
Land at Blackthorn Farm, Culverstone Green: Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Review

Prepared on behalf of Esquire Developments Ltd

May 2018

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Overview

- 1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) was commissioned by Esquire Developments Ltd to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Review of the Land at Blackthorn Farm, Culverstone Green (the 'Site'), in relation to its suitability for residential development and informing Gravesham's Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) Call for Sites, which will support the forthcoming Stage 2 Preferred Options consultation on the Local Plan.
- 1.2 This report details the landscape character, landscape value and visual envelope of the Site, and provides an assessment of the contribution that the Site makes towards the purposes and function of the Green Belt, as set out in Paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.3 The objectives of this study are to:
 - Assess the landscape characteristics and quality of the Site and its surrounding and function within the landscape;
 - Assess the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of the existing views from the surrounding area;
 - Consider the policy basis for the Green Belt designation that applies to the area;
 - Assess the contribution of the Site in response to its Green Belt function and its potential to be released from the Green Belt; and
 - Identify opportunities and constraints to development on the Site, from a landscape and visual perspective.
- 1.4 Supporting illustrative information is presented in the following plans and photographs:
 - Figure 1: Site Context Plan;
 - Figure 2: Topography Plan;
 - Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan;
 - Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan;
 - Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan;
 - Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan;
 - Figure 7: Green Belt Release Plan
 - Site Appraisal Photographs A - D; and
 - Site Context Photographs 1 – 10.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 2.1 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal has been prepared with reference to the guidelines as set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition, prepared by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.
- 2.2 A desktop review of the study area was undertaken, including for a review of the published landscape character information, landform, landscape features, relevant landscape and visual policy and landscape designations. This information was used as the initial basis against which to appraise the Site. A visit to the Site and surroundings was subsequently undertaken in April 2018 to verify the desk-based review and add further information to the landscape and visual context of the Site.
- 2.3 A description of the existing land use of the study area is provided and includes reference to existing areas of settlement, transport routes and vegetation cover, as well as local landscape designations, elements of cultural and heritage value, and local landmarks or tourist destinations. These factors combine to provide an understanding of landscape value and sensitivity and provide an indication of particular key views and viewpoints that are available to visual receptors.
- 2.4 To determine the extent of visual influence, a visual appraisal was undertaken of the Site to consider the nature of existing views from publicly accessible viewpoints including roads, Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and public open space. Consideration was given to private views, however access to private properties was not obtained. Views were considered from all directions and from a range of distances. The viewpoints chosen are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to represent the potential views obtained towards the Site in order to identify areas of higher visual sensitivity that may not be best suited for development.
- 2.5 The inherent sensitivity of the Site is considered in terms of the following:
 - Landscape Character: i.e. landform, vegetation cover, land use, scale, state of repair of individual elements, representation of typological character, enclosure pattern, form/line and movement;
 - Landscape Value: i.e. national designations, local designations, sense of tranquillity/remoteness, scenic beauty and cultural associations; and
 - Visual Influence: i.e. landform influences, tree and woodland cover, numbers and types of residents, numbers and types of visitors and scope for mitigating potential for visual impacts.

- 2.6 A more detailed landscape appraisal of the Site was then undertaken, which in combination with the wider visual appraisal, assists in the identification of opportunities and constraints that would assist in defining the boundaries for potential future development, and thus an amended Green Belt boundary.

Green Belt Review

Assessment against the purposes of the Green Belt

- 2.7 The Site is assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out in Paragraph 80 of the NPPF, which are:

- *"To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- *To prevent neighbouring towns from merging in to one another;*
- *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and*
- *To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns..."*

- 2.8 With respect to the fifth purpose of the Green Belt *"to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land"*, should the Site be brought forward for development it would not prejudice derelict or other urban land being brought forward for urban regeneration. The principle of retaining land within the Green Belt holds true for all areas within the Green Belt, therefore the Site is considered to make the same contribution to this purpose of the Green Belt as any other land parcel within the Green Belt. Accordingly, no additional specific assessment is undertaken.

- 2.9 The NPPF endorses the permanence of Green Belts as an essential characteristic and stipulates in Paragraph 83 that *"once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan"*.

- 2.10 The NPPF seeks to align Green Belt boundary reviews with sustainable patterns of development, as set out in Paragraph 84, with Local Planning Authorities encouraged to *"consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary"*.

- 2.11 In this regard, where a given area of land contributes poorly towards meeting the purposes of the Green Belt and its release would contribute positively to promoting a sustainable development pattern, this may be considered to impart towards 'exceptional circumstances' and the Green Belt boundary should be reviewed accordingly. The criteria used to assess the contribution made to the first four purposes of the Green Belt is set out in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Purposes of the Green Belt – Assessment Criteria

