAN FROM DESIGN AND ACCESS ADDENDUM (AUG 2020)



of its character would appear as an urban fringe environment with derelict horse paddocks evident across the site. This would specifically relate to the northern part of the site where the proposed development area is intended to be located. In this scenario, I consider that the existing site would detract from the immediate local landscape character area. The scheme would introduce a high-quality residential built environment which would be in keeping with the local settlements and therefore, not at odds or out of character or appearance and would not as such, result in an adverse effect but rather neutral in nature with regard to this northern part of the site as a consequence of its change in landscape character terms. The wider landholding and balance of the site would accommodate significant new green infrastructure which would replace derelict horse paddocks and again change this character of the site to be more representative of the local landscape character area and therefore would result in a major beneficial effect at the site level.

- 6.33 I proceed to consider the character of the landscape at the site level i.e., with regard to the site itself. The vast majority of the site is currently grassland, which extends over a number of different

shapes and sized fields. This grassland has been a previously subdivided into a series of horse paddocks, which have been defined by post and rail fencing, together with shelters, all of which are now in a poor state of repair and are derelict. There is also a large area of ground which formerly accommodated an outdoor menage for training and is now subject to spoil heaps associate with the demolition of buildings within the Phase 1 area.

- 6.34 The boundary of the site is in the main framed by a combination of mature hedgerows and standard trees, woodland and shaws which provides a strong sense of visual containment and enclosure associated with the site. There is also some area of woodland together with a number of mature standard trees associated with field boundaries however a combination of the unmanaged species and poor semi-improved grassland together with the dilapidated wooden enclosures creates a strong sense of dereliction associated with the site and is atypical of the local landscape that one associates commonly with the AONB environment.

- 6.35 There are significant urbanising influences associated with the site land. There would be residential curtilages almost contiguous with the site's northern boundary which would reveal a strong sense of physical and visual connection between the new settlement edge and the adjacent areas of the site. Around the perimeter of Phase 1 there is clear physical proximity and a strong visual connection with the current derelict and early construction state of the Phase 1 site. When Phase 1 is constructed with the new residential properties, curtilages and associated residential roads this will exert a strong urbanising influence upon the adjacent site land given their proximity.
- 6.36 Similarly, currently the northern boundary is defined by hedgerows and trees with the appearance of fields beyond however this land having been allocated has now been consented for residential development, the Brick Kiln Farm scheme. When this comes forward and is constructed, given the proximity of the neighbourhood areas to the site's boundary, there will be a close physical presence of these properties with regard to the adjacent areas of this site and it will exert a strong urbanising influence in visual and audible terms upon the adjacent parts of the site. Immediately to the northwest of the site lies the busy Hartley Road where traffic passes alongside the site which can be both seen and heard. Whilst separated, there is a clear line of sight with residential properties fronting the Hartley Road, which further reinforces the sense of urban fringe environment associated with the site.
- 6.37 In summary there will be in the near future a strong urbanising influence associated with a Brick Kiln Farm scheme as well as the Phase 1 scheme. This combined with the movement and sound of traffic associated with the Hartley Road and residential properties flanking this highway will all contribute to create a sense that the site forms an urban fringe environment and is currently in a somewhat poor state of repair. It does accommodate some features such as woodland, mature trees and a few hedgerows, which contribute to the defining characteristics of the locality, but all of these elements would be retained, and their presence reinforced with the green of structure proposals as an integral part of the scheme.
- 6.38 At the site level, with a low susceptibility, high value and medium sensitivity combined with a high magnitude of change this would result in a major (beneficial) effect in landscape element/character terms. This reflects the sheer volume of planting and landscape enhancement which in my view is quite exceptional given the limited scale of proposed housing.

An aerial illustration of a residential neighborhood. The houses are drawn in a sketchy, hand-drawn style with various shades of brown, tan, and grey for the roofs and walls. The roofs are mostly gabled. In the center of the neighborhood is a large, irregularly shaped green space, possibly a park or a large lawn, with a few trees scattered around it. A road or path winds through the neighborhood, and there are some smaller green spaces and trees interspersed among the houses. The overall tone is light and airy, with a soft, hazy background.

7.0

Effect On
Landscape Character Beyond the Site

Introduction

This section of my proof explains how the scheme would have a bearing upon the landscape character of the surrounding area, which lies beyond the site itself. As defined in the GLVIA glossary landscape character is defined as “A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different to another...”.

- 7.1 To further clarify a distinction in the use of terms, Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape, as opposed to Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which are defined in GLVIA, page 157 as follows:

“These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical lands use and settlement pattern, and perceptual and aesthetic attributes.”
- 7.2 A number of landscape character assessments have been undertaken in recent years to identify both landscape character types (LCTs) and areas (LCAs) as defined above and have been published to assist professionals in understanding how decisions can affect landscape character.
- 7.3 I have provided some narrative here in this section to explain how the proposed scheme would have a bearing upon the wider landscape character of the area beyond the site, which includes the settlements of Hartley and Cranbrook.

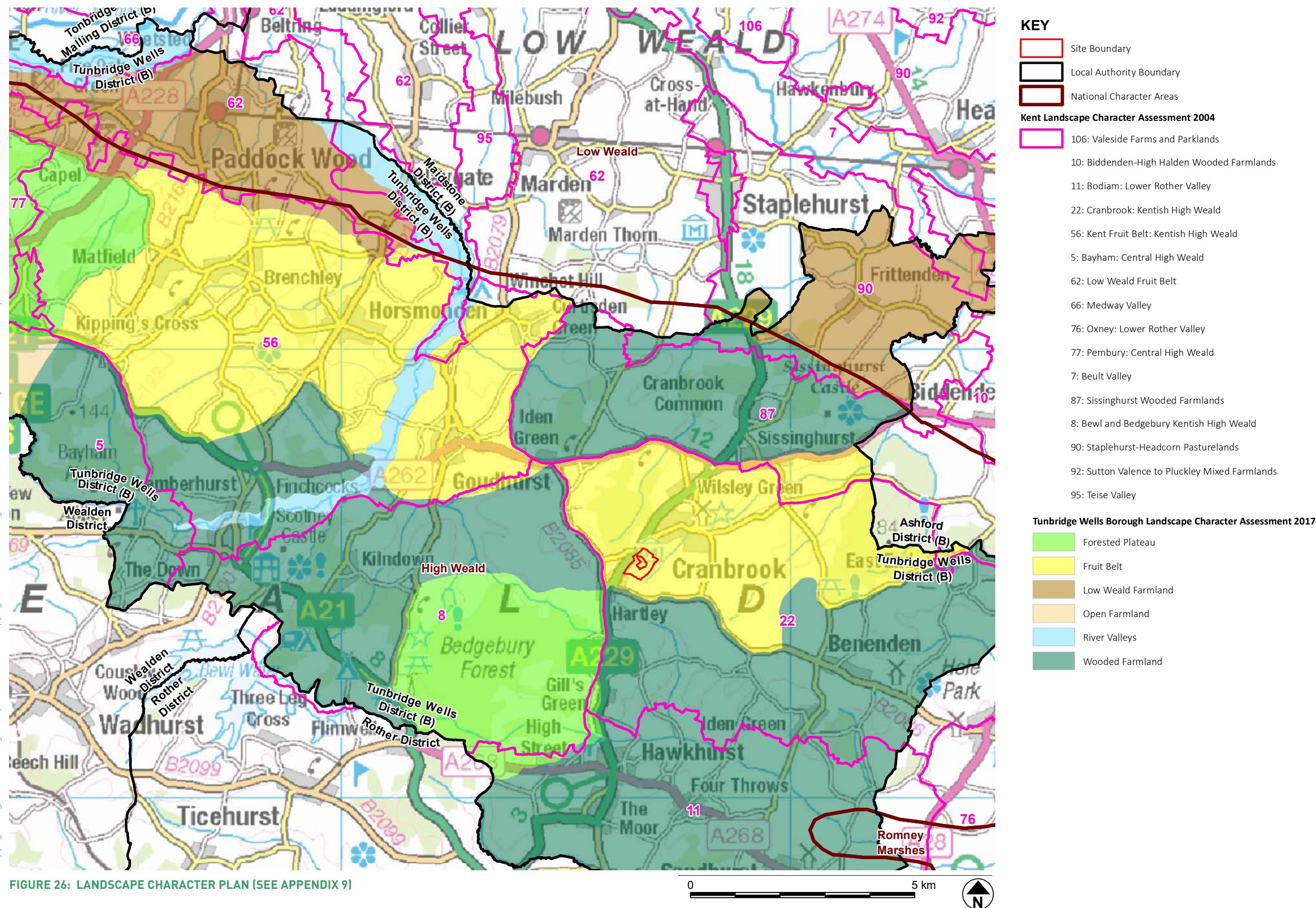


FIGURE 25: NCA 122 HIGH WEALD

National Level NCA 122 The High Weald (CD16.2)

- 7.4 The site and the surrounding areas of Hartley and Cranbrook are located within the National Character Area (NCA) 122 referred to as The High Weald. This NCA forms part of an assessment of the Character of England’s Landscape, first undertaken by The Countryside Agency but now the responsibility of Natural England.
- 7.5 Page 3 of the document provides a summary of the High Weald LCA and notes that it encompasses the ridges and faulted sandstone core of the Kent and Sussex Weald. It is an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in northern Europe. The High Weald consists of a mixture of fields, small woodlands and farmlands connected by historic routeways, tracks and paths. Wildflower meadows are now rare but prominent medieval patterns of small field pastures enclosed by thick hedges and shaws (narrow woodlands) remain fundamental to the character of the landscape.
- 7.6 It goes on to note on page 4 that the High Weald provides many services to communities living within the area’s towns and villages.

- 7.7 Page 5 of the document identifies statements of environmental opportunity and notes four key ones. The first of which is SE01 which states: maintain and enhance the existing woodland and pasture components of the landscape, including the historic field pattern bounded by shaws, hedgerows and farm woods.
- 7.8 SE03 of the document is concerned with maintaining and enhancing the distinctive dispersed settlement pattern whilst SE04 is concerned with managing and enhancing recreational opportunities, public understanding and enjoyment integrated with the conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environments.
- 7.9 The document goes on to identify the key characteristics for the area on page 8 as follows:
 - *“A faulted landform of clays, sand and soft sandstones with outcrops or fissured sand rock and ridges running east-west, deeply incised and intersected with numerous gill streams forming the head waters of a number of the major rivers – the Rother, Breede, Ouse and Medway – which flow in broad valleys*
 - *High density of extraction pits, quarries and ponds, impart a consequence of diverse geology and highly variable soils over short distances*
 - *A dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farmsteads and medieval ridge top villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries, with a dominance of timber framed buildings with steep roofs often hipped or half hipped and extremely high survival rate of farm buildings dating from the 17th Century or earlier*
 - *Ancient routeways in the form of ridgetop roads and a dense system of radiating droveways, often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees and wildflower verges and boundary banks. Church towers and spires on the ridges are an important local landmark. There is a dense network of small, narrow and winding lanes, often sunken and enclosed by high hedgerows or woodland strips. The area includes several large towns such as Tunbridge Wells, Crowborough, Battle and Heathfield and is closely bordered by others such as Crawley, East Grinstead, Hastings and Horsham*



- ***An intimate, hidden and small-scale landscape with glimpses of far reaching views, giving a sense of remoteness and tranquillity yet concealing the highest density of timber framed buildings anywhere in Europe amidst lanes and paths***
 - ***Strong feeling of remoteness due to very rural, wooded character. A great extent of interconnected ancient woods, steep sided gill woodlands, wooded heaths and shaws in generally small holdings with extensive archaeology and evidence of long-term management***
 - ***Extensive broad leaved woodland cover with a very high proportion of ancient woodland with high forest, small woods and shaws, plus steep valleys with gill woodland***
 - ***Small and medium sized irregular shaped fields enclosed by a network of hedgerows and wooded shaws, predominantly of medieval origin and managed historically as a mosaic of small agricultural holdings typically used for livestock grazing***
 - ***A predominantly grassland agricultural landscape grazed mainly with sheep and some cattle***
 - ***There is a strong influence of the Wealden iron industry which started in Roman times, including coke fuel replaced wood and charcoal. There are features such as s notably high number of small hammer ponds surviving today***
 - ***Ashdown Forest, in contrast to the more intimate green woods and pastures elsewhere, is a high rolling and open heathland lying on the sandstone ridges to the west of the area***
 - ***An essentially medieval landscape reflected in the patterns of settlement fields and woodland***
 - ***High quality vernacular architecture with distinct local variations using local materials. Horsham slate is used on mainly timber structures and timber framed barns are a particularly notable Wealden characteristic feature of the High Weald”***
- 7.10 All of these key characteristics would remain and some reinforced with the phase 2 scheme in place. It goes on to note on page 9 under the heading ‘A High Weald Today’ that from a distance the appearance of the High Weald is one of a densely wooded landscape, although on closer inspection reveals a patchwork of irregularly shaped fields and woods forming both open and

enclosed landscapes along rolling ridges and within valleys. It goes on to note that everything in the High Weald landscape is of a human scale. It also notes on page 10 that typically towns such as Tunbridge Wells and villages such as Goudhurst are sited on the ridges. Furthermore, local initiatives have increased the area of restored and created species rich grassland, but the decline of grazing threatens their long-term management.

- 7.11 With regard to SE01 Statement of Environmental Opportunity, this sets out a strategy which is to:

“Maintain and enhance the existing woodland and pasture components of the landscape, including the historic field pattern bounded by shaws, hedgerows and farm woods, to improve ecological function at a landscape scale for the benefit of biodiversity, soils and water, sense of place and climate regulation, safeguard ancient woodlands and encourage sustainable produced timber to support local markets and contribute to biomass production.”

- 7.12 The phase 2 scheme would accord with this strategy. The document then goes on to provide some examples with regard to this strategy as follows:

- ***“Ensuring that any increased woodland cover is informed by the historical nature of the area, and promoting small scale woodland creation to buffer existing woods, enhance landscape connectivity and manage flood flows***
- ***Promoting the High Weald AONB Design Guide to contribute to improved design quality within the area***
- ***Extending woodland around settlements and infrastructure developments to filter light pollution and reduce sound pollution and the visual impact of further urbanisation***
- ***Maintaining and restoring links between woodland and other woodland habitats such as hedgerows, traditional orchards and parkland and species rich grasslands and heathland outside the main woodland. This will create a robust network of wooded and open semi-natural habitats that will benefit the internationally important population of bats as well as other species***
- ***Encouraging and supporting the appropriate management of lowland meadows by owners including though local owners’ groups providing benefits for the local community, biodiversity, the landscape and soil quality”***

- 7.13 With regard to SE03, the strategy here is to:

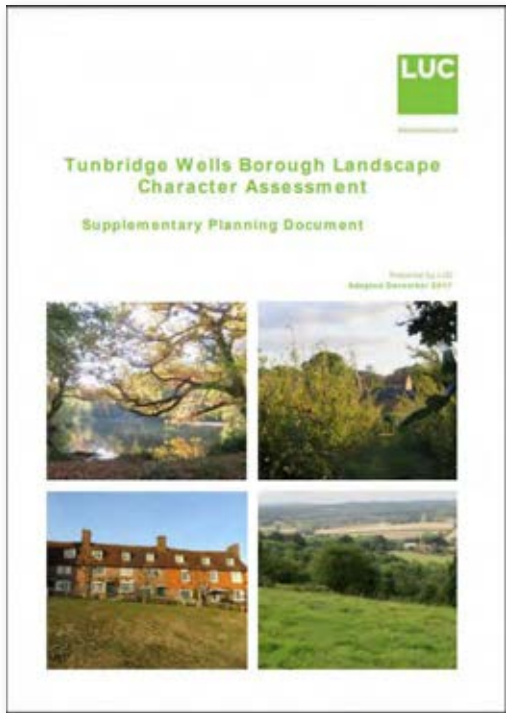
“Maintain and enhance the distinctive dispersed settlement pattern, parkland and historic pattern and features of the routeways of the High Weald, encouraging the use of locally characteristic materials and Wealden practices to ensure that any development recognises and retains the distinctiveness, biodiversity, geodiversity and heritage assets present, reaffirm sense of place and enhance the ecological function of routeways to improve the connectivity of habitats and provide wildlife corridors.”

