

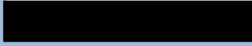
Site 3:

Land off Elbourn Way, Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire

**Technical Note:**

**Landscape and visual commentary**

for



Planning | 10<sup>th</sup> December 2021



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## Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Landscape context and site features
- 3 Landscape character
- 4 Visual context
- 5 Landscape-related designations
- 6 Response to landscape-related comments made in HELAA site assessment



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the study

- 1.1.1 The Landscape Partnership has been commissioned by [REDACTED] to provide landscape and visual consultancy services in relation to land off Elbourn Way, Bassingbourn cum Kneesworth, Cambridgeshire, referred to here as the site.
- 1.1.2 Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire Council are working together to create a joint local plan for the two areas, referred to collectively as Greater Cambridge. The plan will cover the period to 2041.
- 1.1.3 The Greater Cambridge Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), September 2021, forms part of the evidence base for the emerging local plan. The HELAA appraises the potential supply of land for development, including that brought forward from the 2019 Call for Sites. It provides an assessment of each potential site in terms of its suitability, availability and achievability. HELAA Appendix 4 contains completed proforma for each site that include high-level commentary on *Landscape and Townscape*.
- 1.1.4 The Land off Elbourn Way site is referenced in the HELAA as Site 40227.
- 1.1.5 It is anticipated that the site might be developed for residential uses, for between 65 and 80 dwellings, a residential care home and public open space. At this stage, no layout options have been prepared.

## 1.2 Objectives of the report

- 1.2.1 The purpose of this technical note is to provide commentary on the landscape and visual matters raised by Greater Cambridge in the HELAA in relation to Site 40277. It will, in turn, be used to demonstrate the site's suitability to accommodate residential development as part of representations to include the site in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan First Proposals consultation.
- 1.2.2 The commentary in this technical note builds on previous studies of the site undertaken by The Landscape Partnership including the Briefing Note: *Initial observations on landscape and visual opportunities and constraints*, prepared in March 2019 to accompany a submission by Endurance Estates to the call for sites process.

# 2 Landscape context and site features

## 2.1 Location

- 2.1.1 The parish of Bassingbourn cum Kneesworth is located 3km to the north-west of Royston, 22km south-west of Cambridge; it incorporates two settlements (connected by The Causeway) Bassingbourn and Kneesworth, which until 1966 were two separate parishes.
- 2.1.2 Bassingbourn has developed to the north of the ancient track Ashwell Street (one of many trackways connecting to the Icknield Way) and now comprises a collection of roads and lanes extending out from an historic hub centred around North End, Brook Street and High Street.

Kneesworth has a more linear character and has grown on the route of the Roman Ermine Street, now the A1198 Old North Road.

- 2.1.3 To the north, the parish boundary encompasses the former RAF Bassingbourn, which was in use between 1938 and 2014. To the south, it extends to meet the A505 Royston bypass and the county boundary.

## **2.2 The site**

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- 2.2.1 The site abuts the north-eastern edge of the Bassingbourn portion of the parish. It is beyond the Development Framework but is located within a wider indentation in the settlement pattern.

- 2.2.2 There are two parts to the site. The western portion comprises a small parcel of land currently used as allotments. This part of the site is bound by established planting and so is well contained and has a strong association with the edge of the village, being well assimilated into the surrounding vegetation framework that characterises this portion Bassingbourn. To the west, a mixed native woodland belt c.30m wide separates the site from the plots of properties fronting Saddleback Lane and Church Close. To the north, a woodland belt of c.45m separates the site from a wide grass verge and Park Close; the woodland principally comprises alder in need of management to secure its long-term viability. The eastern boundary is defined by an established hedge with standard trees (with the eastern portion of the site beyond). On the southern boundary, a 20m to 30m woodland divides the site from the small field beyond. The vegetated boundaries contain various earthworks including the remains of a moat.

- 2.2.3 The eastern portion comprises the greater part of a larger arable field. Its western boundary abuts the established hedgerow and public footpath that provides a strong feature through the eastern fringes of the village. The southern boundary is formed by the line of a track that provides access to Rectory Farm and is partly defined vegetation that surrounds a drainage feature immediately beyond the site. The landscape to the east is altogether more open and larger scale. The boundary here is defined only by a line of telegraph poles and a continuation of the farm track which leads to Rectory Farm; the short northern boundary is not marked by any physical feature. Both boundaries are devoid of vegetation save occasional scrub.