Purpose	Criteria
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Considerable - Development of the land would be strongly perceived as sprawl, as it is not contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in an incoherent manner. Some - Development of the land would be perceived as sprawl, as it is partially contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in a moderately incoherent manner. Limited - Development of the land would be perceived as sprawl to a limited degree, as it is largely contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in a broadly coherent manner. None - Development of the land would not be perceived as sprawl as it is well contained by robust physical features and/or is entirely set within the existing coherent settlement pattern.
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Considerable - Development would result in the physical unification of two (or more) towns. Some - Development would substantially reduce the physical or perceived separation between towns. Limited - Development would result in a limited reduction in the physical or perceived separation between towns. None - Development would not physically or perceptually reduce the separation between towns.
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Considerable: No built or engineered forms present and perceived as inherently undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a strong urbanising influence over the wider landscape. Some: Built or engineered forms present but retaining a perception of being predominantly undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a moderate urbanising influence over the wider landscape. Limited: Built or engineered forms present and a minimal perception of being undeveloped and or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a limited urbanising influence over the wider landscape. None: Built or engineered forms present and perceived as inherently developed and/or urban in character. Development would not result in urbanising influence over the wider landscape.
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Considerable: Strong physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town. May be within or adjoining the historic part of a town. Some: Partial physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town, whilst not adjacent to it. Limited: weak physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town. None: No physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town.

Assessment against the characteristics of the Green Belt

- 2.12 The NPPF states that the key characteristics of the Green Belt are "*their openness and their permanence*". In defining new boundaries to the Green Belt, it must be ensured that these characteristics are not diminished for the areas remaining within the Green Belt designation as a direct result of development. An assessment is made of the openness of the Green Belt in the vicinity of the Site and to what extent the Sites' removal could have on the perception of openness in the remaining designated area.
- 2.13 In addition, the relationship of the Site to existing elements and visual barriers, such as ridgelines, roads and areas of notable vegetation is demonstrated. This assists in the assessment of impact of potential development upon the openness of the remaining designated area and assists in the identification of boundaries that may be considered to be 'permanent'.
- 2.14 Table 2.2 below provides a glossary of the terms used in relation to the Green Belt assessment.

Table 2.2: Definitions

Term	Definition
Brownfield	(see <i>Previously Developed Land</i>)
Character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that differentiates one area from another.
Coalescence	The physical or visual linkage of large built-up areas.
Countryside	In planning terms: land outwith the settlement boundary; and/or, In broader terms: the landscape of a rural area.
Defensible Boundary	A physical feature that is readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
Encroachment	Advancement of a large built-up area beyond the limits of the existing built-up area into an area perceived as countryside.
Green Infrastructure	A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.
Greenfield	Land (or a defined site) usually farmland, that has not previously been developed.
Large built-up area	An area that corresponds to the settlements identified in the relevant Local Plan, including those inset from the Green Belt.
Merging	(see <i>Coalescence</i>)
Neighbouring Town	Refers to settlements identified within the relevant Local Plan and those within the neighbouring authorities' administrative boundary that abut the Green Belt.
Open space	All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.

Term	Definition
Openness	Openness is taken to be the degree to which an area is primarily unaffected by built features, in combination with the consideration of the visual perception of built features. In order to be a robust assessment, this should be considered from first principles, i.e. acknowledging existing structures that occur physically and visually within the area, rather than seeing them as being 'washed over' by the existing Green Belt designation.
Previously Developed Land	Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. This excludes: land that is or has been occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill purposes where provision for restoration has been made through development control procedures; land in built-up areas such as private gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments and land that was previously-developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape in the process of time.
Sprawl	The outward spread of a large built-up area in an incoherent, sporadic, dispersed or irregular way.

3.0 RELEVANT POLICY

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2012

- 3.1 The NPPF promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, defined as “*meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”, and providing it is in accordance with the relevant up-to-date Local Plan, and policies set out in the NPPF including those identifying restrictions with regard to designated areas.
- 3.2 The NPPF states that “*the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development*” and that there are “*three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental*”. The role the environment plays is described as “*contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use of natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy*”.
- 3.3 Twelve Core Planning Principles are set out, of which the following are relevant to the consideration of landscape and visual matters, stating that planning should:
- ***“not simply be about scrutiny, but instead be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives;***
 - *always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;*
 - *take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it;*
 - *contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution. Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; and*
 - *conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.”*
- 3.4 Section 7 of the NPPF provides guidance on ensuring the delivery of good design. The NPPF requires development proposals to respond to local character and be visually attractive, as well as emphasising the need to integrate development proposals into the natural environment.

3.5 Paragraph 58 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- ***"will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;***
- *establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;*
- *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;*
- *respond to local character and history and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;*
- *create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and*
- *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate **landscaping**".*

3.6 Paragraph 61 of the NPPF states that:

"...planning policies and decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment."

3.7 Section 9 of the NPPF relates to the protection of Green Belt land, with Paragraph 79 noting that *"the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open"*. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt, which are replicated in Paragraphs 2.7 - 2.8 of this report.

3.8 Paragraph 83 considers alterations to the designated Green Belt boundary, stating:

"Local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period."

3.9 This is supported by Paragraph 85 of the NPPF that states with regard to defining boundaries that local planning authorities should *"not include land which it is unnecessary to keep*

permanently open" and to "define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent".

- 3.10 Furthermore, Paragraph 85 notes that local planning authorities should "*satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period*" and "*where necessary, identify in their plans areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period*".
- 3.11 With respect to the natural environment, Paragraphs 109 - 125 of the NPPF focus on the conservation and enhancement of the local and natural environment. The NPPF states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the local environment by inter-alia "*protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils*".
- 3.12 Paragraph 110 of the NPPF sets out that the aim in preparing plans for development should be to minimise adverse effects on the local and natural environment, and that plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value.
- 3.13 Paragraph 114 notes that furthermore, Local Planning Authorities should:

"set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure."