- 7.14 The scheme would accord with this strategy. With regard to this, it provides some examples noting the encouragement of new development to follow the vernacular of the area using locally sourced materials and adhering to the principles of the AONB Design Guide. [CD12.15]

- 7.15 SE04 is concerned with the management and enhancement of recreational opportunities, public understanding and enjoyment integrated with the conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment in accordance with the purpose of the AONB designation. In this regard it provides several examples of which is to maintain and enhance the extensive rights of way network, the creation of additional links through a network of green space and linear access plus increase understanding and enjoyment through education and interpretation material where access balances recreational enjoyment with the protection of biodiversity.

- 7.16 The overall key characteristics reveal a settled and farmed landscape with many specific references to infrastructure and individual settlements. This NE document is inevitably a high-level character assessment, which provides a useful overview by which to understand the character of the local landscape and its surroundings. At this higher level, it is considered that the scheme would bring about negligible change to the key characteristics of this NCA beyond the site. At the character area level this landscape would have a medium susceptibility and a high value resulting in a high sensitivity, which combined with a negligible change of magnitude would result in a negligible degree of effect as a consequence of the scheme being in place. The proposal would be in keeping with the character of the adjacent settlements and accord with these NE landscape strategies.

FIGURE 27: TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



Local Level – Tunbridge Wells Borough Landscape Character Assessment SPD December 2017 (CD12.8)

7.17 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council have undertaken their own Landscape Character Assessment of the locality which forms an online resource on the Council’s website. The site and its surrounding area particularly for the land south of Cranbrook, is categorised as **Cranbrook Fruitbelt (Character Area 4 CD12.8)**.

7.18 On internal page 49 of the document, it provides a summary for the Cranbrook Fruitbelt as follows:

“A plateau top landscape where the topography flattens out (compared with the more intricate topography of the Fruitbelt to the west) permitting larger scale land uses to exist. This is a diverse zone of transition and typical of the High Weald landscape. The strong yet diverse character incorporates elements of fruitbelt, forested plateau and wooded farmland and the historic town of Cranbrook.”

7.19 It goes on to note and set out the key characteristics from page 50 as follows:

- *“Gently undulating upland plateau that shelves towards the north*
- *Network of small water courses that have been influential in the development of the area*
- *Intermittent views to the surrounding wooded ridges and hills*
- *Large fields of arable farmland divided by ghyll woodland with the wavy boundaries of hedgerows*
- *An informal regular pattern of small and medium fields many of which are early medieval or medieval. Fields are characterised by arable, sheep pasture and orchards with thick hedges and shaw boundaries*
- *Orchards particularly concentrated around settled areas*
- *High proportioned of woodland*
- *Settlement contained within the topographical and wooded framework and at pattern of dispersed farmsteads*
- *The small town of Cranbrook has been termed the capital of the High Weald and is the focus of settlement. A distinctive town nestled in the landscape with a strong vernacular townscape created by various brick, timber and weatherboarded styles with a windmill, cupola on the big school and sandstone church creating particular landmarks.” (my emphasis)*

7.20 The phase 2 scheme would retain all and reinforce some of these characteristics. With regard to key characteristic number 8, settlement, the document notes that due to the rolling landscape and aspects of landcover, buildings and settlements are usually hidden within the landscape when viewed from afar. Despite its elevated location, even Cranbrook is not prominent in the landscape, generally being well screened by a combination of woodland, forest and orchards. I note this would continue to be the case with the scheme in place. There are few views of the town from the adjoining farmland. I note the reference to the small town of Cranbrook as being one of the key characteristics. The document goes on to note on internal page 51 that Cranbrook is the main settlement of the area.

7.21 The report notes that occasional glimpsed views of the town reveal a cluster of white weatherboarded or rich earth-toned buildings set within a picturesque framework of trees. The undulating topography, dense belts of trees and general low building height ensure that the town is generally hidden from view with occasional glimpses of key landmarks. It goes on to note the dense form and historic street pattern creates a lively and vibrant character. A broad range of traditional building materials are found, including timber framed buildings, local red brick and clay tiles and the buildings display a wide range of subtle colours and details such as a rich and varied pattern of different roof shapes. Furthermore, the report notes that the Crane Valley is an integral part of the green infrastructure of the town cutting through the built-up area forming a key element in the setting of the town. I note that all of these defining elements would remain with the scheme in place.

7.22 Internal page 53 of the document identifies valued features and qualities, which are considered to be of particular value in the landscape character area. The area lies within the High Weald and exhibits the following elements of character related to the AONB are particularly valued in this character area and are identified as follows:

1. **“The scenic ridges of wooded ghyll valleys...**
2. **The pattern of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets, locally distinctive buildings, and the nucleated medieval village of Cranbrook. The settlement pattern is typical of the High Weald landscape...locally distinctive and historic buildings add important local character to the landscape**
3. **Ancient routeways that form a clear network of roads and tracks...**
4. **Woodland – particularly ancient woodlands, ghylls and shaws...**

Other features and qualities considered to be of particular landscape and visual value to the character area include:

5. **The value of the historic field pattern which shows a time depth in the landscape and visual interest in combination with the wooded shaws, ancient woodland and hedgerow field boundaries**

- 6. **Sense of tranquillity... with settlement contained within the topographical and wooded framework**
- 7. **The distinctive character of Cranbrook. Its historic street plan and dense development...**
- 8. **The rural setting of Cranbrook, particularly the wedge of landscape provided by the Crane Brook which permeates into the town centre. The relationship of the town with the surrounding landscape is of particular value for the contribution to recreation and views."**

- 7.23

All these characteristics would continue to remain and prevail and some reinforced with the scheme in place.
- 7.24

The document goes on to note on page 54 the recommended landscape strategy for this local landscape character area and should be considered in the context of the AONB. Furthermore, the valued features and qualities of the landscape should be conserved and enhanced and goes on to identify five as follows:
 - 1. **"Retain the rural character of the area...**
 - 2. **Control the location, amount and style of further development to prevent intrusion of built form on the landscape and to avoid deterioration of the currently high-quality built environment and vernacular heritage particularly approximate to Cranbrook...ensure boundary treatments are appropriate to the surrounding character whether in the town or countryside**
 - 3. **Maintain the wooded framework...**
 - 4. **Control the proliferation of hobby farms ensuring features such as paddocks and fencing do not incrementally degrade the character and quality of the landscape**
 - 5. **Protect the Crane Valley and associated woodland from further development by use of suitable buffers and improved management."**
- 7.25

These characteristics would be physically unaffected and would continue to remain and prevail and some reinforced with the proposed scheme in place. I note that the derelict site would change to a high-quality scheme. I would ascribe a high value, medium susceptibility and high sensitivity combined with a high

magnitude of change which would result in a major (neutral to beneficial) degree of effect with regard to the site. The site also exhibits hedgerows and trees around its perimeter, which define the former fields. However, these would be reinforced with new tree and shrub planting which would have a major (beneficial) effect at the site level. The local field pattern and the grain of the landscape would be enhanced with the reintroduction of historic hedgerows and a woodland shaw. The proposed scheme when considered in the context of the Cranbrook Fruitbelt LCA wide area, would have a negligible (neutral/beneficial) degree of effect based on high sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change.

The High Weald AONB (CD12.13)

- 7.26

The site and all the land surrounding it, which also wraps around Cranbrook settlement falls within the AONB.
- 7.27

The AONB has published a Management Plan, which sets out specific details with regard to the landscape of this area (CD12.13). This document describes the AONB landscape sub-dividing the designation to a number of landscape character areas.
- 7.28

The key characteristics that define this AONB are set out on internal page 25 of the document as follows:
 - **"Impressive coastal cliffs**
 - **A principal ridge**
 - **A pattern of faults and folds**
 - **Numerous small streams**
 - **Distinctive outcrops of sandstone**
 - **A high density of pits, quarries and ponds**
 - **Locally distinctive geological materials**
 - **Soils**
 - **Heavily channelised and intensively managed river valleys**
 - **A high density of ponds**
 - **An oceanic climate"**
- FIGURE 28: THE HIGH WEALD AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN**
-
- P21-1356_11A | LAND ADJACENT TO HARTLEY ROAD, TURNDEN, CRANBROOK, KENT | LANDSCAPE PROOF OF EVIDENCE

43

7.29 The above characteristics that define the AONB would all continue to remain and prevail with the proposed scheme in place beyond the site itself, as they would be physically unaffected.

Author's Assessment of Landscape Character

7.30 As far as landscape character is concerned, I acknowledge that the site would see some considerable change from the derelict horse paddocks. However, the baseline that needs to be taken into account here is that the proposed scheme is framed by the approved Turnden Farmstead site for 36 dwellings to the south and to the north by the Brick Kiln Farm site with outline approval for 180 dwellings. My analysis also takes into account the proposed limited ground modelling within the wider landholding which when the meadow is re-established would be essentially imperceptible. An access road is also under construction as part of an extant full planning consent for a residential neighbourhood for up to 36 dwellings. Change to the character of the site's context itself has come about as a consequence of these consents. No significant off-site works are proposed and as such the character of the local landscape as well as the character of the AONB beyond the site in both physical and experiential terms would remain materially unchanged with the scheme in place.

7.31 I recognise that the call-in scheme would bring about an inevitable change to the character of the application site itself, however such a change would in physical terms be confined within the application site boundaries. Off site, the pattern of the land cover, tree and hedge cover and agricultural mix, undulating topography, the variety of building materials, Cranbrook's settlement pattern generally and the drainage network of streams as identified in the various published reports, would all continue and prevail with the scheme in place. Consequently, it is considered that those key characteristics of the wider landscape and settlement beyond the application site boundary as identified above would be physically unaffected with the scheme in place. It is only the experiential factors of character, both visual and audible elements that would be influenced to some limited degree. Any noise associated with the habitation and use of this scheme would be negligible in the wider landscape and settlement context particularly given the Hartley Road. The scheme would not change the broad character of the wider area as the 'settled agricultural scene', which would continue to prevail with the scheme in place. The sensitive design of the proposed scheme would reflect the local settlement character of Cranbrook.

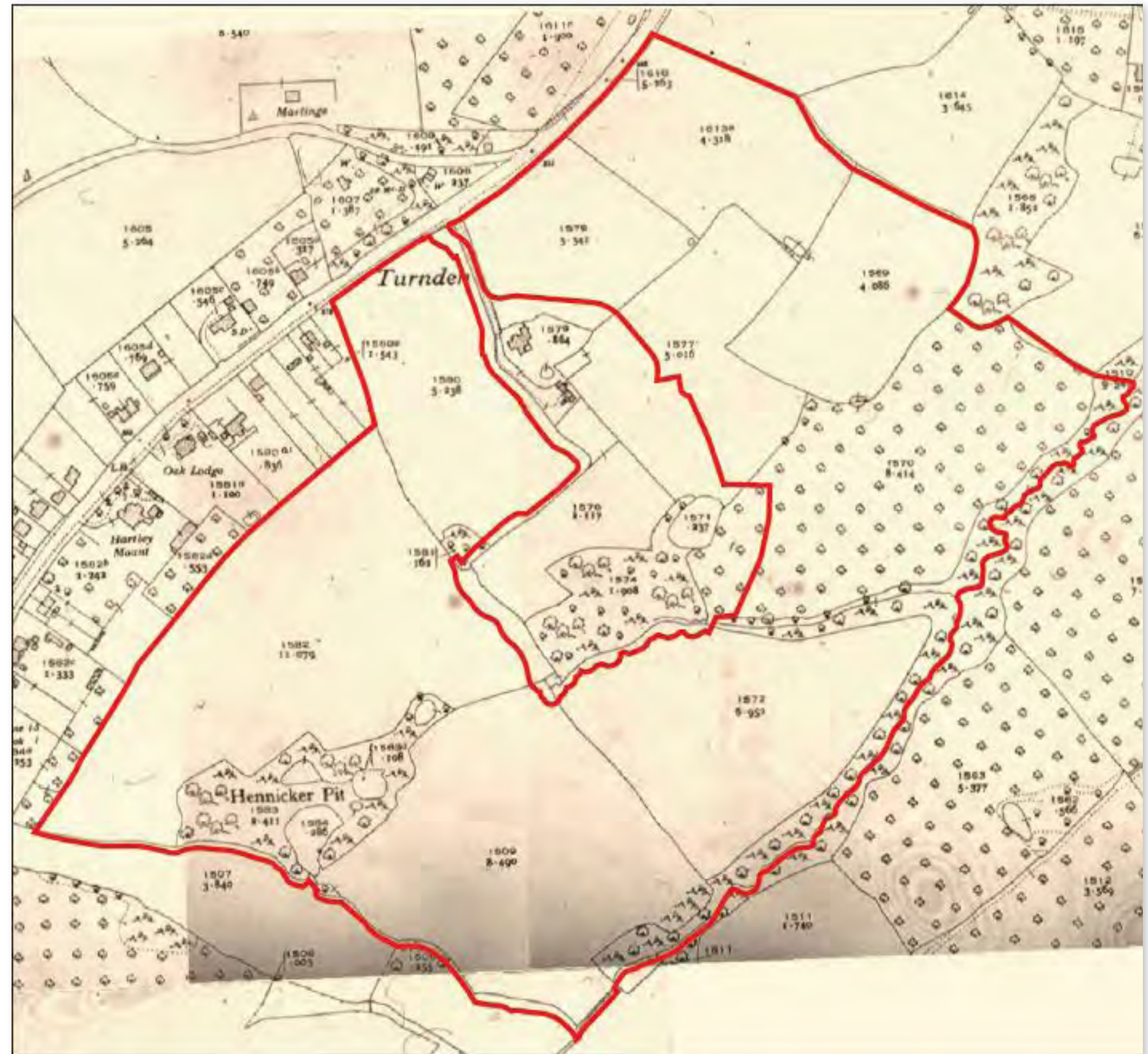


FIGURE 29: HISTORIC MAP CIRCA 1936

- 7.32 I proceed to consider the character of the landscape at the site level I.e., with regard to the site itself. The vast majority of the site is currently at grassland, which extends over a number of different shapes and sized fields. This grassland has been a previously subdivided into a series of horse enclosures, which have been defined by post and rail fencing, together with shelters, all of which are now in a poor state of repair and are derelict. There is also a large area of ground which formerly accommodated an outdoor manege for training and is now subject to spoil heaps associated with the demolition of buildings within the Phase 1 area.
- 7.33 The boundary of the site is in the main framed by mature hedgerows by a combination of mature hedgerows and standard trees, woodland and shaws which provides a strong sense of visual containment and enclosure associated with the site. There is also some area of woodland together with a number of mature standard trees associated with field boundaries. A combination of the unmanaged species poor semi improved grassland together with the dilapidated wooden enclosures and creates a strong sense of dereliction associated with the site and is atypical of the key characteristic landscape features that one associates commonly with the high Weald AONB environment.
- 7.34 There are significant urbanising influences associated with the site. There are a number of residential curtilages at which are contiguous with the site's northern boundary which reveals a strong sense of physical and visual connection between the settlement of Hartley and the adjacent areas of the site. Within the southwestern field and there is clear proximity and visibility with a large industrial barn like buildings located just south of the site. Around the perimeter of Phase 1 there is clear physical proximity and a strong visual connection with the current derelict and early construction state of the Phase 1 site. When Phase 1 is constructed with the new residential properties, curtilages and associated residential roads this will exert a clear urbanising influence upon the adjacent site land.
- 7.35 Similarly, currently the northern boundary is defined by hedgerows and trees with the appearance of fields beyond however this land having been allocated has now been consented as now has an outline consent for residential development, the Brick Kiln Farm scheme. When this comes forward and is constructed, given the proximity of the neighbourhood areas to the site boundary there will be a clear close physical presence of these properties with regard to the adjacent areas of this site and it will exert an urbanising influence in visual terms upon the adjacent parts of the site. Immediately to the north of the site lies the busy Hartley

Road which where traffic and passes alongside the site which can be both seen and heard particularly in the area is close to this and highway. Further back towards the centre of the northern part of the site there is a clear line of sight of residential properties at fronting the Hartley Road, which further reinforces the sense of urban fringe environment associated with the site.