## **2.3 Topography**

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- 2.3.1 The site is located within a wider plain; the western part is largely level at or around 28m AOD and the eastern part slopes very gently down to the north, from c.30m AOD on the southern boundary, though the fall is virtually imperceptible on the ground.

- 2.3.2 Beyond the site, there is a very gentle slope down northward and eastward towards the River Cam (4km) and to the west towards Mill River and associated drainage ditches to the west of Bassingbourn.

## **2.4 Historic landscape features**

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- 2.4.1 The field units in which the site is located date back to at least the late 1800s, as does the track around the southern and eastern boundaries the western part of the site. Wooded features are shown in the western portion and there is reference to 'The Mount'.



- 2.4.2 The 1891 OS map shows a well vegetated edge to the village with numerous and extensive orchards, in particular to the west of the line of footpath No. 21/6; the South Cambridgeshire Village Capacity Study – see below - notes that the village was famous for its cherries.

## 2.5 Public access

- 2.5.1 A public footpath (No. 21/6) follows a line from High Street to Guise Lane, following a line between the eastern and western parts of the site. The path enables a loop to be made around the northern portion of the village and appears to be well used. A further public footpath (No. 21/19) follows a line eastward and then north-eastward from public footpath No. 21/6 to Bassingbourn Barracks, from whence it continues south-eastward to meet Old North Road; at its closest point it is c.345m to the north of the site.
- 2.5.2 Public footpath No. 21/7 commences in North End and follows the route of Saddleback Lane and then the southern edge of the western part of the site to meet public footpath No. 21/6.
- 2.5.3 The routes of these footpaths and their aspect would be respected in any future development and there is the opportunity to further their amenity value by enhancing their routes and providing new links to them.

## 3 Landscape character

### 3.1 National level – National Character Area profiles (2014)

- 3.1.1 The site falls within National Character Area (NCA) 87: East Anglian Chalk, *“the narrow continuation of the chalk ridge that runs south-west–north-east across southern England”*; which *“creates a visually simple and uninterrupted landscape of smooth, rolling chalkland hills with large regular fields enclosed by low hawthorn hedges, with few trees, straight roads and expansive views to the north”*. In the vicinity of the site, it is expressed in the chalk escarpment of the Hertfordshire Chalk Downs to the south and west of Royston. A short distance to the north, encompassing the wide river valleys, is NCA 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands – *“a broad, gently undulating, lowland plateau dissected by shallow river valleys that gradually widen as they approach The Fens NCA in the east”*.
- 3.1.2 The landscape characteristics present at the site are broadly commensurate with this description.

### 3.2 County level – Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (1991)

- 3.2.1 The site falls within Landscape Character Area 2: Chalklands. The supporting text notes:
- The complex history of settlement and the impact of people on the landscape over the centuries is particularly apparent in this part of the County. Roman roads, Anglo-Saxon earthworks, large fields, modern roads and developments are all interlinked.
  - The region was mostly too dry for early settlement. However, this dryness and light vegetation meant that it was ideal for communications and it is traversed by a major prehistoric and historic highway, the Icknield Way. Its importance as a highway also gave it strategic value. In the Iron Age it was controlled by Wandlebury hill fort and in Anglo-Saxon times by the three great linear dykes which span the chalkland from the fen edge east of Cambridge to the wooded edge on the higher claylands.

- These artificial elements overlies the smooth rolling chalkland hills. The hills are dissected by the two gentle valleys of the Granta and the Rhee, which converge to form the river Cam just south of Cambridge.
- The majority of the chalkland is devoted to growing cereal crops, despite the frequently poor, thin soils. It is a broad-scale landscape of large fields, low mechanically trimmed hedges and few trees.

3.2.2 The landscape around Bassingbourn shares some of the characteristics described above. The rolling chalkland hills are not present but are evident in wider views to the Hertfordshire Chalk Downs to the south.