Local Policy

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy, adopted 2014

- 3.14 The Site lies within the administrative boundary of Gravesham Borough Council, Kent. Those policies of relevance to the immediate context of the Site and landscape, visual and Green Belt matters are set out below.
- 3.15 Policy CS02 'Scale and Distribution of Development' states that:

"...in the rural area, development will be supported within those rural settlements inset from the Green Belt and defined on the Policies Map. Development outside those settlements, including affordable housing and proposals to maintain and diversify the rural economy, will be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in this plan. The extent of the Green Belt is defined on the Policies Map. A strategic Green Belt boundary review will be undertaken to identify additional land to meet the housing needs up to

*2028 and to safeguard areas of land to meet development needs beyond the plan period, while maintaining the **national and local planning purposes of the Green Belt...**"*

3.16 The settlement of Culverstone Green is noted as a 'Third Tier Settlement' within the rural area, inset from the Green Belt. Paragraph 4.2.6 notes that "*these boundaries do not define the full extent of each settlement but relate to a coherent and established built up area where infilling would not adversely affect local character and identity, or impact on the openness of the Green Belt*".

3.17 Paragraph 4.2.7 notes that "*the national aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open*" and sets out the following local planning purposes:

- *"To maintain the break in development between the eastern edge of Gravesend and the Medway Towns which is one of the few barriers preventing the further eastward sprawl of London and the merging of towns along the southern part of the Thames Estuary;*
- *To assist in safeguarding the countryside by minimising the expansion of the Borough's rural settlements; and*
- *To assist in concentrating development on underused, derelict and previously developed land in the urban area of Gravesend and Northfleet."*

3.18 Paragraph 4.2.8 states that:

"The Core Strategy acknowledges that as development opportunities within the existing urban area and settlements inset from the Green Belt become more limited, some development may be required on land in the rural area before the end of the plan period to meet the Borough's housing needs and sustain rural communities. The Green Belt has therefore been identified as a broad location for future growth and its boundaries will be subject to a review."

3.19 Policy CS12 'Green Infrastructure' states that:

"...there will be no net loss of biodiversity in the Borough, and opportunities to enhance, restore, re-create and maintain habitats will be sought..."

The overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced. The greatest weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and natural beauty of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting. Proposals will take account of the Kent Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan, the

Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment, and the Cluster Studies where relevant."

3.20 Policy CS14 'Housing Type and Size' states that:

"...the Council will expect new housing development to provide a range of dwelling types and sizes taking into account the existing character of the area..."

3.21 Policy CS14 'Housing Density' states that:

"...all new housing will be developed at a density that is consistent with achieving a good design and does not compromise the distinctive character of the area in which it is situated..."

3.22 Policy CS19 'Development and Design Principles' states that:

"New development will be visually attractive, fit for purpose and locally distinctive. It will conserve and enhance the character of the local built historic and natural environment, integrate well with the surrounding local area and meet anti-crime standards...this will be achieved through..."

- Using the collaborative approach advocated in Building for Life 12 and in line with the guidance set out in Kent Design, the design, layout and form of new development will be derived from a robust analysis of local context and character and will make a positive contribution to the street scene, the quality of the public realm and the character of the area. Account will be taken of the scale, height, building lines, layout, materials and other architectural features of adjoining buildings. Account will also be taken of the wider site context, including strategic views, site topography, the significance of heritage assets and features of townscape and landscape value which contribute to local character and sense of place..."***

Supplementary Planning Documents

Gravesham Strategic Land Availability Assessment, 2012

3.23 Gravesham's Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) collates information regarding the future development potential in the Borough and forms part of the evidence base to the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy. The Site is not included within the SLAA.

3.24 Paragraph 2.1.11 of the SLAA notes however that:

*"The SLAA is a technical background document only. It is not a statement of Council policy, it does not allocate land, **and is not a statutory planning document...it will not pre-empt or prejudice any decision the Council may make in the future on any particular site and does not alter any policies or land use designations as set out in the Local Plan.**"*

Landscape Character Based Analysis of Potential Development Sites, 2011

- 3.25 The Landscape Character Based Analysis of Potential Development Sites was prepared by David Hares Landscape Architecture on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council, and comprises a landscape character based analysis and review of a number of potential development sites, outlining their sensitivity to development. The Site is identified as lying within 'Site CG1 South of Heron Hill Lane Culverstone Green' and notes:

"The part of the site which lies immediately adjoining the road and is well screened by existing housing or hedging, is a relatively discrete block of land. This area is within the Meopham plateau local character area which is considered to be less sensitive to change. This part of the site is level and could accommodate appropriately designed development. The eastern section of the site lies within the Culverstone wooded housing character area, which is highly sensitive due to its topography and the manner in which the trees and woodland provide the setting for the settlement. The recommendation for this site would therefore be for only the western section within the Meopham plateau local landscape character area to be considered for development."