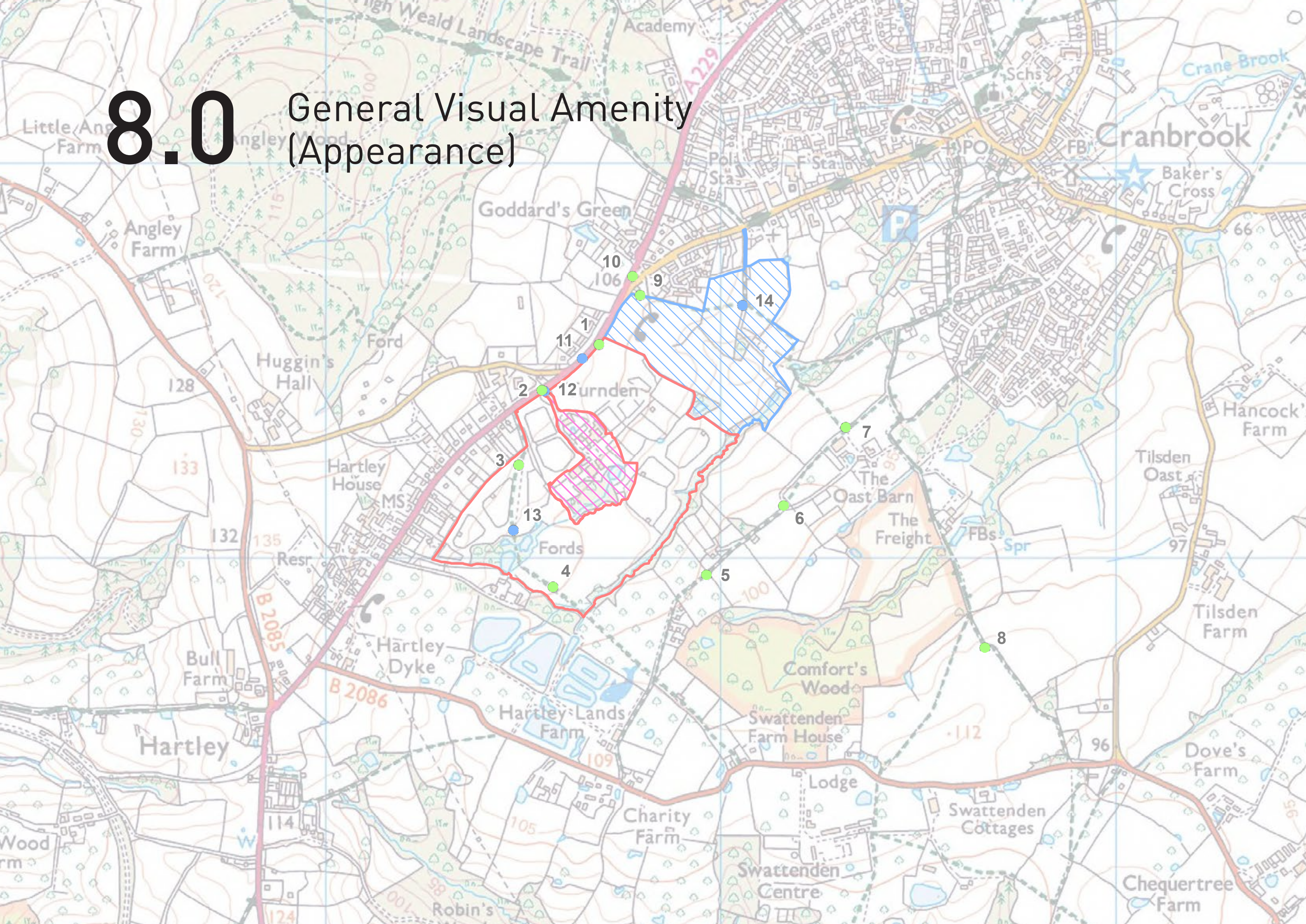
- 7.36 In summary there will be in the near future a strong urbanising influence associated with a Brick Kiln Farm scheme as well as the Phase 1 scheme. this combined with the movement and sound of traffic associated with the Hartley Road and residential properties flanking this highway will all contribute to create a sense that the site forms an urban fringe environment and is currently in a somewhat poor state of repair. It does accommodate some features such as woodland, mature trees and a few hedgerows, which contribute to the defining characteristics of the locality, but all of these elements would be retained and their presence reinforced with the green of structure proposals as an integral part of the scheme.

Settlement Pattern

- 7.37 With regard to settlement pattern, I would note the following. Cranbrook as a settlement extends across the Crane Brook Valley and is nestled within the two sides of this topographic feature. The current settlement in terms of its built form extends up the slopes of both the north and south sides of the valley to extend across local areas of high ground.
- 7.38 The signpost to denote the southern arrival point for Cranbrook is located close to the vehicular access point for Phase 1. The hamlet of Hartley forms a small linear settlement which effectively straddles the A229 Hartley Road and exhibits development almost continuously along the length of this road up to the most northerly point just short of Goddard's Green, a residential district at the southern end of Cranbrook. There is some limited physical separation between the southern point of Goddard's Green and the northern point of Hartley which maintains a sense of separation to provide separate identity for Hartley. The Brick Kiln Farm parameters plan has been carefully designed to respect and maintain this sense of separation by setting its residential neighbourhoods back from the most northern residential properties of Hartley, with a physical separation distance similar to that which currently exists along the A229. This area of physical separation would remain permanent through the provision of strategic open space which would front onto the Hartley Road. Similarly, the consented Phase 1 development residential area is also set downslope and located some distance from the Hartley

Road and its frontage housing. The proposed Phase 2 scheme, similarly, would maintain and respect the separation between Cranbrook and Hartley. The proposed residential neighbourhood would be set downslope some distance from the A229. All the land within the site adjacent to the A229 would form strategic open space as grassland and meadows with proposed woodlands which upon establishment would further reinforce a sense of physical and visual separation with Hartley to the southwest. The physical separate identity of Hartley would continue to remain and prevail with the Phase 2 scheme in place, as the latter would not cause any actual coalescence.

8.0 General Visual Amenity (Appearance)



EFFECT ON GENERAL VISUAL AMENITY (APPEARANCE)

- 8.1 To reiterate, character and appearance are two quite different aspects, where the latter is concerned with views and general visual amenity as opposed to the former, which is concerned with the elements that collectively define a given landscape. I have explained how the character of the surrounding area beyond the site would remain materially unchanged with the scheme in place in the previous section.
- 8.2 In order to gain a better understanding of the extent and nature of the change brought about by the scheme in visual amenity terms, I examine the effect of the proposed residential scheme and green infrastructure on the visual amenity of the landscape and the perception of those visual receptors (people) within the landscape and townscape, where relevant.
- 8.3 It is useful to refer to the photoviews of the representative viewpoints included as part of the submitted LVIA together with the photoviews in my appendix 12. My analysis takes into account all aspects of the scheme including the proposed limited ground raising within parts of the wider landholding. (Once completed with the meadow re-established, this slight modification to the topography would be almost imperceptible in visual terms).

- 8.4 My analysis is based on year 1 following planting after completion of construction and assumes a winter assessment with deciduous foliage absent as a worst-case scenario. I also comment on the visibility with foliage present during the summer months and year 15 scenario where relevant (see appendices 12-15).
- 8.5 Visual amenity is described on page 158 in the Glossary of GLVIA as:
- “The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area.”***
- 8.6 Views from the countryside are mainly gained from vantage points accessible to members of the public. The two main ways in which members of the public can gain an appreciation of views when in the countryside are from public highways and by using the various public rights of way that pass through the landscape. I address both of these receptors here. I consider the built form would be neutral and green infrastructure beneficial in visual amenity terms as explained (regarding nature of effect). Both elements combined would be neutral to beneficial and would conserve and enhance the visual amenity of the AONB.
- 8.7 I have set out below my analysis and professional judgement as to how the proposed residential scheme would have a bearing upon general visual amenity in the context of the baseline position.

Public Highways

- 8.8 There are a number of public highways in the vicinity and surrounding the site, which are analysed as follows.

Public Highways to the west of the site

- 8.9 Immediately to the west of the site and contiguous to the site's northwest boundary lies the A229 known as Hartley Road. This highway is broadly orientated north-south linking Cranbrook to the north with Hartley to the south and passes through both of these settlements.
- 8.10 For road users as they pass through the linear settlement of Hartley where residential properties front onto both sides of this highway, the built form together with mature vegetation associated with these residential curtilages channels views along this highway and as such, there would be no opportunity to observe the proposed scheme. As motorists pass the phase 1 access point, mature vegetation on the south side of this carriageway would further prohibit views of the proposed scheme. With the new vehicular access to Phase 1 in place, there would be the opportunity to gain a fleeting view across the access point and the open space towards some of the proposed dwellings seen with phase 1 in the foreground. Immediately north of this access point mature vegetation on the south side of the road would substantially limit views of the proposed scheme given the heavily filtered views through the adjacent mature hedgerow and tree cover.



FIGURE 30: HARTLEY ROAD, ENTRANCE LOCATION TO PHASE 1



FIGURE 31: VIEW FROM THE A229 LOOKING SOUTH TOWARDS SITE

- 8.11 As road users pass the proposed vehicular access point, the existing hedgerow and tree cover on the eastern side of the road would be removed and a new hedgerow planted behind the visibility splays on either side of the access road. Along the length of this highway alongside this new access and visibility splay, there would be the opportunity to gain views of some of the phase 2 scheme seen alongside some of the phase 1 scheme and Brick Kiln Farm where houses front onto the open spaces. This would create a new view of the open space frontage with attractive houses fronting onto these spaces seen in the middle distance.
- 8.12 North of the new access point and associated visibility splays and the site boundary, road users would observe the new vehicular access associated with the Brick Kiln Farm scheme with a similar viewing context with public open space forming a frontage area adjacent to this highway with new dwellings seen beyond.
- 8.13 Slightly further north of this point lies a junction with the high street veering off to the east of the A229. From this junction northwards, there would be no opportunity to observe the proposed scheme given the extent of built form and associated mature vegetation within the residential curtilages.
- 8.14 The A229 Hartley Road is a busy highway, which passes through the length of Hartley village and Cranbrook and as such, in this context, there is a high expectation for road users to observe residential properties. Whilst this road is lengthy, only a very short stretch of this highway would be visually affected by the proposed phase 2 scheme and where observed, this would be seen in the context of phase 1, the Brick Kiln Farm development and road frontage housing on the A229.

- 8.15 There is close to the site on the west side of Hartley Road a cul-de-sac known as Orchard Way which lies to the west and runs parallel to the A229. There would be little opportunity to observe the proposed scheme from this length of highway as views would be heavily filtered by the mature hedgerow, which lies between this highway and Hartley Road. As motorists leave Orchard Way to enter Hartley Road the road users would have views directly across this highway and across into the access road and views along it towards the Brick Kiln Farm development.

Public Highways to the east of the site

- 8.16 There are a number of public highways located to the east of the site, the principal one being a country lane known as Tilsden Lane which is broadly orientated north-south linking Cranbrook to the north with the B2086 to the south. This highway lies slightly over 1km to the east of the site, however due to topography and tree cover, there would be no opportunity to observe the proposed scheme from this highway and it would be visually unaffected by the proposed scheme.

Public Highways to the south of the site

- 8.17 There is one public highway located approximately 0.5km to the south of the site, reference B2086 and known as Swattenden Lane and is broadly orientated east west linking Hartley to the west with Swattenden to the east. This narrow country lane is for the most part flanked by mature tree cover and hedgerows. Due to topography and tree cover in the intervening landscape

between this highway and the site, there would be no opportunity to observe the proposed scheme and users would be visually unaffected by the proposals.

Public Highways to the north of the site

- 8.18 To the north of the site lies the settlement of Cranbrook, which has a network of highways including the A229 Hartley Road as discussed in the preceding section. In addition to this highway, there are a number of other roads such as the High Street, a principal highway together with a number of residential roads including New Road and Goddard's Close. Given the existing residential properties and associated mature vegetation within the southern part of the settlement and given the Brick Kiln Farm scheme is in place, all of these highways would be visually unaffected by these proposals.
- 8.19 There are a number of highways proposed associated with the Brick Kiln Farm scheme. From these residential roads visual amenity would be appreciated within this new urban context given the nature of the residential scheme. From these residential roads immediately to the north of the Phase 2 scheme, there would be the opportunity to gain some glimpsed views of residential properties associated with Phase 2 but would form a small element in the backdrop of views of the Brick Kiln Farm dwellings. The extent of visibility of the proposed scheme as seen from highways to the north would be very limited.