3.2.3 The guidelines cite principles for landscape improvement and management in the Chalklands and notes: *“The future pattern is for a large-scale landscape defined by rolling hills, large fields, bold shelter belts, sweeping masses of woodland and occasional beech hangers”*. Specific principles relevant to the site include:

- Management and creation of chalk grasslands; such grasslands should remain open and uncluttered. The promotion of species-rich grassland on thin chalk soils could provide visual and wildlife value.
- Management of existing shelter belts: these should be restocked to encourage young tree growth and fill gaps.
- Planting new mixed woodlands and shelter belts, carefully sited to enclose large tracts of rolling farmland and emphasise landforms.
- Hedgerows: selected hedgerows should be reinforced, or managed for particularly significant impact, based upon their visual and wildlife potential. Historically significant hedgerows should be carefully conserved, and new hedges planted to emphasise the existing landscape.
- Footpath corridor improvements: the Roman Road is an important route across the chalk landscape. Planting small woodlands at selected locations such as hill tops or to frame views, as well as carefully managing the existing rich flora, would enhance the route. A similar approach could be adopted for other footpaths in the area, concentrating on a small number of linked corridors

3.2.4 Such measures would be considered for incorporation when exploring means of accommodating development at the site.

### **3.3 Greater Cambridgeshire Landscape Character Assessment (2021)**

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3.3.1 The site is located within Character area 3C Rhee Tributaries Lowland Farmlands, close to its boundary with 8B: Morden to Duxford Lowland Chalklands to the south.

3.3.2 The Rhee Tributaries Lowland Farmland is described as *“a large swathe of gently undulating rural landscape with distinctive linear features that forms the wide, shallow valley of the River Rhee”*; its key characteristics include:

- *Wide valley of the River Rhee and its tributaries.*

- *Predominantly medium to large rectilinear fields organised in a haphazard pattern with pockets of regularity.*
- *Small woodland blocks combine with shelterbelts and clumps of trees to create well treed horizons.*
- *Small scale fields often found at the edge of villages.*
- *Ecological richness including lowland meadows, lowland fen and floodplain grazing marsh.*
- *Dense settlement pattern comprising large, nucleated villages in the south of the LCA.*
- *Distinctive linear features including Ermine Street Roman road, Wimpole Hall.*
- *Avenue and the railway.*

### **3.4 South Cambridgeshire Village Capacity Study, Chris Blandford Associates (1998)**

- 3.4.1 The study notes that the broad landscape of the village is of large arable fields. To the north, the landscape is more wooded in association with the River Cam. To the south, the arable landscape is *“very flat and open, leading to distinctive rising ground in the distance around Royston Heath”*. From the east, *“the land rises and forms a large farmed plateau, providing a slightly elevated view of the village”*.
- 3.4.2 The Village Context diagram, in the vicinity of the site, notes *“Approach provides wide views of village edge across flat arable fields”*; it is assumed that this refers to the experience of users of public footpath No.21/19.

### **3.5 Approach to the village**

- 3.5.1 Development at the site would have little influence on any of the approaches to Bassingbourn, save for the experience of users of public footpath No. 21/6 travelling towards the village from the north – see commentary below under visual context.

### **3.6 Separation and settlement patterns**

- 3.6.1 As noted above, the western part of the site is contained within the village’s well-vegetated edge; however, development to the east would extend the settlement into what is currently open countryside.
- 3.6.2 The development would not compromise the separation of Bassingbourn from Kneesworth.

## **4 Visual context**

- 4.1.1 Close proximity views into the western portion of the site are available from footpaths No. 21/7 and No. 21/6 where they pass along its southern and eastern edges. Likewise, views filtered by established bounding vegetation, are available from footpath No. 21/6 into the eastern part. The aspect from these routes will require careful treatment if the site is to be developed.
- 4.1.2 Middle and longer-distance views of the eastern portion are experienced from points on footpaths No. 21/6 and No.21/19. These views encompass open arable farmland with a backdrop of the well-vegetated settlement edge. Most of the houses within the village are set within a framework of vegetation; however, a row of recently completed houses at Elbourn Way are much more

prominent and present a harsh urban edge. The vegetated edge would need to be replicated, albeit further out from the existing settlement edge, in order to accommodate residential development at the site, such that the backstop to views from the footpaths remains a strong green and defensible edge to the village. Treatment here might include the planting of a woodland belt, or of native hedges with hedgerow standard trees, either side of a perimeter track.