- 3.26 Concerning the mitigation of landscape impacts of development in relation to 'Site CG1' it states:

"Restrict development to the less sensitive western part of the site and retain boundary and intermediate tree lines."

Residential Layout Guidelines, 1996

- 3.27 The Residential Layout Guidelines were prepared by Gravesham Borough Council to inform the layout of new development, setting out criteria that all planning applications for residential development should comply with. For the most part the criteria relate to the internal arrangement of development proposals, albeit reference is made to privacy distances, overshadowing and amenity space and play space provision.

Kent Design Guide, 2005

3.28 The Kent Design Guide seeks to provide a starting point for good design while retaining flexibility for creative, individual approaches to different buildings and areas, while also seeking to ensure that the best of Kent's places remain to enrich the environment for future generations. It does not seek to restrict designs for any new development to any historic Kent vernacular, but instead aims to encourage well considered and contextually sympathetic schemes.

3.29 The Kent Design Guide notes that successful places tend to:

- *"Be friendly, safe and attractive;*
- *Be well used – a steady passage of people provides a feeling of safety;*
- *Have public space and squares that draw people together;*
- *Have spaces for public events, markets and performances;*
- *Clearly distinguish private and public areas;*
- *Have building frontages with a direct relationship with the street;*
- *Have clearly defined entrances to buildings used by the public;*
- *Have a network of pedestrian routes and spaces;*
- *Give priority in streets to people rather than to vehicles;*
- *Have clearly defined boundaries for public areas – using hedges, fences and trees;*
- *Have a coordinated approach to street surfaces and furniture - lamps, seats, litter bins, paving, bus shelters and signs."*

3.30 It further notes that *"creating a 'sense of place' or 'character' is one of the most important things for new development to achieve..."* With respect to the landscape setting it states that *"the landscape setting of a development site should be understood, extended and enhanced within the site"*, and states that a well-designed landscape will provide:

- *"An attractive setting for a development, its users and occupiers;*
- *A positive environment of wider economic benefit;*
- *A sense of place with a clear identity;*
- *A sense of space and enclosure;*
- *Spatial benefits including integrating the visual impact of the built environment with nature;*
- *Environmental benefits including micro-climate creation, pollution attenuation and the reduction of water and energy consumption;*
- *Noise and visual screening; and*
- *Retention of cultural associations with the natural environment."*

- 3.31 With respect to new planting it is noted that it may take a long time to reach maturity, therefore **"...existing features which contribute to amenity and biodiversity should be retained to make the development attractive in its early years..."**.

Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study, 2016

- 3.32 The Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study was prepared by LUC on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council and published in March 2016. The study provides an assessment of the landscape and visual sensitivities within defined assessment parcels around existing defined settlements to help inform judgements regarding the capacity of the landscape to accommodate new built development.
- 3.33 The majority of the Site (with the omission of the easternmost part) is identified in Parcel CG1, which is described as follows:

"The parcel joins the west and northern edge of Culverstone Green, on the plateau above the dry valley extending to the west of the A227 and the borough boundary. To the north the boundary is defined by South Street and Heron Hill Lane, with the eastern boundary formed where the topography drops away to the wooded Culverstone Valley. To the west Lion Wood marks the edge of the plateau.

The northern boundary, at South Street, contains a line of residential development beyond the defined settlement, set within small scale pasture fields bound by woodland and hedgerows which continue along the A227. Across the main part of the plateau are larger scale fields bound by hedgerows but generally forming a more open landscape..."

- 3.34 Within this assessment criterion, under the heading of 'physical and natural character', the following is noted: *"The landscape scale plateau landscape is not inherently sensitive..."*. While under the heading of 'settlement form and edge' it notes: **"...to the east, the settlement dips down to the wooded plotland area known as Culverstone Valley, with the gardens of Willow Walk backing onto an area of paddocks and scrub around Blackthorn Farm"**.
- 3.35 Under the heading of 'settlement setting' it notes **"...to the north of Willow Walk the landscape dips down towards Culverstone Valley, with the woodland itself forming a strong backdrop."**. Under the heading of 'perceptual qualities' it refers to the area that encompasses the Site, noting *"the smaller pasture fields to the east of the road are more closely associated with the settlement..."*.

3.36 The following key sensitivities to development are provided:

- ***"Role in creating the rural gap and maintaining the sense of separation between Culverstone Green and Meopham Green notably in views from the A227 travelling north –south through the Borough;***
- *Plateau location with potential high visibility and exposure from the wider rural area; and*
- *The adjacent ancient woodland associated with the dry valleys that cut through the plateau which are highly sensitive, and at Culverstone Valley create a wooded setting to Culverstone Green to the east."*

3.37 The study outlines that Parcel CG1 has a 'Medium-Low' capacity for development, albeit noting (with respect to the area to the east of the A227, within which the Site lies) the following:

- ***"There is some capacity for development in this area to the immediate north of the existing defined settlement within the small scale fields north of Blackthorn Farm. Any development here would be constrained by the steep dry valley slopes and ancient woodland dropping away to the east which forms an important backdrop and setting; and***
- *On the eastern side of A227 (within the area north of Willow Walk and south of Heron Hill Lane) the eastern slopes to the wooded valley are important to the settlement setting and therefore highly sensitive to development."*

Gravesham Greenfield and Green Belt Site Assessments and Options Consultation, 2011

- 3.38 This study was intended to be the starting point for more detailed assessment of a series of candidate sites for removal from the Green Belt. The Site is identified within this study under the heading of 'South of Heron Hill Lane and East of Wortham Road, Culverstone Green.
- 3.39 It notes that the impact of development on the Site will "*strengthen*" the Green Belt boundary and that the "*western plateau part of the site is less sensitive*" in landscape terms.