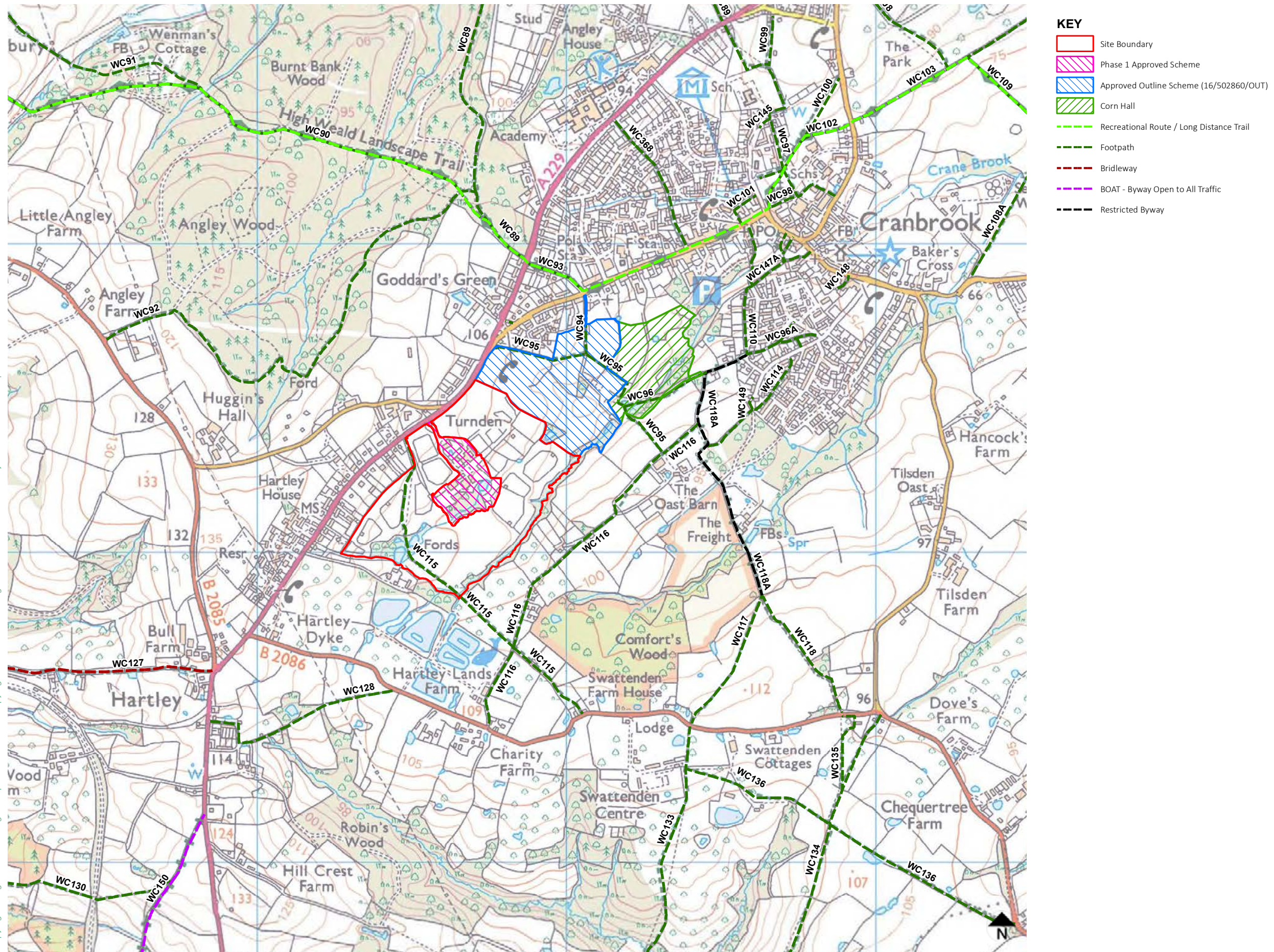


FIGURE 32: SITE LOCATION & PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY PLAN, 02/07/2021
(SCALE: 1:10,000)

Public Rights of Way

8.20 There is a network of public rights of way surrounding the site, which is considered in the proceeding sections.

Public Rights of Way to the north of the site

8.21 There are a number of public rights of way located to the north of the site. Some of these lie to the northwest of the Hartley Road the A229. These public rights of way, reference no WC90 and WC89 are primarily located within an extensive area of woodland on part of the High Weald Landscape Trail within Angley Wood. Given the topography and built form in the intervening landscape there would be no line of sight towards the proposed scheme. Within the southern part of Cranbrook settlement itself, there are some further public rights of way reference WC93 which passes through a residential area. This is part of the long-distance way marked trail known as the High Weald Landscape Trail and passes eastward along the high street together with a further series of public footpaths WC102 and WC103 and WC109 together form an east-west orientated route for the High Weald Landscape Trail. All of this routes would be visually unaffected by the proposed development.

8.22 There is a further cluster of public rights of way, which pass through the urban area of Cranbrook to the north-east of the proposed scheme including the northern end of the high street. Again, given the built form, vegetation, topography in the intervening landscape, these would all remain visually unaffected by the proposed scheme.

8.23 Within the Brick Kiln Farm development area there are two public rights of way, which pass through this area. One broadly orientated east-west, reference WC95 and one orientated north-south, reference WC94. Both of these two routes are accommodated within the proposed development framework for Brick Kiln Farm. These will pass through a new residential neighbourhood. Given the nature of this scheme based on the Parameters plan, it is likely that there would be some limited opportunity to gain views southward through the Brick Kiln Farm residential scheme towards the proposal which would be seen as some built form as part of the backdrop to the residential scheme of Brick Kiln Farm. The proposal would be seen in the context of that outline consented scheme.

8.24 To the east of Brick Kiln Farm there is a further public right of way, reference WC96 which passes through the lower part of the Crane Valley and areas of woodland cover. Given that this route is set down in the valley, and falls towards Cranbrook to the east, there would be no visual effect upon this route as a consequence of the proposed scheme given the topography and mature vegetation and Brick Kiln Farm in the intervening landscape.

8.25 In terms of views from public rights of way to the north of this site, it is only really the footpaths that are located within the Brick Kiln Farm scheme where there would be the opportunity to gain some very limited views of the scheme as part of the backdrop to the Brick Kiln scheme itself.



FIGURE 33: PHOTOMONTAGE FROM VP06 - YEAR 1

Public Rights of Way to the east of the site

8.26 There is a public right of way which passes out of the site and lies to the south-east of the site, and passes through an orchard and is referenced WC115. As pedestrians walk south-eastwards up the hill, they would be looking away from the scheme and be visually unaffected. Pedestrians walking north-westwards down the slope, would note views towards the proposed scheme to reveal a mature treebelt in the middle distance that defines the course of the Crane Brook. As a consequence of the orchard trees and this mature treebelt, views towards the proposed scheme would be very heavily filtered through the tree canopies. There would be little opportunity to gain an appreciation that there would be some built form. The proposal would be seen in the context of phase 1. For public footpath WC116, which is broadly orientated northeast to southwest, this route broadly follows the similar orientated ridge of local high ground, which forms the eastern valley side limits of the Crane Brook Valley. Along much of this route it either passes through mature fruit tree orchards or is framed by hedgerows and mature tree cover and as such, there would be very limited opportunity to observe the proposed scheme as views would be very heavily screened and framed

views across to the north side of the valley where the proposed scheme would be observed in the context of Phase 1 and Brick Kiln Farm.

8.27 There is a short section near to the Oast Barn, where there are some open aspects with no field boundary present from where it is possible to gain views across the Crane Brook Valley towards the proposed scheme. Tree cover in the intervening landscape would heavily screen views of the proposed development which would be seen with phase 1 and Brick Kiln Farm. There is a short section of footpath which leads down from the WC116 footpath downslope into the bottom of the Crane Brook Valley and is referenced WC95. For pedestrians walking northwards down this slope, the views are open in a westward direction across the field, towards the scheme where small elements of phase 2 would be visible seen in the context of tree cover in the middle distance and would be framed on either side by the phase 1 scheme and Brick Kiln Farm schemes. Other public rights of way such as those to the east and south of the Oast Barn and Comfort's Wood would be visually unaffected due to topography, built form and tree cover in the intervening landscape.



FIGURE 34: PHOTOMONTAGE FROM VP07A - YEAR 1 (APPENDIX 15)



FIGURE 35: PHOTOMONTAGE FROM VP07B - YEAR 1 (APPENDIX 15)

Public Rights of Way to the south of the Development Area

8.28 There is a public right of way which passes through the site itself across the southern part of the wider landholding reference WC115. It is broadly orientated northwest to southeast and connects with the A229 Hartley Road, the settlement of Hartley and extends south eastwards to connect with the B2086 close to Comfort's Wood. The first section of this route lies within the site and starts just south of the Hartley Road and runs alongside the curtilage to existing residential properties which are to the west of the route. To the east of the route is part of the wider landholding, which would be planted as woodland. This woodland planting would be seen through gaps in the adjacent hedgerow and tree cover and the eastern side of this path which the Phase 1 housing would be observed. Beyond this development some small elements of the proposed Phase 2 scheme would be observed in the far distance as a backdrop to Phase 1. With the establishment of the woodland in the foreground, views eastward from this short section of route would be limited to only views of the wood itself with the development of phase 1 and 2 behind screened from view (see photomontage viewpoint 3, Appendix 15).

8.29 The footpath extends southward to enter a large field which would be seeded and managed as a wildflower meadow within the site. The current alignment of the public right of way cuts diagonally across this field and would be retained and would remain with the proposed scheme in place. This field is subject to the distribution of spoil to a depth of 45 – 46cm across most of the field and would be created to reflect the topographic profile of the field with the margins of this overburden being feathered at the margins. The minor level rises would not materially alter the viewing experience. Views eastward from this footpath would first fall upon the proposed two woodland blocks of planting with the Phase 1 scheme located beyond this field and the proposed new woodland planting would be clearly visible in the middle distance. Proposed Phase 2 housing would be situated further away beyond and behind the Phase 1 scheme and as such, there would be only very limited opportunity to observe some elements of built form located beyond the Phase 1 development as members of the public pass through this field.

8.30 With regard to the south eastern field which accommodates public right of way WC115 there would be views down the length of the field northward to reveal views of the Brick Kiln Farm scheme in

the far distance. With the proposed phase 2 scheme in place this would sit in front of Brick Kiln Farm but would be similarly seen in the same viewing plane in the landscape as the extant scheme. See photomontage viewpoint 4, Appendix 15.

8.31 The path continues south eastward through the ancient woodland associated with the Crane Brook. The breadth and depth of this woodland and tree cover mean there would be no opportunity to observe the proposed scheme from this woodland section. South of this woodland the path extends upwards up a slope south eastwards through a mature fruit orchard. In the winter months there would be little impression of some built form through heavily filtered views through the tree cover. There would be little opportunity to observe the proposed scheme from the orchard section of this footpath. This path connects with a further public right of way WC116 extending further south eastwards towards Swattenden Farmhouse to topography and mature vegetation. This section of route would be visually unaffected by the proposals.



FIGURE 36: PHOTOMONTAGE FROM VP03 - YEAR 1 (APPENDIX 15)

8.32 There is a further public right of way reference WC128 orientated east-west linking the southern part of Hartley to the B2086 to the east in the vicinity of Hartley Lands Farm. Due to distance, topography and mature tree cover in the intervening landscape, there would be no line of sight towards the proposed scheme from this route and as such, users of it would be visually unaffected by the proposals.

Public Rights of Way to the west of the site

8.33 There are few footpaths located to the west of the proposed scheme. There are none associated with Hartley settlement itself. There is a public right of way, reference number WC92 which is broadly orientated east-west and runs from the B2085 to the west linking to the High Weald Landscape Trail close to Cranbrook to the east and extends for most of its length through Angley Wood. As this route is located within a woodland framework, there would be no visual effect upon users of this route as a consequence of the proposed scheme. There is a further public right of way WC127 which is located to the west of Hartley, again orientated east-west connecting with Hartley at the junction of the B2085 and the A229. Again, this would be visually unaffected by the proposals given topography, built form and vegetation in the intervening landscape. The public rights of way to the west of the scheme would be visually unaffected by the proposals.

Summary

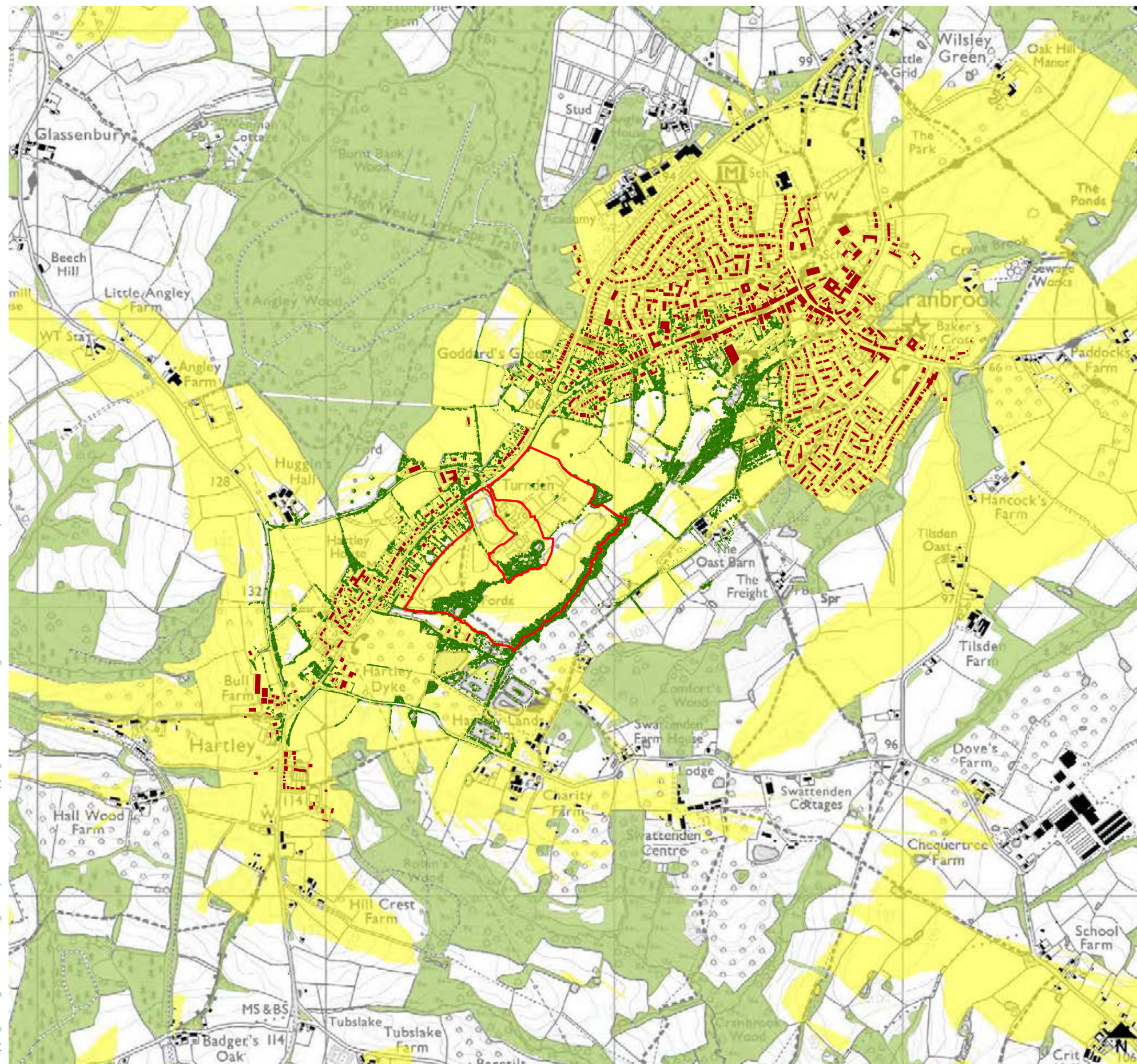
8.34 It is only in the locality of the proposed entrance on Hartley Road where there would be a material change in viewing experience regarding the phase 2 scheme. This is the only length of highway that would be visually affected. Similarly few public rights of way would be affected. Where the proposal would be seen it would be in local views restricted to within the Crane Valley and where seen would be in the context of the adjacent phase 1 and Brick Kiln Farm schemes. The significant limited visibility is due to the significant wooded character of the landscape together with its topography and the settlement of Cranbrook. Given the close proximity to Cranbrook settlement visual receptors have an expectation to observe residential neighbourhoods in this locality. Views of the proposed vernacular would be in keeping and not out of character with the locality.