- 4.1.3 Houses at Bassingbourn Barracks are not visible from the site, and it is assumed therefore that the site is barely discernible from these properties. It is not clear if the public footpath through Bassingbourn Barracks is still in use. In any event views from the path would be partially obscured by Rectory Farm.
- 4.1.4 The site is screened from The Causeway by intervening development and vegetation to the north of the road.
- 4.1.5 Beyond the most easterly property in Saddleback Lane, private views into the western portion of the site are screened by the established boundary woodland.
- 4.1.6 Private short-distance views into the eastern portion of the site would be available from particular properties within Elbourn Way. The introduction of built form at the site would result in a loss of longer-distance views over farmland. The visual effects of development could be reduced by planting on the southern boundary.
- 4.1.7 A few properties at Tower Close afford views of the site that are partially filtered by existing vegetation within the gardens of the properties. Private views into the eastern portion of the site, filtered by established vegetation, are also available from the rear elevations of properties in Park Close, Park View and Walnut tree Close.

## 5 Landscape-related planning policy

- 5.1.1 The western portion of the site is contained within the Bassingbourn Conservation Area, whose eastern edge follows the line of footpath No. 21/6. The Conservation Area was originally designated in 1973 and extended in 1993 to encompass Manor Farm and The Mount, and so part of the site. No Conservation Area Appraisal is available but the planning notice notes: *“The purpose of the designations is to preserve and enhance those elements which make a contribution to the overall amenity of the village scene and to ensure that special regard is paid to the character of the area when proposals for change are considered.”*
- 5.1.2 A horse chestnut in the south-eastern corner of the western portion of the site is subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), reference TPO 0038 (2003). Notwithstanding that no appraisal has been made regarding the tree’s health, the tree would be retained within the proposed layout and be subject to appropriate offsets and protection to safeguard its long-term contribution to the village-scape.

## 6 Response to landscape-related comments made in HELAA site assessment

### 6.1 Overview

6.1.1 The following paragraphs contain commentary made in response to comments made by Greater Cambridge in the HELAA as part of the appraisal of sites submitted at the Call for Site.

- The site reference is 40227
- It is noted that Site 40277 extends to 7.02ha and that the current or last use of the site is “Agricultural land/building, Education/community, Woodland/orchard”.
- The proposed development is noted as “Residential, Market and affordable housing, Residential care home, Public open space”, with 65 to 80 dwellings.

6.1.2 The following paragraphs consider landscape and visual matters.

### 6.2 General observations

6.2.1 For the purposes of the Landscape and Townscape assessment, the following scoring criteria were adopted [The Landscape Partnership’s [emphasis](#)]

Red: Development of the site would have a significant negative impact which cannot be mitigated.

Amber: Development of the site would have a detrimental impact which could be satisfactorily mitigated.

Green: Development of the site would have either a neutral or positive impact.

6.2.2 Landscape assessment was provided by Landscape Architects within the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service Built and Natural Environment Team.

6.2.3 It is noted that:

*Greater Cambridge does not contain any nationally important landscape designations such as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but the landscape of Cambridge still has local importance, particularly as the setting for the historic city of Cambridge. In the local context therefore, site landscapes are assessed against the National and Regional Landscape Character Areas and how typical or atypical (how unique) they are to those National and District Character Areas. Its settlements also have characteristic built form, which could be enhanced by development but there is also potential for detrimental impacts.*

6.2.4 The Landscape Partnership concurs with this approach.

6.2.5 Sites to be assessed were located and reviewed, and constraints identified. The presence of site designations or features were identified, e.g. example Conservation Areas, Tree Preservation Orders, Important Countryside Frontages or Protected Green Space. Greenbelt was omitted from consideration, as this would be subject to a separate assessment as part of the local plan process.

6.2.6 The assessment of each site was informed by the relevant 2018 Local Plan policies, the South Cambridgeshire Design Guide, Village Design Guides, Neighbourhood Plans, Cambridge Suburbs and Approaches Studies, and Landscape Character Assessment.