4.0 SITE CONTEXT

Landscape Setting

- 4.1 The Site covers approximately 5.4 hectares (ha) and is irregular in shape. The land use is predominantly agricultural, consisting of a series of fields that are enclosed by a mix of hedgerow vegetation, tree belts and timber post fencing. The built form of Blackthorn Farm is located centrally within the Site.

Location and Local Land Use

- 4.2 As demonstrated by Figure 1: Site Context Plan, the Site lies in proximity to the rural settlement of Culverstone Green, which is inset from the Green Belt. However, the Site does not directly adjoin the defined settlement boundary and is instead separated from the defined settlement edge by linear development extending northwards along the A227 South Street and by an area of scrub/woodland vegetation. This linear development continues northwards along the western side of the A227 South Street, to the west of the Site, with its northernmost extent defined by Heron Hill Lane / Chapmans Hill.
- 4.3 Culverstone Green itself comprises a series of built forms of varying age and typology, including a small number of houses that predate the first world war. However, generally the built form dates from either the 1930's or the 1960's, with the former set amongst the dense wooded vegetation of the Culverstone valley and its' slopes, and the latter atop the plateau in proximity to (and bisected by) the A227 South Street.

Access and Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

- 4.4 The key transport routes within the vicinity of the Site include:
- The A227 South Street, aligned broadly north-south, which extends through the landscape and provides connectivity between Vigo and Meopham Green;
 - Heron Hill Lane, aligned east-west to the north of the Site, which connects South Street with Harvel and Priestwood; and
 - The M20 and M26 corridors, which lie to the south of the Site.
- 4.5 The Site is not crossed by any PRoW and overall there are few PRoW within the vicinity of the Site. However, notwithstanding the above PRoW NS284 does run east-west just to the north of the Site along the course of Heron Hill Lane. A series of PRoW radiate out from, and through, the built-up area of Culverstone Green, following the ridgelines and valley bottoms of the underlying landform as well as providing connectivity to other nearby built-up areas including Hodsoll Street and Harvel.

- 4.6 There are no areas of Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act Land within the vicinity of the Site, although the Culverstone Green Recreation Ground does lie approximately 600m to the south of the Site at its nearest point.

Topography and Hydrology

- 4.7 As demonstrated by Figure 2: Topography Plan, the Site comprises gently sloping land, which falls from approximately 166m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the south, to approximately 143m in the north-eastern part of the Site. The settlement of Culverstone Green is situated on the gently sloping chalk plateau of the dip slope of the North Downs. Two dry valleys pass through the landscape to the west and east of the main body of the village, draining towards the Thames. In this regard, the Site forms part of a broadly north-facing spur of this plateau landscape.
- 4.8 There are no notable hydrological features within the vicinity of the Site or the settlement of Culverstone Green, with the exception of a small pond that lies to the immediate south of the Site.

Vegetation

- 4.9 With reference to Figure 1: Site Context Plan, the Site is contained by substantial tree belts that form part of the northern, eastern, southern and western boundaries of the Site. Willow Wood, which defines the eastern boundary of the Site, is also defined as ancient woodland and provides a framework that provides one means of distinction between the 1930s and 1960s built development of Culverstone Green.
- 4.10 Within Culverstone Green itself, ornamental and structural planting is commonplace within its western part, with the streetscene generally featuring mature trees within the curtilage of residential dwellings and lining the roads. In contrast, the eastern part of Culverstone Green appears heavily sylvan in character, with the backdrop of all views being dominated by the enclosing woodland.
- 4.11 Beyond Culverstone Green, strips of woodland are commonplace within the valley areas, much of which is defined as ancient woodland. Field boundaries are typically defined by hedgerows featuring the occasional mature hedgerow tree and/or substantial tree belts.

Designations

- 4.12 The Site is not covered by any national, regional or local landscape designations. However, the Site and surrounding landscape does lie within the designated Green Belt, with the exception of the main built-up area of Culverstone Green (which is inset from the Green Belt).

- 4.13 The nearest nationally designated landscape, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies approximately 1.3km to the east of the Site at its nearest point.
- 4.14 There are no national or local nature reserves in the vicinity of the Site, although the Local Wildlife Site 'Happy Valley, Meopham' (GR10) does lie approximately 270m to the east of the Site at its nearest point.
- 4.15 There are no Registered Park and Gardens within the vicinity of the Site, while there are also few other designated heritage assets within the surrounding area. The nearest designated heritage assets are the Grade II listed Owls Castle and Owls Castle Barn, which lie approximately 185m to the south-west of the Site.