FIGURE 37: PHOTOMONTAGE FROM VP04 - YEAR 1 (APPENDIX 15)



FIGURE 38: PHOTOMONTAGE FROM VP04 - YEAR 15 (APPENDIX 15)



KEY

- Site Boundary
- Cranbrook & Hartley (8m built form height)
- National Tree Map Data (2015)
- OS Open Map Local Woodland
- OS Open Map Local Buildings
- ZTV - Cranbrook & Hartley Visible

Screened ZTV Production Information -

The ZTV has been produced using multiple datasets to create a DSM (Digital Surface Model). These have been combined together accurately using ESRI GIS software. The following datasets have been used to create the DSM-

- OS Terrain 5 has been used as the base layer.
- Bluesky's National Tree Map (NTM) This is a detailed dataset covering England and Wales. It provides a comprehensive database of location, height and canopy spread for every single tree 3m and above in height. This is created from stereo aerial photography. Heights used within the model are the MEAN heights supplied with the dataset.
- OS Open Map Local data for woodland and trees has been used for areas beyond the NTM dataset. The heights have been set at 15m for woodland and 8m for buildings.
- Viewer height set at 1.7m
(in accordance with para 6.11 of GLVIA Third Edition)
- Calculations include earth curvature and light refraction

N.B. This Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) image illustrates the theoretical extent of where the development may be visible from, assuming 100% atmospheric visibility, and includes the screening effect from vegetation and buildings, based on the assumptions stated above.

FIGURE 39: SCREENED SZTV OF CRANBROOK AND HARTLEY (NOT TO SCALE)

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV Analysis)

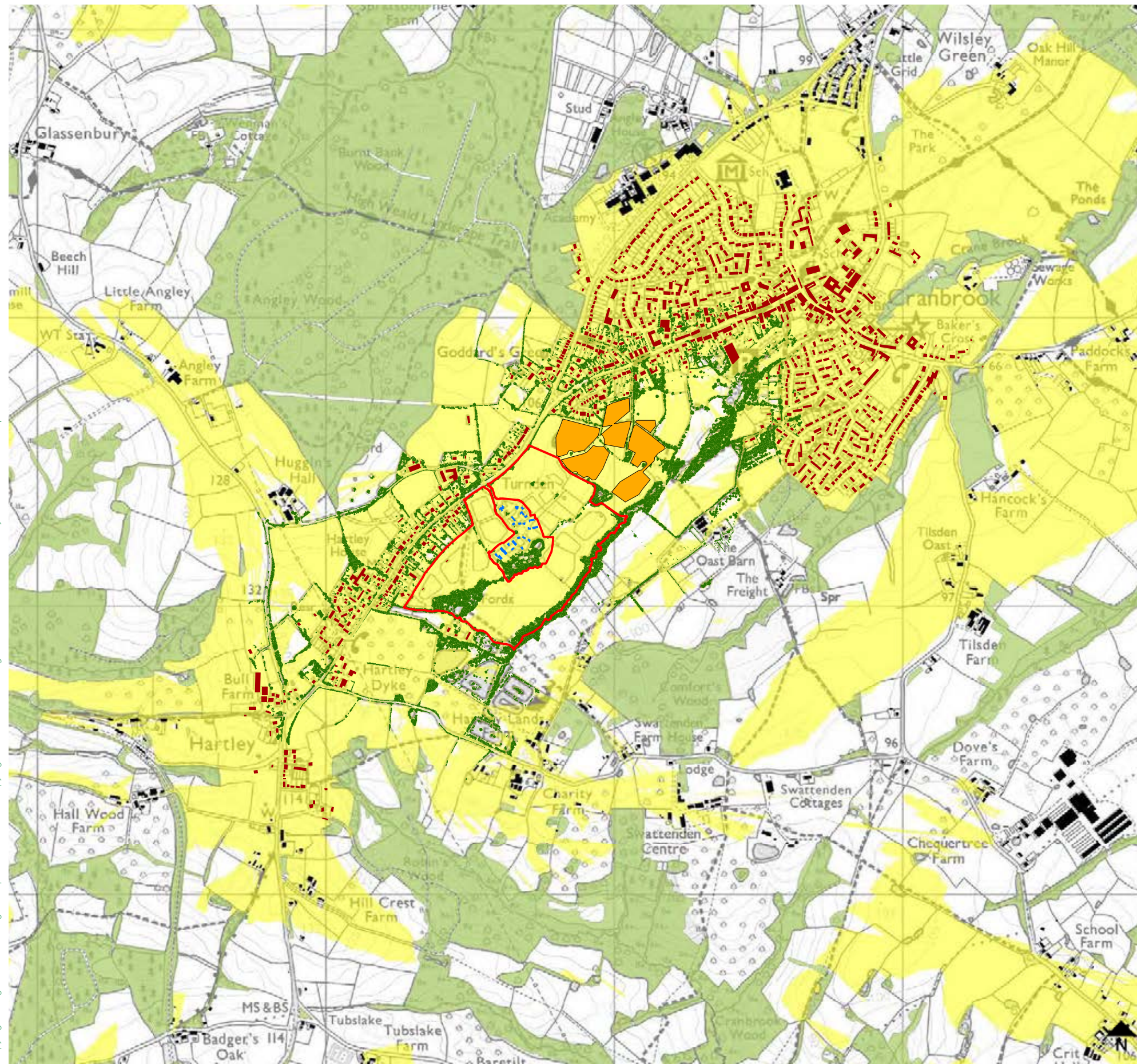
- 8.35 The visibility of the proposed scheme was considered in the application ES LVIA. Notwithstanding this, I have undertaken my own analysis to consider this aspect further. One of the aspects which is worth considering in further detail is the degree to which the proposal would exert its visual influence over the surrounding area within the AONB environment, i.e., the geographical extent of potential visibility.
- 8.36 I note that the AONB washes over the whole of the surrounding area as well as the settlements of Cranbrook and Hartley and their environs. The built form associated with these settlements, particularly Cranbrook is part and parcel of the local environment which defines the character of the AONB in this particular part of the designation. This is recognised in the published landscape character assessments.
- 8.37 It is necessary first to establish the current baseline in terms of visibility of built form in this area. Appendix 2 identifies the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) which is based on the existing settlements of Cranbrook and Hartley as they currently exist. A screened ZTV has been applied which takes into account buildings, tree cover as well as topography. This plan shows that the northern side of the Crane Brook Valley where the site is located, is already visually influenced by development associated with Hartley and Cranbrook. The Zone of Visual Influence extends out beyond these two settlements into the surrounding countryside across fields framed by blocks of woodland and includes land to the northeast of Cranbrook and the local higher ground centred on Tilsden Oast.
- 8.38 However, the baseline also needs to take into account the approved outline scheme of Brick Kiln Farm (parameters plan and the phase 1 scheme). With the Phase 1 extant scheme also included again it is evident that the overall geographical extent of visibility does not materially increase (see appendices 3 and 4).
- 8.39 My analysis then includes the Phase 2 scheme superimposed on the previous plans and again there is no significant difference in terms of the geographical extent (see appendix 5).

- 8.40 Appendix 6 illustrates the screened ZTV for the proposed Phase 2 scheme only. It is worthy of note that the area of visibility is heavily confined to just the site. Specifically, it is limited to the east by the woodland along the Crane Brook, to the south by further mature tree cover, to the west by the ribbon development along the Hartley Road and associated tree cover and to the north by the Brick Kiln Farm development based on the application parameters plan. It also reveals a very small area of visibility to the west of the Hartley Road near Goddard's Green, but this is private land and therefore cannot be appreciated by means of a public viewpoint. It also shows some distant visibility to the northeast of Cranbrook, however, Cranbrook would be in the foreground of such views. In summary, visibility of the scheme at close range is broadly confined to the site itself including the wider landholding with a few locations on the opposite side of the same Crane valley where views of the proposal would be seen in the context of the Phase 1 and Brick Kiln Farm schemes. Visibility of the scheme would be restricted to the Crane Valley and limited in degree.

- 8.41 Given the location of the extant schemes north and south, the proposal would not extend the development envelope of Cranbrook any further east, west or south than what already currently exists or what is extant. As a consequence of this, the overall general composition of the views towards the scheme would not materially change with the proposed Phase 2 scheme in place as is illustrated in the photographs, wirelines and photomontages, except for a new view created from the access road.

Summary

- 8.42 The site benefits from significant visual containment limited to parts of the Crane Valley. Furthermore, where the proposal would be seen it would be observed in the context of both existing and consented development. Additionally, the proposed residential scheme would not extend the zone of visual influence beyond which currently exists with the existing and consented developments in place.



KEY

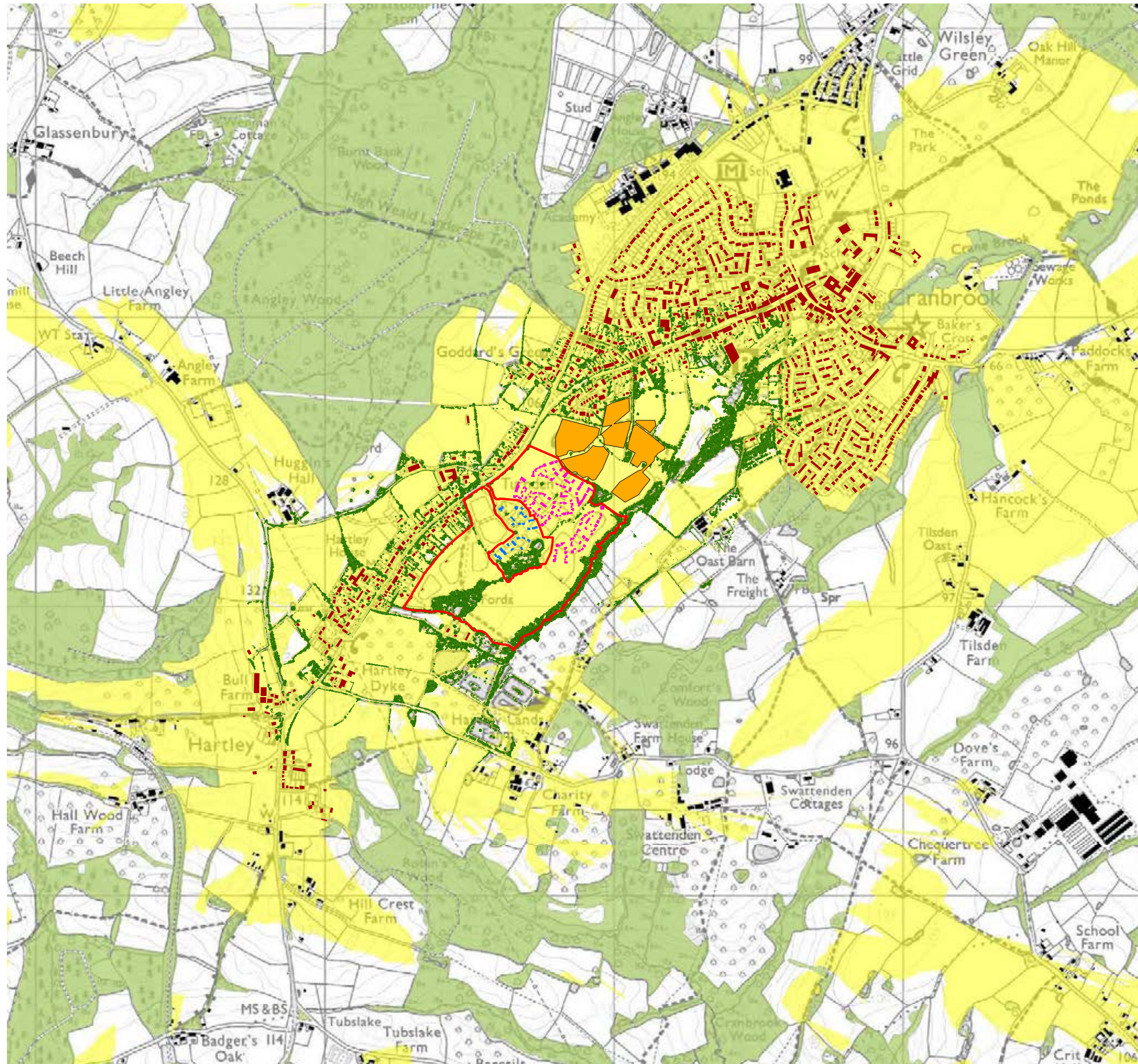
- Site Boundary
- Cranbrook & Hartley (8m built form height)
- Approved Outline Scheme (16/502860/OUT) 9m built form height
- Phase 1 Layout (9.5m built form height)
- National Tree Map Data (2015)
- OS Open Map Local Woodland
- OS Open Map Local Buildings
- ZTV - Cranbrook & Hartley & Approved Outline Scheme & Phase 1 Visible

Screened ZTV Production Information -
The ZTV has been produced using multiple datasets to create a DSM (Digital Surface Model). These have been combined together accurately using ESRI GIS software. The following datasets have been used to create the DSM-

- OS Terrain 5 has been used as the base layer.
- Bluesky's National Tree Map (NTM) This is a detailed dataset covering England and Wales. It provides a comprehensive database of location, height and canopy spread for every single tree 3m and above in height. This is created from stereo aerial photography. Heights used within the model are the MEAN heights supplied with the dataset.
- OS Open Map Local data for woodland and trees has been used for areas beyond the NTM dataset. The heights have been set at 15m for woodland and 8m for buildings.
- Viewer height set at 1.7m (in accordance with para 6.11 of GLVIA Third Edition)
- Calculations include earth curvature and light refraction

N.B. This Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) image illustrates the theoretical extent of where the development may be visible from, assuming 100% atmospheric visibility, and includes the screening effect from vegetation and buildings, based on the assumptions stated above.

FIGURE 40: SCREENED SZTV EXISTING BASELINE (NOT TO SCALE)



KEY

- Site Boundary
- Cranbrook & Hartley (8m built form height)
- Approved Outline Scheme (16/502860/OUT) 9m built form height
- Phase 1 Layout (9.5m built form height)
- Phase 2 Layout (10.75m built form height)
- National Tree Map Data (2015)
- OS Open Map Local Woodland
- OS Open Map Local Buildings
- ZTV - Cranbrook & Hartley & Approved Outline Scheme & Phase 1 & Phase 2 Visible

Screened ZTV Production Information -
The ZTV has been produced using multiple datasets to create a DSM (Digital Surface Model). These have been combined together accurately using ESRI GIS software. The following datasets have been used to create the DSM-

- OS Terrain 5 has been used as the base layer.
- Bluesky's National Tree Map (NTM) This is a detailed dataset covering England and Wales. It provides a comprehensive database of location, height and canopy spread for every single tree 3m and above in height. This is created from stereo aerial photography. Heights used within the model are the MEAN heights supplied with the dataset.
- OS Open Map Local data for woodland and trees has been used for areas beyond the NTM dataset. The heights have been set at 15m for woodland and 8m for buildings.
- Viewer height set at 1.7m
(in accordance with para 6.11 of GLVIA Third Edition)
- Calculations include earth curvature and light refraction

N.B. This Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) image illustrates the theoretical extent of where the development may be visible from, assuming 100% atmospheric visibility, and includes the screening effect from vegetation and buildings, based on the assumptions stated above.