6.2.7 It is noted:

*To begin, each site as assessed individually and upon its own merits. Sites were reviewed in a similar way to that of a standard planning application, particularly for the small-medium sized sites. Large and very large sites were reviewed more widely and at larger scale due to their expected impacts on their local area. Based on the constraints of the site, the scope of the intended proposals and/or expected unit numbers, it was considered whether the site was developable and if so, to what extent the landscape and existing townscape had been considered. For example, would there be enough room for adequate boundary buffering, would there be enough room for tree planting within the site, would the grain/density of the development fit in with surrounding development or setting of the village, and would the surrounding designations be impacted by the development. If the site was found to be unacceptable at the proposal's scale/units/density etc, further consideration was given to determine if there was an option wherein development could occur if various amendments were made such as a reduction in unit numbers to the avoidance of a part of the site. If the development was within an urban area or within a development framework boundary with on-site constraints it was likely to be green. Some countryside site[s] outside the development framework were considered green if the expected impacts could be considered as negligible. An amber rating required some mitigation or alteration to the proposals to be found acceptable. Red meant the proposal would result in significant harm that could not be reasonably mitigated.*

### 6.3 Adopted Development Plan policies

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Assessed as Amber:

- *Outside Development Framework.*

6.3.1 It is acknowledged that the site lies outside the Development Framework. However, the western portion of the site is well contained by vegetation and built form and is located within an indentation of its boundary, which extends around it to the north, west and south. As such, it can be considered a natural extension or infill to the settlement pattern.

### 6.4 Landscape and Townscape

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Assessed as Red:

- *TPO on-site*
- *NCA 87 East Anglian Chalk*
- *District Area Chalklands*
- *The site is typical of this character type*
- *Landscape Character Assessment (2021) Landscape Character Area – 3C: Rhee Tributaries Lowland Farmlands*
- *The proposals seek to develop the eastern most field which extends away from the development framework into rural countryside. This part of the site would create a harmful*

*impact on the NCA as well as increase the developed area of Bassingbourn in an uncontextual manner. The site is dependant on land outside the red line for access and seeks to upgrade and control access via a track that serves the allotments and is also a Public Footpath.*

- *Overall, the proposals poorly relate to the village and development on what seems like an outlying field is not in keeping with the village character.*

- 6.4.1 The TPO'd horse chestnut on the south-eastern corner of the western portion of the site would be retained within any future development. It would be subject to appropriate offsets and buffers to safeguard its long-term health and to enable its appreciation in the landscape.
- 6.4.2 The Landscape Partnership concurs that the site falls within the East Anglian Chalk, Chalklands and Rhee Tributaries Lowland Farmlands character areas. Generally, the landscape in the vicinity of the site is representative of that described in the character assessments. For example (Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines: *"The complex history of settlement and the impact of people on the landscape over the centuries is particularly apparent in this part of the County. Roman roads, Anglo-Saxon earthworks, large fields, modern roads and developments are all interlinked"* or (Cambridgeshire Landscape Character Assessment) *"Wide valley of the River Rhee and its tributaries", "Predominantly medium to large rectilinear fields organised in a haphazard pattern with pockets of regularity", "Small woodland blocks combine with shelterbelts and clumps of trees to create well treed horizons"* and *"Small scale fields often found at the edge of villages"*. However, some feature are less apparent or present, for example rolling chalk hills.
- 6.4.3 Were the proposed development built out, the western portion of the site would remain as allotments, and therefore largely unchanged in character. The character of the eastern portion of the site would inevitably change; new development would extend into what is currently arable farmland and so would have an adverse effect on the open countryside.
- 6.4.4 Reference in the HEELA is made to effects on the National Character Areas. Whilst these provide a useful high-level overview, the more detailed Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment is likely to be more useful when assessing effects on character.
- 6.4.5 As noted above, the site falls within LCA 3C: Rhee Tributaries Lowland Farmlands. The development would have no material adverse effect on the following key characteristics of this landscape:
- The wide valley of the River Rhee and its tributaries.
  - The small woodland blocks that combine with shelterbelts and clumps of trees to create well treed horizons.
  - The small-scale fields often found at the edge of villages, since the western portion of the site would remain largely unchanged, and the eastern portion forms part of a much larger field.
  - Ecological richness including lowland meadows, lowland fen and floodplain grazing marsh.
  - The distinctive linear features present in the landscape, including Ermine Street Roman road, Wimpole Hall. Avenue and the railway.
- 6.4.6 It would also replicate the dense settlement pattern comprising large, nucleated villages in the south of the LCA (e.g. Bassingbourn).