Published Landscape Character

- 4.16 The landscape character assessment approach is a descriptive approach that seeks to identify and define the distinct character of landscapes that make up the country. This approach recognises the intrinsic value of all landscapes, not just 'special' landscapes, as contributing factors in people's quality of life, in accordance with the European Landscape Convention. It also ensures that account is taken of the different roles and character of different areas, in accordance with the NPPF Core Principles.
- 4.17 The description of each landscape is used as a basis for evaluation in order to make judgements to guide, for example, development or landscape management. The extent of published landscape character areas are illustrated on Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan.

National Landscape Character

- 4.18 As part of Natural England's responsibilities in delivering the Natural Environment White Paper, Biodiversity 2020 and the European Landscape Convention, Natural England has developed a series of National Character Area (NCA) profiles. These NCA profiles provide a broad range of information including an outline of the key characteristics of a given area; a description of the ecosystem services provided and how these relate to people, wildlife and the economy; and an array of opportunities for positive environmental change.
- 4.19 The Site is predominantly covered by NCA Profile 119: North Downs. The area is described as ***"a chain of chalk hills extending from the Hog's Back in Surrey and ending dramatically at the internationally renowned White Cliffs of Dover...Twisting sunken lanes, often aligned along ancient drove roads, cut across the scarp and are a feature of much of the dip slope"***.
- 4.20 The key characteristics of NCA Profile 119: North Downs, of relevance to the Site and surrounding area, are outlined as follows:

- *"...A distinctive chalk downland ridge rises up from the surrounding land, with a steep scarp slope to the south providing extensive views across Kent, Surrey and Sussex and across the Channel seascape to France;*
- *The broad dip slope gradually drops towards the Thames and the English Channel, affording extensive views across London and the Thames Estuary. The carved topography provides a series of dry valleys, ridges and plateaux;*
- *The area is cut by the deep valleys of the Stour, Medway, Darent, Wey and Mole. The river valleys cut through the chalk ridge, providing distinctive local landscapes which contrast with the steep scarp slope;*
- *The south-facing scarp is incised by a number of short, bowl-shaped dry valleys, cut by periglacial streams and often referred to as combes. The undulating topography of the dip slope has also been etched by streams and rivers, today forming dry valleys, some of which carry winterbournes that occasionally flow in the dip slope, depending on the level of the chalk aquifer;*
- *The footslope of the escarpment supports arable cropping, the dominant land use within the NCA. In the east, the richer, loamy soils of the lower dip slope support large tracts of mixed arable and horticultural production;*
- *Woodland is found primarily on the steeper slopes of the scarp, valley sides and areas of the dip slope capped with clay-with-flints. Well-wooded hedgerows and shaws are an important component of the field boundaries, contributing to a strongly wooded character. Much of the woodland is **ancient...; and***
- *Small, nucleated villages and scattered farmsteads including oasts and barns form the settlement pattern, with local flint, chalk and Wealden brick the vernacular **materials...**"*

County Landscape Character

- 4.21 The Landscape Assessment of Kent was prepared by Jacobs Babbie on behalf of Kent County Council and was published in October 2004. The Landscape Assessment of Kent identifies a number of different Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) across Kent, and provides a description of and vision for each LCA.
- 4.22 The landscape encompassing the existing settled area of Culverstone Green and covering the Site and surrounding area is identified as the Ash Downs LCA, the characteristic features of which are defined as:
- *"A pleasant mix of deep, dry pastoral valleys enclosed by wooded ridges and species rich hedgerows, with broad plateau tops beyond;*
 - *Small valley-bottom villages and large 20th century settlements on plateau; and*
 - *A winding network of narrow, historic lanes often eroded by **traffic**"*

4.23 The condition of the Ash Downs LCA is identified as 'Good', noting *"the pattern of landscape elements is coherent and in most cases reflects the underlying landform"* and that *"some visual detractors such as commercial buildings and unsympathetic land uses intrude into some of the views"*. Additionally, it notes *"the condition of heritage features such as field boundaries and vernacular buildings is good, however, much recent isolated development using unsympathetic materials has a negative impact."*

4.24 The sensitivity of the Ash Downs LCA is identified as 'High', stating:

*"The characteristic features of this landscape are strongly represented and portray both an historic and ancient time-depth. Recent development of urban areas has a localised effect; the area retains local distinctiveness and a strong sense of continuity. The existing highways and the evidence of vernacular materials (such as flint) in historic buildings, in particular, enhance the sense of place. Visibility is moderate due to the **intermittent tree cover.**"*

Local Landscape Character

4.25 The Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment, which identifies eleven distinct LCAs within Gravesham Borough, was prepared by Jacobs on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council and was published in May 2009. The Site and the surrounding area is identified within the Meopham Downs LCA, the key characteristics of which are outlined as follows:

- *"Gently undulating topography with a mixture of arable and pasture farmland;*
- *Neat pattern of small square fields in the south;*
- *Broader irregular shaped fields to the north;*
- *Narrow lanes and roads lined with hedgerows;*
- *Three large settlements located along A227 running east and west; and*
- *Traditional architecture surrounding village greens provide local vernacular."*

4.26 It is noted that the condition of the LCA is 'Good' and that *"The pattern of landscape elements is coherent, with few visual detractors. Established hedgerows and small woodland clumps limit the visual impact of detractors. Hedgerows are native and in good condition, providing ecological corridors along field boundaries. Woodland clumps are mostly native and mature and vary in condition, whilst the remains of orchards are in poor condition"*, while the sensitivity of the LCA is assessed as 'Moderate', stating:

"The key characteristic elements of the landscape are distinct, providing coherency and a strong sense of place within the landscape. Although woodland is restricted to small woodland clumps, hedgerows that run along field

*boundaries are historic and distinct. Both the settlements of Meopham and Meopham Green have distinct traditional village centres. In addition, traditional vernacular architecture can be found scattered across the landscape. The other two remaining settlements have more recent architecture that is less in keeping with the local vernacular. Strength of character and visibility are **moderate, providing a moderate sensitivity overall.**"*

Published Landscape Guidelines

National Landscape Guidelines

4.27 With respect to NCA 119: North Downs, the following Statements of Environmental Opportunity of relevance to the Site are provided:

- *"SEO 1: Manage, conserve and enhance the distinctive rural character and historic environment of the North Downs, including the long-established settlement pattern, ancient routeways and traditional buildings. Protect the tranquillity of the landscape and sensitively manage, promote and celebrate the area's rich cultural and natural heritage, famous landmarks and views for future generations;*
- *SEO 2: Protect, enhance and restore active management to the diverse range of woodlands and trees of the North **Downs....recognising their contribution to sense of place, sense of history and tranquillity...; and***
- *SEO 4: Plan to deliver integrated, well-managed multi-functional green space in existing and developing urban areas, providing social, economic and environmental benefits and reinforcing landscape character and local **distinctiveness...**"*

4.28 The following landscape opportunities of relevance to the Site are identified:

- ***"...Protect, conserve and enhance the characteristic medieval settlement pattern of small nucleated villages along spring lines, within valleys and on the lower dip slope linked by winding, often sunken lanes, along with the strong local flint, chalk and Wealden brick vernacular of traditional architecture, with new building sensitive to local styles and materials...; and***
- *Manage, conserve, enhance and restore the characteristic pattern of thick well-treed hedgerows and shaws, forming **a predominantly irregular field pattern...**"*

County Landscape Guidelines

4.29 Landscape management and development guidelines for the Ash Downs LCA include the following landscape actions:

- *"Conserve broadleaf woodland cover;*

- *Conserve small scale field pattern on valley sides Conserve wooded edges to arable plateau Conserve the impact of vernacular materials and the historic scale of built form;*
- *Conserve the enclosure of settlements within wooded areas; and*
- ***Conserve original highway characteristics"***

Local Landscape Guidelines

4.30 The following guidelines of relevance to the Site are provided for the Meopham Downs LCA:

- *"Conserve and reinforce the traditional landscape structure and where necessary introduce new elements they should respect and enhance the pattern;*
- *Conserve characteristic narrow winding lanes and dense native hedgerows;*
- *Conserve traditional character of built environment by drawing on traditional building materials and techniques for new development;*
- *Reinforce village identity, keeping villages distinct and separate from one another;*
- *Reinforce the enclosure of settlements within wooded areas;*
- *Conserve and reinforce broadleaf woodland cover and wooded edges to arable plateau;*
- *Encourage the use of local produce to support traditional land uses such as orchards;*
- *Explore new horticultural land uses; and*
- ***Conserve and reinforce agricultural land use."***

5.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL SITE APPRAISAL

Overview

- 5.1 The Site and the surrounding environment was visited in April 2018, with Site Appraisal Photographs A - D illustrating the existing character of the Site. The locations from which the Site Appraisal Photographs were taken are shown on Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan. The visual context of the Site is illustrated by Site Context Photographs 1 - 10, the locations of which are illustrated on Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan.

Landscape Appraisal

- 5.2 A landscape appraisal has been undertaken to ascertain the existing character of the Site. This is accomplished through recording and analysing the existing landscape features and characteristics, the way the landscape is experienced, and the value or importance of the landscape and visual resources in the vicinity of the Site. The elements of the landscape that contribute to landscape character include the built and natural form, the pattern of features, detailing, scale, planting, land use and human perception. In this regard, landscape character is derived as a result of the perception of, and action and interaction of, natural and human factors.
- 5.3 As illustrated in Site Appraisal Photograph A the western part of the Site consists of a large pastoral field that gently slopes upwards towards a treebelt that forms the boundary to the adjoining Mitford House. The built form of Hope Cottages and a vehicle maintenance and storage yard / industrial premises adjoin this field to the north, with the white-rendered gable end of the former a notable feature in the setting of the Site. The western boundary of the field is defined by a treebelt that limits intervisibility with the adjacent A227 South Street. To the east, the setting to the Site appears well-wooded, with far-reaching views interrupted by the dense treebelt that passes through and partly defines the eastern boundary of the Site.
- 5.4 Site Appraisal Photograph B is taken from a central location within the Site and illustrates that the general condition of the timber post fencing is in a good state of repair. The sand/riding school (manège) is the main feature of this part of the Site, although the built form of Blackthorn Farm also influences this part of the Site. The vegetation framework generally appears robust, with the western boundary of the Site appearing well vegetated and fulfilling a strong containment function. Nonetheless, the remnant hedgerow that breaks-up the large field in the western part of the Site is gappy in places, which does lead to a somewhat degraded appearance and diminishes the scenic quality of the Site, as does the intervisibility with the stacks of car tyres associated with the industrial premises that adjoin the Site to the north.