FIGURE 41: SCREENED SZTV INCLUDING PHASE 2 (NOT TO SCALE)

An aerial illustration of a village. The village is densely packed with houses, mostly with red roofs. A central green space, possibly a park or sports field, is visible. A river or stream flows through the village, curving around the central green space. The illustration is in a soft, painterly style with muted colors.

11.0

High Weald AONB

Introduction

- 11.1 The site and its immediate surroundings including the whole of the settlement of Cranbrook lie within the AONB designation. I proceed to consider how the proposed development would have a bearing upon this designated landscape.
- 11.2 AONB's are addressed in section 15 of the NPPF (CD10.1), which is concerned with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Internal Paragraph 176 notes that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest state of protection in relation to these issues.
- 11.3 The High Weald AONB was designated in 1983 and being the fourth largest AONB extends over 1400km2; with 70,000 people living in towns, which are excluded from this designation but wholly surrounded by it. In contract Cranbrook lies within the designation.

The NERC Act 2006 (CD21.2)

- 11.4 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 in part 9 section 99 is concerned with the natural beauty of the countryside and states that:

“The fact that an area in England or Wales consists of or includes –

a) Land used for agriculture or woodlands

b) Land used as a park, or

c) Any other area whose flora, fauna or physiographical features are partly the product of human intervention in the landscape,

Does not prevent it from being treated, for the purposes of any enactment (whenever passed), as being an area of natural beauty (or of outstanding natural beauty).”
- 11.5 With regard to the High Weald AONB, the Management Plan sets out in the document what the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) considers to constitute natural beauty, as set out in the proceeding paragraphs.

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024 (CD 12.13)

- 11.6 The JAC published the current Management Plan, which runs 2019-2024. One purpose is to use the Management Plan to identify detrimental effects of proposed development on the AONB and to help ensure development is landscape-led and contributes to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.
- 11.7 Internal Page 5 of the documents notes that the JAC's vision for the future of the High Weald is a landscape, which is maintained by sustainable land management practices, such as regenerative agriculture, wilding and small-scale woodland management and engage with nature and contributes to the health and wellbeing of people amongst other visions.
- 11.8 Internal Page 13 notes that the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities with land in an AONB to prepare and publish an up-to-date plan, which formulates their policy for the management of the area.
- 11.9 Internal page 14 notes that with regard to decision-making, Section 85 identified the duty to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. The Management Plan can be used to guide environmental land management and to assess the impact of development or other changes on the AONB. It goes on to note the key characteristics for each component of natural beauty and what is special about the High Weald's landscape and beauty that should be afforded great weight in planning decisions. The Management Plan includes a "Statement of Significance" which defines the natural beauty of the High Weald and also amongst other points includes, character statements including a list of key characteristics, which describe the key components of natural beauty that policy and actions should aim to conserve and enhance. It identifies a set of management policies (objectives) for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. It goes on to note the Management Plan can be used to guide environmental land management and assess the impact of development or other changes on the AONB.
- 11.10 It notes that key characteristics for each component of natural beauty identify what is special about the High Weald's landscape and beauty that should be afforded "great weight" in planning decisions.

- 11.11 On page 17 it notes the primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty but that it is recognised there are other underlying principles which are an important aspect of the designation's success and that these include the need to maintain a thriving community life and that particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development. It specifically notes that recreation is not an objective of the designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty. I note that paragraph 177(c) of the NPPF specifically makes reference to recreational opportunities. It notes that in addition, local authorities and all public bodies have a statutory duty under the CROW Act, section 85. This duty places an obligation on a wide range of organisations, not just to consider any detrimental impacts on AONBs of their policies and activities, but to also positively to consider how they might enhance the AONB's natural beauty.
- 11.12 Internal page 20 notes that:

“It is the AONB as a whole that must satisfy the technical criteria of natural beauty. The weight and importance of factors indicating natural beauty may vary across the designation. The presence of incongruous features or degraded landscapes does not, in itself, detract from the value of the area as an AONB. The emphasis in these cases is on the second part of the designation purpose, that of enhancement of natural beauty.”
- 11.13 I note in terms of planning development in AONBs, the scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited with planning permission refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of three aspects, the third of which is whether "any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated."
- 11.14 The document on page 21 notes that the European Landscape Convention promotes a definition of landscape which usefully underpins the rational for AONBs:

“An area as perceived by people whose character is the result of action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” and:

“As an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity”

11.15 Internal page 23 of the document provides the “Statement of Significance”, which for the purposes of this Management Plan seeks to define natural beauty. It states that:

“Despite its large size 1000km sq and a proximity to London its landscape has remained relatively unchanged ...Its outstanding beauty from its essential rural and human scale character, with a high proportion of natural surfaces and the story of its past visible throughout. The extensive survival and traditional mixed farming supports an exceptionally well connected blue and green infrastructure with a high proportion of semi-natural habitat in a structurally diverse permeable and complex mosaic supporting a rich diversity of wildlife.”

11.16 It goes on to note that the natural beauty of the High Weald comprises five defining components of character as follows:

1. ***“Geology, landform and water systems – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with numerous gill streams***
2. ***Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries***
3. ***Routeways – a dense network of historic routeway (now roads, tracks and paths)***
4. ***Woodland – abundance of ancient woodland, highly interconnected and in smallholdings***
5. ***Field and Heath – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing with distinctive zones of lowland heaths and inned river valleys” (my underlining)***

11.17 It goes on to note other additional qualities as locally distinctive features, such as historic parks and gardens, orchards, hop gardens, veteran trees along with rich and varied biodiversity as well as people valuing views, scenic beauty and relative tranquillity.

Geology, Landform, Water Systems and Climate

11.18 The Management Plan firstly addresses geology and water systems. In so doing, it identifies the key characteristics that relate to this component as defining this aspect of natural beauty as follows:

- Impressive coastal cliffs. Comment – not affected by the scheme
- A principal ridge. Comment – the legibility of the principal ridges associated with the Crane Brook Valley would remain with the scheme in place
- A pattern of faults and folds. Comment – no change with the scheme
- Numerous small streams. Comment – those associated with the site would remain and be enhanced through the additional water features

- Distinctive outcrops of sandstone. Comment – unaffected
- A high density of pits, quarries and ponds. Comment – additional ponds introduced as part of the scheme
- Locally distinctive geological materials including sandstone, clay bricks and tiles and Horsham stone contributing to high quality vernacular architecture. Comment - proposal delivers a high-quality built environment compliant with the AONB design guide
- Soils. Comment – retained and enhanced with loss restricted to the development area. Overall slight beneficial effect
- Heavily channelised and intensively managed river valleys. Comment – SUDS would provide better surface water management
- A high density of ponds. Comment – additional water features created
- An oceanic climate. Comment – not affected

11.19 With regard to this component, the Management Plan notes a number of objectives, which I proceed to consider. Objective G1 is concerned with restoring the natural of rivers, watercourses and water bodies. The proposed scheme would increase the extent of woodland and wetland features, which is an indicator of the Management Plan’s success. In terms of proposed actions, it refers to the restoration and creation of a range of wetland features, which this scheme delivers. Furthermore, it notes to avoid development close to watercourses that would restrict their natural processes and flood capacity, which again this scheme reflects. The proposal also has a sustainable drainage system designed across the development area and wider landholding, another action that is sought by the Management Plan. The objective also proposes the establishment of effective combinations of uncultivated grassland buffer strips and tree planting, again an aspect that the scheme delivers.

11.20 Objective C2 seeks to protect sandstone outcrops, soil and other important landform and geological features. The proposed scheme would adopt best practice with regard to protecting soil during construction and as a result of creating wildflower meadows would result in reduced chemical inputs to the soil environment. Furthermore, it would avoid substantial alterations to landform. These are all actions advocated for objective G2.

Settlement

11.21 A further aspect of natural beauty associated with the High Weald AONB is the dispersed historic settlements founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries. The key defining characteristics relating to settlements are as follows:

- High density of historic farmsteads. Comment - unaffected
- Separation between settlements. Comment – scheme maintains sense of separation between Hartley and Cranbrook
- Frequent den and fold place names. Comment - unaffected

- Farmsteads typically arranged around routeways. Comment - unaffected
- High numbers of pre-1750 timber framed farm buildings. Comment - unaffected
- Hamlets occurring around the junction of routeways. Comment - unaffected
- Pockets of small wayside cottages. Comment - unaffected
- Villages and towns of medieval origin. Comment – scheme reinforces the historic and planned southward growth
- Absence of large-scale settlement extensions. Comment – scheme forms modest scale as an extension to Cranbrook
- No significant nucleated settlements before the 13th Century. Comment - unaffected
- Deer parks. Comment - unaffected
- Distinctive settlement types. Comment – scheme reinforces growth of main settlement reflecting growth pattern
- High concentrations of historic buildings. Comment – Few locally. Building in Phase 1 delisted
- Villages and hamlets typically unlit. Comment – unaffected except lighting local to the scheme
- A limited palette of local materials. Comment – scheme reflects use of local materials
- Greenness of roads and streets. Comment – integrated into the green infrastructure



FIGURE 47: EXISTING HOUSING ON SOUTHERN SIDE OF CRANBROOK

11.22 The vision, with regard to settlement contributing to natural beauty is set out on internal page 31 and notes that:

“A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of settlement is protected in a way that positively contributes to the natural environment and improves the connections between settlements and the countryside ...”

11.23 The document identifies five issues, namely an increase in green field development pressure for housing, generic layout and design of new housing developments and erosion of character through suburbanisation and declining housing affordability. In response to these aspects, the Management Plan identifies a series of objectives.

11.24 Objective S1 to reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside with regard to this proposed action requires developments to maximise measurable gains for biodiversity and opportunities for flora and fauna in the design of buildings, curtilages and open spaces and makes space for wildlife to thrive. This scheme adopts this strategy both within the development area and wider landholding.

11.25 Objective S2 seeks to protect the historic pattern and character of settlement. The proposal has taken into account the separation between the settlements of Cranbrook and Hartley and has introduced with this management of separation linked with green infrastructure. The scheme has taken account of the High Weald Design Guide (CD12.15) and historic characterisation to guide the design of the scheme as it relates to these two settlements. As such, it protects the relationships between the settlements and associated green spaces and route ways and has sought to deliver new housing with a mix of house sizes that respond to local needs, all of which are proposed actions identified in the Management Plan.

11.26 Objective S3 seeks to enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure development reflects the character of the High Weald in its scale, layout and design. An increase in new developments according with the AONB Design Guide (CD12.15) is identified as an indicator of success. It identifies a number of proposed actions including the following:

- Promote the High Weald Design Guide and apply to housing development in the AONB
- Describe and promote traditional architectural detailing
- Promote and utilise the High Weald Guidance on the Selection and use of Colour in Development
- Utilise AONB Design Guidance for New Housing Development
- Reflect local landscape character and use of local provenance species in new landscaping scheme ensuring improved connectivity

11.27 All of these actions as proposed have featured in the evolution of the scheme through its various design iterations. Mr Colin Pullan can comment on the design of the built environment with regard to these aspects. The above strategies with regard to the green infrastructure and wider landholding are addressed elsewhere in my proof in terms of how all of these aspects have been incorporated into the scheme.

Routeways

11.28 Routeways are identified as one of the five components contributing to natural beauty with the Management Plan identifying a number of key characteristics with regard to this as follows:

- A dense radiating network. Comment - unaffected
- Typically present by the 14th Century. Comment - unaffected
- Sunken routeways. Comment - unaffected
- Braiding. Comment - unaffected
- Earth banks, lynchets and ditches. Comment - unaffected
- Wide flowery grass verges. Comment – scheme integrates verges as part of green infrastructure
- Small-scale variations in habitat. Comment - scheme provides habitat creation and biodiversity net gain
- Frequent sandstone exposures. Comment - unaffected
- Linear nature. Comment – new permissive linear routes introduced
- Veteran trees and ancient roadside coppice. Comment – veteran trees retained and integrated within green space
- Many lost, stopped or diverted routeways. Comment – no loss or diverted routeways. Temporary diversion of PROW for regarding one field. Tanner’s Lane would be reinstated



FIGURE 48: FOOTPATH WC115

- Associated heritage features. Comment – non-within the site. Reinstatement of historic hedgerows and field pattern within wider landholding
- Archaeology and cultural associations. Comment – no comment

11.29 The Management Plan identifies a number of objectives with regard to routeways as follows.

11.30 Objective R1 seeks to maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways. In terms of proposed actions, it notes to give consideration to the historic alignment of roads, tracks and paths in decision-making. The proposal has had regard to the historic route, Tanner’s Lane, which the scheme would reinstate linking Hartley Road with the Brick Kiln Farm development.

11.31 Objective R2 seeks to enhance the ecological function of routeways. The scheme design would enhance the verges with indigenous grassland species, which is one of the actions.

Woodland

11.32 The Management Plan identifies woodland as another component of natural beauty as the AONB is characterised by the great extent of ancient woods, gills and shaws and identifies key characteristics with regard to this aspect as follows:

- Highly interconnected. Comment – green infrastructure creates new connections
- High proportion of ancient woodland. Comment – retained and protected and integrated into the green infrastructure
- Many irregularly shaped. Comment – no change
- A few very large woods. Comment – no change



FIGURE 49: ON SITE WOODLAND

- High density of gill woodlands. Comment – establishment of new woodland areas and tree belts
- Frequent patches of wet woodland. Comment – no change
- A stronghold for characteristic species. Comment – new habitat created through new woodland and management
- Considerable variability. Comment – existing and new woodland types across green infrastructure
- Wood pasture and parkland. Comment – new pasture with trees created
- Nationally significant resource. Comment – veteran trees retained and protected for habitat
- A strong commercial woodland industry. Comment - no comment
- A culture of small-scale management. Comment –no comment
- Visible evidence of historic use. Comment – historic landscape restoration with fields and hedgerows
- Trees used for boundary markers. Comment – standard trees reintroduced to reflect former field boundaries

11.33 A number of objectives are identified with regard to this component as follows.

11.34 Objective W1 seeks to maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland and notes that an indicator of success is no loss of ancient woodland. The Management Plan identifies a number of proposed actions, some of which are incorporated into the design proposals where relevant. The scheme avoids the loss of ancient woodland and veteran trees. Indeed, the scheme has been carefully designed to also avoid their deterioration and conversely seeks to enhance these features. The scheme has carefully assessed opportunities for and delivers woodland expansion as well as provides buffering and the inter-linking of gill and small woodlands together with enhancement of semi-natural habitats.