- 6.4.7 It would have an adverse effect on:
- The predominantly medium to large rectilinear fields organised in a haphazard pattern with pockets of regularity.
- 6.4.8 Village edges are noted to vary, but be typically *“bound by a mixture of open fields, woodland or smaller fields so that generally, villages appear well treed and are not visible in the wider landscape.”* The eastern boundary of the site would be planted with a substantial woodland belt in order to help recreate a new vegetated edge to this part of Bassingbourn, and to recreate what is already present, albeit further out into the landscape. This new settlement edge would, in time, enable the continuation of a characteristically well-treed village.
- 6.4.9 A set of Generic Guidance for Integrating Development into the Landscape is provided for the Lowland Farmlands. The following would be delivered or incorporated with the proposed development:
- Conserve the historic villages through avoidance of ribbon development and coalescence with nearby settlement.
  - Ensure density and pattern of new developments reflect that of existing villages and hamlets.
  - Avoid backland and cul-de-sac developments where possible.
  - Ensure buildings are arranged in continuous frontages within village cores and are arranged in loose knit patterns facing the street on more peripheral sites.
  - Ensure new developments are integrated with sufficient space for garden and street tree planting where applicable.
  - Take opportunities to create new village greens and/or wildlife areas within new developments.
  - Ensure new developments integrate/connect with existing Public Rights of Way (PROW) within development layout.
  - Ensure new developments reflect the form, scale and proportions of the existing vernacular buildings of the area and pick up on traditional local building styles, height, materials, colours and textures.
  - Enclose boundaries facing the street on village peripheries with hedge and tree planting.
  - Avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, street furniture, lighting and signage as part of traffic calming measures wherever appropriate.
- 6.4.10 This landscape and visual technical note has shown that development of the type proposed would have a limited visual influence on receptors in the wider landscape, and thus changes to landscape character or the appreciation of landscape character would be relatively localised.
- 6.4.11 The eastern portion extends out from the existing settlement edge and Development Framework. In doing so, it extends into more open countryside. Historically, for most of the twentieth century, this portion of the village edge has been defined by the water course and hedge line demarked by public footpath No. 21/19, but in recent times development has breached this line. For example,



by the Elbourn Way development, constructed in the 1990s, which extends to the next hedge line in an eastward direction. Here – and in contrast to the proposed development at the site – little space has been devoted to landscape planting on the edges of the scheme, and so the new development presents a harsh and unsympathetic edge in the landscape.

- 6.4.12 Development at the site would extend from the existing Development Framework boundary a similar distance out as the Elbourn Way development in an eastward direction, and in a northern direction as far Walnut Tree Close. As such, it could be considered to constitute a form of rounding off of the existing settlement edge.
- 6.4.13 Commentary on the access to the site being outside the red line and utilising a track (emergency access only) that serves the allotments and accommodates a public footpath is beyond the scope of this Technical Note.
- 6.4.14 Overall, whilst it is acknowledged that development at the site would result in some adverse effects on landscape character, it is considered that an assessment of Red, which equates to *“Development of the site would have a significant negative impact which cannot be mitigated”*, is not reflective of the effectiveness of the mitigation measures that would be an integral part of any development at the site.
- 6.4.15 Once the new planting is established, and in particular the new eastern edge to this part of the village, it is considered that it would help integrate the proposed development into the surrounding vegetation structure and landscape. The generous planting proposed at the site would also serve to soften views to the obtrusive Elbourn Way development and help, retrospectively, to assimilate it into the landscape.
- 6.4.16 On balance, a more appropriate judgement would be Amber, which equates to development that would have *“a detrimental impact which could be satisfactorily mitigated”*.

## 6.5 Open Space / Green Infrastructure

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*Assessed as: Green:*

- *Site is not on protected open space designation. Any impact of the proposed development could be reasonably mitigated or compensated.*

- 6.5.1 The Landscape Partnership concurs with this assessment.
- 6.5.2 It is also considered that the development proposed at the site could bring with it opportunities to enhance public access and contribute to the wider green infrastructure, which could result in a net beneficial gain in relation to open space and green infrastructure.