11.35 Objective W2 seeks to enhance the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale, the rationale is to increase the viability of woodland habitat for wildlife by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland and to link and enhance isolated habitats, providing greater connectivity between woodland and other important wildlife areas. This strategy has been adopted within the wider landholding. Specifically, the scheme would provide appropriate management for the woodland areas. The design would provide a minimum of a 15 metre buffer and seeks to provide a larger buffer zone to protect the veteran trees from any potential detrimental effects of nearby development. Furthermore, the scheme would seek to introduce indigenous tree planting which could be secured by means of a condition and with the LEMP

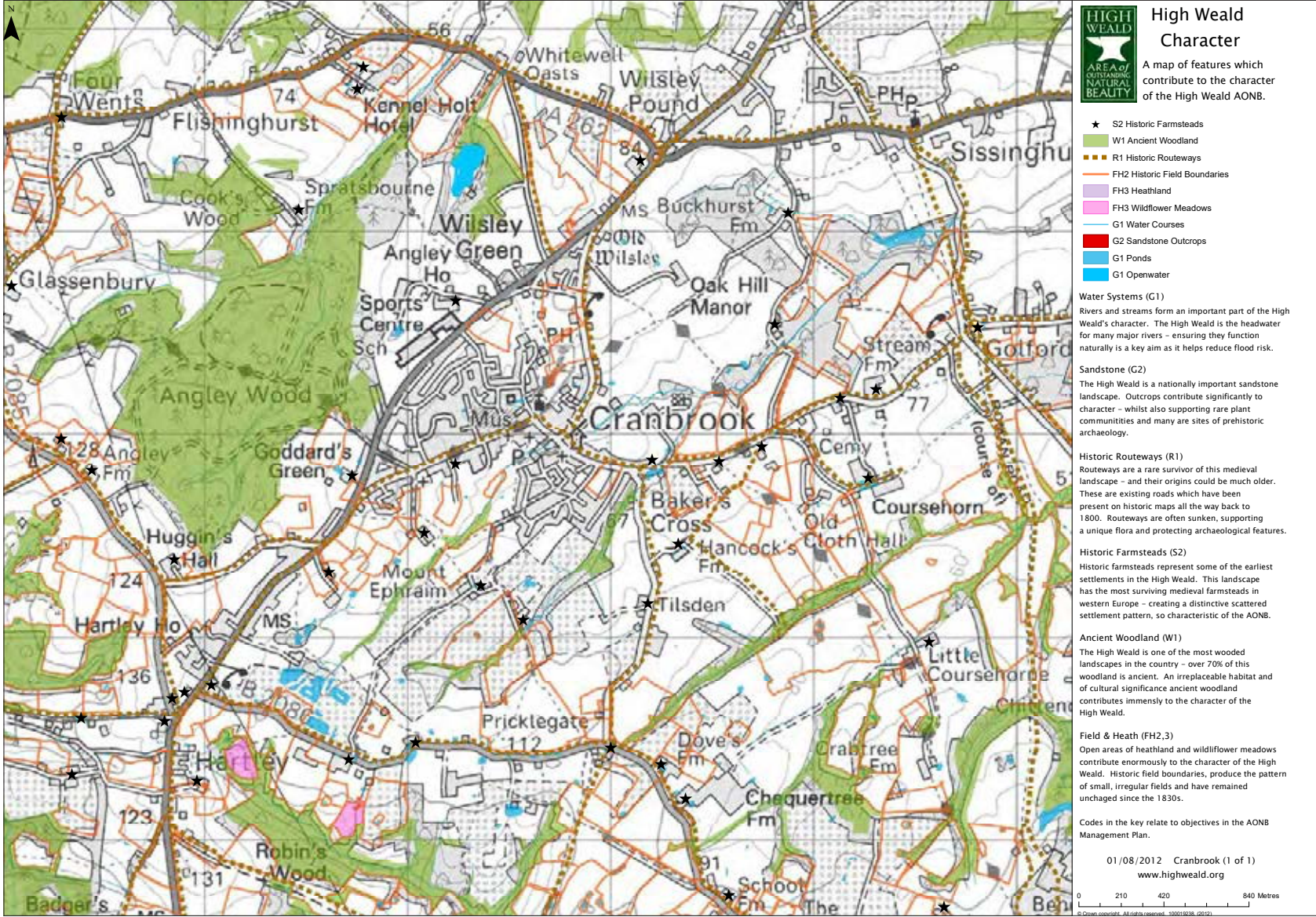


FIGURE 50: HIGH WEALD AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

would secure appropriate management of the woodland areas for ecological benefits in and adjacent to the proposed housing and provides new areas of trees and woodland. All of these actions are proposed in the Plan.

11.36 Objective W3 seeks to protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodland, a matter that Dr. Chris Miele can address.

Field and Heath

11.37 The Management Plan notes that the High Weald AONB is characterised by small, irregularly shaped and productive fields often bounded by hedgerows and small woodlands and typically used for livestock grazing, small holdings and non-dominant agriculture within which can be found distinctive zones of lowland heath and inned river valleys. The Management Plan identifies a number of key characteristics as key component as follows:

- A generally irregular field pattern. Comment – small fields created as part of green infrastructure
- Fieldscape dominated by historic farmsteads. Comment – Turnden farmstead delisted and redeveloped as part of Phase 1
- Strong influence exerted by topography. Comment – proposed new fields at right-angles to Crane Brook and topography
- Predominantly pastoral mixed farming. Comment – reinstatement of pastoral farming
- Fields mostly used for grazing. Comment – most existing and new fields proposed for grazing livestock
- Medieval character dominant. Comment – currently physically absent across site. Historic landscape restoration proposed
- Boundary ditch and bank features. Comment – reinstatement of historic ditch and bank feature
- Nationally important fragments of unimproved neutral grassland. Comment – introduction of wildlife meadows as unimproved grassland

- High proportion of good quality flowery grassland. Comment – proposed as part of green infrastructure
 - Traditional orchards. Comment – currently no orchards present within the site and therefore unaffected
 - Ashdown Forest. Comment – unaffected
 - Distinctive areas of wooded heath. Comment – Non present on site and unaffected
- 11.38 The Management Plan identifies a number of objectives as follows.
- 11.39 Objective FH1 seeks to secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets as part of sustainable land management. With regard to this an indicator of success is the maintenance of land registered for grazing animals. This scheme would introduce the regular and permanent grazing opportunity for sheep within a number of stock proofed fields reinstated as part of the historic landscape restoration on site.
- 11.40 Objective FH2 seeks to maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands. Two indicators of success with regard to this include the increase in hedges restored and new hedges planted and no loss of medieval field systems with reference to intact field areas. The document notes great weight will be given to medieval field systems in planning decisions, especially where there is a high degree of intactness and strong presence or relationship with other notable landscape and heritage features. In this instance, the site, whilst considered to have medieval fields present, the reality is that the historic field structure is no longer legible or intact as the majority of the site forms a series of horse paddock enclosures with fencing. The scheme would reinstate historic field boundaries with new hedgerows with standard trees and stock proof fencing. The development Masterplan does protect and enhance existing field patterns including hedges, ditches or other field boundary features and where possible restores these, particularly within public spaces. The LEMP would secure management for such boundary features including hedgerows and veteran trees. The scheme has used historic map analysis to help guide the reinstatement proposals for previously lost hedgerows. All of these aspects are identified as proposed actions in the Management Plan.
- 11.41 Objective FH3 seeks to enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats. The rationale is to improve the condition, landscape permeability and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and inter-related habitats (such as hedges, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife. The proposed green infrastructure design incorporates these objectives. The Management Plan identifies three indicators of success, which the proposal would secure. Firstly, there would be no loss of any species rich grassland. Secondly, no loss of lowland heather, and thirdly an increase in connectivity of species rich grassland. Thirdly, the proposed actions of the Management Plan include the avoidance

of large-scale new tree planting and planting trees on species rich grassland and small woodland creation schemes. The design of the green infrastructure incorporates these strategies. The LEMP would deliver landscape management design guidance to ensure environmental net gain, a further proposed Management Plan action.

- 11.42 Objective FH4 seeks to protect the archaeological and historic assets of field and heath, which Dr. Chris Miele can comment upon.

Land Based Economy and Related Rural Life

- 11.43 The Management Plan notes that the AONB is characterised by an increasing broad-based economy but with a significant land-based sector and identifies a number of key characteristics with regard to this component as follows:

- Land based workers. Comment – new homes for potential land-based workers
- Strong influence of London. Comment – no comment
- Tendency for greater self-sufficiency. Comment – sustainable location to underpin Cranbrook economy
- Retention of woodland workers. Comment – no comment
- An expensive landscape to manage. Comment – engagement with Kent Wildlife Trust as volunteers to support landscape management
- High house prices in relation to wages. Comment – scheme introduces new dwellings
- Strong rural community life. Comment – proposal reinforces and underpins Cranbrook economy

- 11.44 The Management Plan identifies a number of objectives, the first of which LBE1 seeks to improve returns from land management activities and LBE2 which seeks to improve amenities including provision of appropriate affordable housing that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Mr S. Slatford will comment upon this aspect with regard to the scheme.

Other Qualities

- 11.45 The Management Plan identifies other qualities contributing to natural beauty characterised by perceptual qualities, features and cultural associations and enhance health and well-being and foster enjoyment and appreciation of the beauty of nature. It identifies several key characteristics in this regard as follows:
- Features and resources providing opportunities for informal outdoor recreation and experiencing the beauty of nature. Comment – wider landholding and green infrastructure provides a range of informal outdoor recreation opportunities
 - Locally distinctive and nationally important features which enrich people's experience of the High Weald. Comment – green infrastructure provides opportunity to enrich people's experience

- Other perceived qualities. Comment – green infrastructure provides new public access and associated viewing opportunities and reintroduces a human scale landscape within the site
- Cultural associations. Comment – unaffected

- 11.46 The Management Plan identifies a number of objectives as follows.

- 11.47 Objective OQ1 seeks to increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the AONB. The scheme would provide educational interpretation boards at various locations within the landscape.

- 11.48 Objective OQ2 seeks to increase the contribution of individuals and communities to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. The Applicant has liaised with Kent CC Wildlife Trust in the formulation of a LEMP and seek their involvement in subsequent landscape management and maintenance of the wider landholding.

- 11.49 Objective OQ3 seeks to develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty. In this regard the scheme would introduce a number of new permitted routes across the wider landholding and would be inclusive of all recreationalists including the opportunity to dog walk. The scheme also as part of the green infrastructure creates a number of new links between the countryside and Cranbrook and Hartley which accords with some of the relevant proposed actions.



FIGURE 51: EXAMPLE OF RECREATIONAL ROUTE

- 11.50 Objective OQ4 seeks to protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value. The scheme has been carefully designed to minimise light pollution mindful of the dark sky environment. It also through design seeks to provide access to the landscape through health and well-being. These strategies accord with the Management Plan’s proposed actions.
- 11.51 In light of my analysis I consider that the proposals would not offend the AONB Management Plan objectives and components identified which reflect the special qualities of this particular designated landscape.

**High Weald Housing Design Guide (November 2019)
(CD12.13)**

- 11.52 The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee is responsible for monitoring the Management Plan and is supported by the AONB Unit, which provides advice on how to conserve and enhance the AONB. Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000 sets out the duty with regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. The JAC comprises 15 Local Authorities, DEFRA and NE with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council being one of the parties.
- 11.53 Notably the forward of the document notes that the distinct character of the High Weald is a by-product of the way in which the land has been both settled and farmed. It goes on to note that the designation can never be seen as a growth area, but it does have to be allowed to grow to meet the needs of its communities. The document goes on to note that it has taken a bold step to produce this guidance for new homes. Furthermore, it states explicitly that the guidance sets out very clearly how to ensure that new development conserves a strong sense of place that defines the High Weald. Therefore, this guidance is a vital tool to help everyone involved with change and development. Furthermore, it has taken a topic so often judged subjectively and through careful analysis provides an objective approach to securing the future character of the AONB. Furthermore, it notes that this is a landscape-led approach that will produce places that are valued and provide new homes to support strong economic performance and create beautiful places.
- 11.54 Internal page 3 of the document recognises that housing development within the High Weald is necessary and desirable in creating a thriving and successful place. It notes that generic housing developments fail to capitalise on the true character of the place and as such, the guide is designed to help in balancing

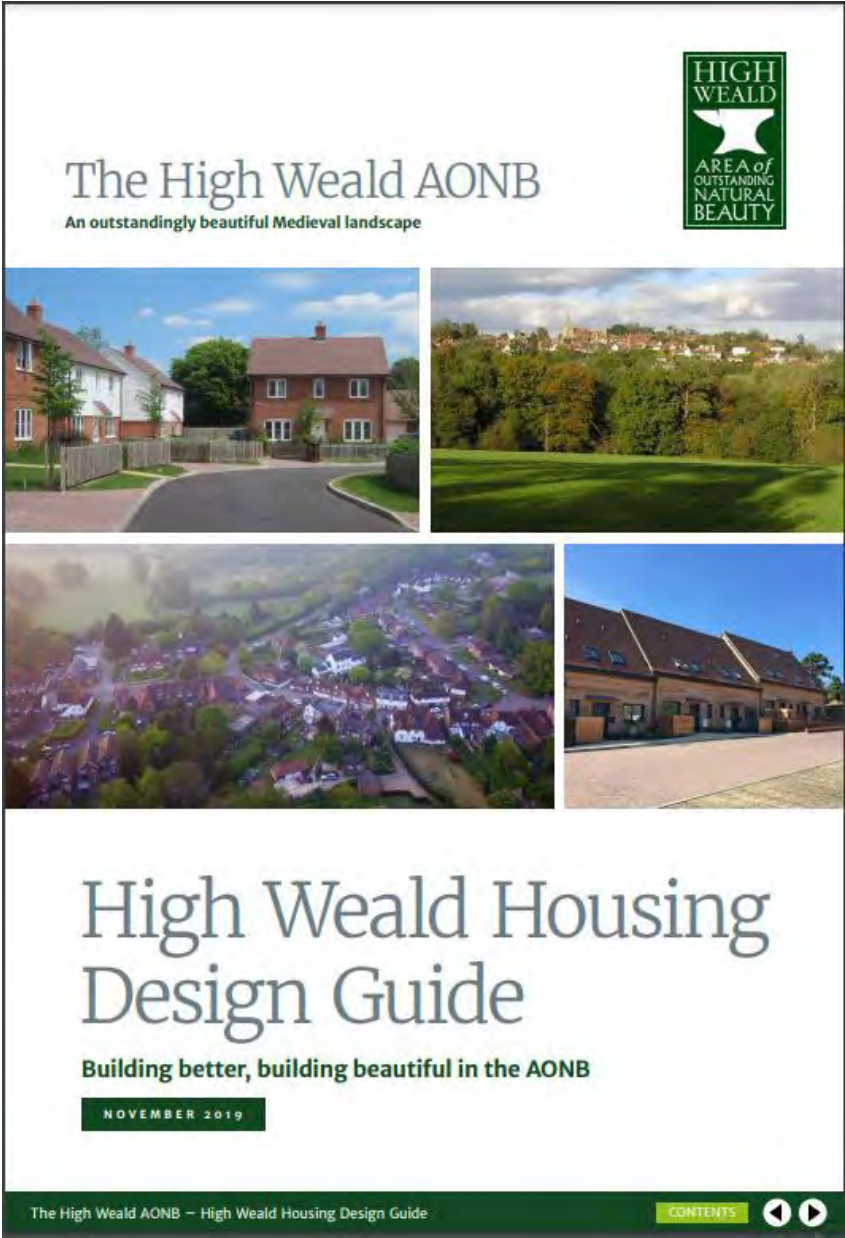


FIGURE 52: HIGH WEALD HOUSING DESIGN GUIDE (CD12.13)

housing delivery with the statutory duty on Local Authorities to conserve and enhance the AONB and setting the standards expected of new housing developments in the High Weald. This point is reiterated under the heading ‘The Aim of the Guide’ which seeks to

“...help development meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework with regard to achieving well designed places and the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.” (my emphasis)

- 11.55 The guide is broadly based on the ‘Building for Life 12’ a widely accepted national industry standard and takes into account the NDG.
- 11.56 Chapter 2 of the document is concerned with ‘Understanding the High Weald’ and sets out what constitutes the natural beauty of the High Weald environment. It notes five defining components of character that have made the High Weald a distinct and recognisably distinct and homogenous area, with one of the five components being settlement.
- 11.57 Chapter 3 of the document provides an overview of the Design Guide sections with particular emphasis on tailoring design to support the overall character and identity of the High Weald. It identifies three principal steps namely:
- Step 1 – response to setting
 - Step 2 – making a place
 - Step 3 - the right details
- 11.58 Adopting this stepped approach is intended to ensure that housing developments are truly ‘of the place’, a genuine and integrated part of the existing settlement and that schemes both conserve and enhance the High Weald character. With this in mind, the document notes that planning applications should demonstrate how schemes have regard to this guidance and principles as follows:
- For development to reflect and enhance the character of the High Weald it must be designed to integrate into its setting
 - Rather than being a constraint, context offers opportunities to retain and embed the character of the High Weald into a genuinely landscape-led design
 - Context will also include the heritage assets of a site
 - New housing development schemes must be influenced by a detailed understanding of the character and function of the landscape of the site and surrounding area

- A multi-disciplinary approach (urban design, landscape and ecological strategy, highways engineering and heritage management) needs to be engaged throughout the design process
- 11.59 It goes on to provide a checklist with regard to design and identifies four key points as follows:
1. ***“Analyse not just the site, but its wider landscape and topographical setting and its relationship to existing woods, fields, built settlement and routeways to ensure robust understanding of the essential character of the area***
 2. ***Identified existing views into and through the site that need to be maintained and incorporated into the layout***
 3. ***Studied historic maps to understand the evolution of the site/area and identify key historic features and considered if opportunities exist to reinstate historic features, hedges and routeways to reinforce ‘sense of place’***
 4. ***Identified existing site features, such as species rich grassland, water features or field boundaries and taken the opportunity to retain, proactively incorporate and enhance these in the scheme”***
- 11.60 I note that the scheme has had regard for this checklist. Concerning siting development in the landscape, it notes a number of key principles. One of which is that new development should be designed in a way that is sensitive to existing historic settlement patterns. Secondly, it notes that historic settlements in the High Weald are a key part of its character because of how well they are integrated with the landscape when viewed from afar. With regard to this principle, it notes that new developments should be similarly well integrated in the landscape but notes that new development should be good enough to be seen not justified on the basis that existing or proposed planting will screen it from view. It goes on to note the response to existing built context is also important and that the scale of the new scheme should not dominate that of the parent settlement. I note the scheme reflects these principles.
- 11.61 The document addresses connectivity on internal page 14 and with regard to permeability notes that it is important for new development to sit successfully as an integrated piece of the village that people can walk and travel through rather than as a separate estate and as such, help encourage interaction between existing and new residents. I note that the scheme positively addresses connectivity.
- 11.62 In terms of layout, and the principles of site structure, it notes that High Weald settlements are characteristically very green places with substantial soft landscaping, grass verges, lush hedgerows and full tree canopies breaking up the built form in all but the tightest knit built core of villages and towns. It goes on to note that sufficient space must be incorporated at the earliest stages of site layout and plot disposition to accommodate such green infrastructure and to allow large scale and replacement trees the space to grow in order to enable the development to maintain this important characteristic impression of greenness in new housing developments. I note this scheme accommodates substantial green infrastructure.
- 11.63 The principles of site structure go on to note mitigating and adapting to climate change as a key requirement that needs to be considered at the earliest stages of site structure.
- 11.64 In terms of ‘street layout’ the document notes that street placement and form should be linked to topography, existing field patterns and existing routes and how movement is organised across the site. I note the scheme does reflect these aspects.
- 11.65 Page 20 of the AONB Design Guide considers locating meaningful public realm. In particular, it notes that the design of public open spaces should not only reinforce local landscape character and sense of place but also enhance habitats and wildlife. Furthermore, green public spaces are characteristic of High Weald settlements and as such, open green spaces should be located to be prominent and accessible and visible to create a feeling of safety through passive surveillance. The location of public green spaces may be determined by existing site landscape features and are best placed at the heart of the scheme. I note the scheme accords with these principles.
- 11.66 The AONB Design Guide goes on to address the subject of multi-functional green spaces on page 21 of the document. Under this heading it notes that green spaces in the public realm are designed to be multi-functional. Open spaces should be designed to offer high quality amenity whilst also providing for surface water management, wildlife habitats and corridors, planting and structural landscaping and improved connectivity for walking, cycling and riding. The wildlife of the High Weald is embedded in the landscape character and so proposals for habitat creation and enhancement or biodiversity net gain should also be able to make positive contributions to landscape character. The document goes on to note that decent size spaces offer the opportunity to add large trees to the site and create wildflower meadows, which help to support the character of the High Weald. I note the scheme accords with these principles.
- 11.67 It also notes that opportunities for informal and natural play should be created across the site.
- 11.68 The document notes that on-site landscape spaces and water should be used to form a meaningful interlinking system for wildlife and landscape character. Swales and ponds must be designed to offer an ecological as well as an amenity value. I note the scheme accords with these principles.
- 11.69 The design guide addresses on page 26 onwards the principle concerning the right built form and addresses a number of aspects. With regard to the grain and density of development, new development should reflect the historic density and grain of the area in which it has been proposed so that the distribution of buildings supports the existing pattern of the settlement. It goes on to address, scale, form and massing of buildings. I note the scheme accords with these principles.
- 11.70 The document addresses reinforcing local planting character and habitats. With regard to this, it notes that plant species within new housing schemes are critical to support the landscape character of the local area. In particular, it notes that High Weald native wildflowers should be included in landscaping schemes to embed a sense of place and local character within a new development and that planting of ornamental shrubs is not appropriate within the High Weald. Finally, with regard to ongoing management of open spaces and habitats should be included as part of the planning application through a LEMP. I note the scheme accords with these principles.
- 11.71 Having reviewed the AONB Management Plan I consider that the proposals would comply with the objectives of the document. With regard to the components which define special qualities, the scheme would bring about enhancement with regard to a number of components and further reinforce these across the Site. Accordingly the scheme would accord with the AONB Management Plan as well as the National Design Guide (2019) and the NPPF (2021).

An aerial, watercolor-style illustration of a suburban neighborhood. The scene shows a dense cluster of houses with red and grey roofs, interspersed with green trees. A winding road or path cuts through the middle of the neighborhood. In the foreground, a larger, more prominent house with a red roof and white walls is visible. The overall tone is soft and artistic, with a light yellowish-green background.

15.0

Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

- 15.1 I am instructed on behalf of Berkeley Homes (Eastern Counties) Ltd ('the Applicant') to present evidence relating to landscape and visual matters in respect of this Call In Inquiry relating to an application for full planning permission, which was submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council on 12th March 2020 and validated on 2nd April 2020. The application as amended proposed the following:

"The construction of 165 new dwellings with associated access, car parking, refuse/recycling storage, landscaping, earthworks and other associated works."

- 15.2 Following a number of amendments to the application proposals in response to matters raised during the consultation process, the application had officers' support and was recommended for planning permission to be granted subject to completion of a Section 106 legal agreement and conditions. My Landscape Proof of Evidence comprises this document and my appendices.

This evidence should be read in conjunction with the Planning Proof of Evidence prepared by Simon Slatford and a Design Proof of Evidence prepared by Colin Pullan, ecology is addressed by Tim Goodwin and heritage covered by Dr. C Miele.

Description of the Scheme

- 15.3 The site can be described as forming two parts, a 'development area' accommodating the proposed housing and a 'wider landholding' which forms the balance of the site and forms the extensive green infrastructure as a series of naturalistic green spaces. Within the development the majority of the proposed dwellings would be two storeys with some 2.5 storey elements. The development area of the site area measures 4.7 hectares creating a density of 35.1 dwellings per hectare.
- 15.4 The proposal would deliver a high-quality scheme, both in terms of its built form as documented in Mr Colin Pullan's Proof of Evidence and in terms of the substantial green infrastructure that is proposed across the majority of the site and is significant in my opinion.

Effect on Landscape Elements

- 15.5 The site comprises a number of landscape elements including topography, land use, vegetation, trees and woodlands, hedgerows, water features and a public footpath. The majority of these individual elements would be retained and enhanced which would result in an overall net major beneficial effect with regard to landscape elements within the site. The scheme would inevitably result in the loss of some poor quality grassland, which currently forms derelict horse paddocks and as such, there would be a physical reduction in the overall area of grassland with the proposed scheme in place. However, the remaining areas of grassland would be subject to careful design and management to create wildflower meadows and unimproved pasture for grazing which would lead to an improved quality of this resource albeit over a reduced area. In overall terms, there would be a substantial (major) net beneficial effect with regard to landscape elements within the site itself. There would be no change to landscape elements beyond the site apart from some reduction in the grass verges associated with the pavement improvement works associated with the Hartley Road.



Effects on Landscape Character

- 15.6 With regard to landscape character, the site and its surroundings and Cranbrook all fall within the High Weald NCA 122 and locally within the Cranbrook Fruitbelt, all of which lies wholly within the AONB. Apart from the pavement improvements associated with the Hartley Road, no other onsite works are proposed to enable this scheme to come forward. As such, the key characteristics that define the local landscape character beyond the site would remain physically unaffected and with regard to experiential aspects, there would be no material change to the landscape character of the area beyond the site with the proposed scheme in place.
- 15.7 With regard to the site itself, i.e., Phase 2 land, this in character terms can be described as land which comprises a series of derelict horse paddocks and has an appearance of dereliction given the former horse-riding paraphernalia which is now in a poor state of repair. The northern part of the site is proposed to accommodate the residential neighbourhoods referred to as the development area which as a high-quality scheme would reflect the local vernacular architecture which would be in keeping with other residential areas associated with Cranbrook and the AONB. The proposal would result in a change to the character of the site, an inevitable consequence of accommodating housing on a greenfield site and thus resulting in a significant magnitude of change (major), but in terms of its nature of effect this would be neutral rather than adverse, given it would be in keeping in terms of its character and appearance.
- 15.8 The balance of the Phase 2 land would form substantial green infrastructure, which would bring about substantial major change in character terms from horse paddock land to a whole series of fields including the creation of new enclosures as part of a historic landscape restoration scheme. The whole green infrastructure would be more in keeping with the local rural farmland with its new wildflower meadows and pastoral fields, together with new woodlands, water features and improved recreational opportunities. Such change to the character of the site would bring about a high magnitude of change and enhancement which would be beneficial in nature in landscape character terms. This reflects the sheer volume of planting and landscape enhancement which in my view is quite exceptional given the limited scale of proposed housing.

Effects on Visual Amenity

- 15.9 In terms of how the proposed scheme would have a bearing upon general visual amenity, I would note the following main observations. As is shown with the ZTV analysis, the potential to observe the scheme in terms of visual envelope would be mainly restricted to the immediate environs of the site and wholly contained within the Crane Brook Valley. As such, the proposed housing would have a very limited visual envelope. Where observed, the proposed scheme would be generally heavily framed and screened by tree cover such that it would be difficult to distinguish it from the Phase 1 and Brick Kiln Farm schemes.

Where observed, it would also always be seen in the context of adjacent development, both existing and consented. This means that the proposed scheme would not visually extend the visual envelope of Cranbrook as it relates to the wider AONB but rather it would fall within the existing visual envelope associated with the wider environs of Cranbrook. As a result, the magnitude in terms of degree of effect would be quite limited and local to the environs of south Cranbrook. The scheme would also not impinge in visual terms upon the existing visual relationship between the Crane Valley and Cranbrook settlement further to the north, an aspect that the Council seeks to protect.

- 15.10 As for the nature of effect with regard to visual amenity, given the high-quality of the proposal reflecting the vernacular architecture in accord with the AONB Housing Design Guid (CD12.15), the proposed housing would be in keeping in terms of its appearance and therefore, the housing scheme would be neutral rather than adverse in terms of nature of effect. Simply, this would be an attractive housing scheme to observe rather than harmful on the eye. Sight of the proposed scheme would not cause harm to the visual amenity of the area. The green infrastructure would be beneficial in terms of nature of effect. Together with both elements at the site level there would be a major degree of effect whilst locally within the Crane Valley in overall terms there would be a slight degree of effect in terms of this valley landscape.

Natural and Scenic Beauty of the Area and its Special Qualities

- 15.11 The AONB designation and associated planning policy requires that development conserves and enhances the AONB environment as per paragraph 176 of the NPPF 2021. As I have articulated in the preceding paragraphs, the development area would be in keeping with other residential areas nearby in the locality and with the scheme being in place, would not result in material harm to the AONB in both landscape character and visual amenity terms. In my view, it would conserve the general character of this particular part of the AONB, which has a strong settled character and with it 'sense of place' anchored with the presence of Cranbrook. With regard to the balance of the site, the scheme would facilitate new substantial green infrastructure which would bring about enhancement in both landscape character and visual amenity terms and in broad terms, I consider enhancement in terms of the local environment within the confines of the site. Both elements of the scheme, i.e., the development area and the wider landholding green infrastructure would together, both conserve and enhance the AONB at the local level, and as such would not conflict with policy with regard to this designation.
- 15.12 The proposal and its design has had due regard to the AONB and its special qualities. In this particular instance, the AONB Management Plan specifically expresses the special qualities with regard to the High Weald as a number of component parts of the environment, one of which is settlement. The AONB is extensive in area and inevitably across its designation, there will be variation in character and quality.

- 15.13 In this particular locality of the designation, Cranbrook as a settlement plays a significant role in defining this landscape as one of being 'settled' and forming a lived in and working environment. The site currently exhibits a series of derelict horse paddocks across extensive grassland which reflects a landscape with little sense of intactness in terms of its field pattern. It is evident that when the various components of the landscape that define the AONB generally, these are generally absent with regard to the site apart from the woodland and as such, this land exhibits little by way of special qualities identified that contribute to the designation's natural and scenic beauty. The reality is, the site is closely framed by consented and existing development and infrastructure does reflect an urban fringe landscape rather than some deep countryside with little evidence of development, and as such, appears as an unremarkable everyday landscape.
- 15.14 The proposal would result in some physical loss of grassland, but in character terms the site does not generally reflect the characteristics of the local fruitbelt landscape and can be regarded as being atypical. The proposals would result in a change to the landscape at a very localised site level and would have a limited effect on landscape character of the Crane Valley and would not cause material harm in respect of the AONB. Once the green infrastructure is established and has the opportunity to thrive, the proposals would have a more positive effect physically with regard to the site and as appreciated visually within the local environs. The proposed development would have some localised landscape visual effects, but these would not result in unacceptable impacts on the AONB in the landscape context of Cranbrook and Hartley.

Summary

15.15 For the reasons stated above it is my view that on landscape and visual grounds there are no substantive reasons for refusing planning permission for the proposed residential scheme on land adjacent to Hartley Road. Therefore, the Inspector is respectfully requested to uphold the scheme and allow the grant of planning permission so far as landscape and visual issues are concerned.





DESIGN



ENVIRONMENT



PLANNING



ECONOMICS



HERITAGE