- 5.5 The eastern part of the Site is illustrated in Site Appraisal Photographs C and D, which demonstrate the very different feel to this part of the Site. As illustrated in Site Appraisal Photograph C, the underlying landform of the north-eastern part of the Site has a much more pronounced slope than the remainder of the Site. The orientation of this field, in conjunction with the extent of containment provided by the dense vegetation on all sides, gives rise to a perceived air of rurality and tranquillity, which leads to a sense of relative remoteness.
- 5.6 In contrast, the intervisibility with the built form of Blackthorn Farm and the adjoining properties along the A227 South Street to the west as demonstrated in Site Appraisal Photograph D has an urbanising influence over the Site and leads to a diminished visual amenity experience. Again however, it is apparent the extent to which the vegetation that forms the eastern boundary of the Site has an enclosing quality that ensures the Site is perceived as a discrete parcel of land that is both physically and visually distinct from the wider landscape to the east.
- 5.7 The Site is considered to be of low landscape value as:
- The Site is generally not of noteworthy scenic beauty, insofar that it largely comprises a series of commonplace fields with ruderal vegetation, contained by woodland and tree vegetation;
 - The Site is not particularly remote, given its proximity to existing built development and the highway network and does not have an air of tranquillity (with the exception of the north-eastern field);
 - The Site does not form part of the historic landscape setting to a noted heritage asset;
 - The Site does not currently afford the opportunity for public recreation; and
 - The Site is not covered by any landscape designations.

Visual Appraisal

- 5.8 A visual appraisal has been undertaken to determine the relationship of the Site with its surroundings and its approximate extent of visibility within the wider landscape from publicly accessible locations.
- 5.9 The potential visibility of the Site is largely determined by the intervening landform, as topographic features such as ridgelines and subtle undulations may block or curtail views towards the Site. In addition, land cover has an important role in determining potential visibility as woodland, treebelts or built forms may contribute to additional blocking, filtering or curtailment of views.
- 5.10 The effectiveness of vegetation as a screen depends to a considerable extent on its scale. A large mature feature will form a substantial screen throughout the year, but a hedgerow or

intermittent treebelt may only be effective during the summer months. Whilst small features, such as hedgerows and individual trees can be very important, particularly when their combined effect is taken into account, they cannot be considered to be substantial or wholly effective screening features or visual barriers due to the seasonal nature of their effect.

- 5.11 Site Context Photographs 1 – 10 demonstrate that views of the interior of the Site are largely limited to the immediately adjoining properties. Even from those locations in proximity to the Site, the Site's visibility is heavily restricted due to the extent of containment provided by the vegetation that encloses the Site (in combination with built form in the Site's setting). An indication of the existing visual envelope of the Site is provided in Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan, which also shows where the Site Context Photographs were taken from.
- 5.12 As demonstrated in Site Context Photograph 1 the industrial premises that adjoin the Site to the north curtail views of the ground plane of the Site, while moving west the residences that adjoin the Site to the north-west similarly curtail the views (as shown in Site Context Photograph 2).
- 5.13 Further to the north along the A227 South Street the vegetation lining the main highway truncates views in the direction of the Site, as shown in Site Context Photograph 3. However, built form aligned to Chapmans Hill is visible to the right of the view and is perceived as forming the edge to the main settled area of Culverstone Green.
- 5.14 From the elevated landscape to the west of the Site the majority of views out are heavily filtered by the substantial amount of woodland cover. Nonetheless, there is one vantage point within this wooded ridge area whereby views of the eastern part of the Site are obtainable, as shown in Site Context Photograph 4.
- 5.15 Further to the north the intervening rising landform serves to screen views of the Site, as demonstrated in Site Context Photograph 5. While, further afield to the north-east the Site is screened from view by the containing vegetation (although the dense treebelt that passes through the centre of the Site is a discernible feature in the skyline as demonstrated in Site Context Photograph 6). In this long distance view the built form that extends along the A227 South Street to the north of the Site is visible.
- 5.16 To the immediate west of the Site there are filtered glimpsed views of the Site through the vegetation that forms the Site's western boundary, as shown in Site Context Photograph 7. However, these views are typically obtained by users of vehicles passing through the area and obtained at an oblique angle. Further to the south, the Site is screened from view by the built form and vegetation that adjoins the Site to its south, as illustrated in Site Context Photograph 8. From further afield to the west and south-west, as shown in Site Context Photographs 9 and 10, the Site is not discernible.

Summary

- 5.17 Overall the Site is considered to be of low sensitivity as it is of low landscape value and it has a very localised visual envelope due to the orientation and nature of the landform within and adjoining the Site (given its siting within a plateau landscape that is contained by substantial vegetation cover). It is also of note that the Site is not visible in its entirety from any one location.

6.0 SCOPE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Site is considered to provide the opportunity for residential development from a landscape and visual perspective due to the extent of enclosure provided by the existing vegetation framework bordering the Site; the proximity to and influence of the existing built forms to the north, west and south; and as the existing settlement pattern already extends as far north as Chapmans Hill / Heron Hill Lane, with the built form aligned to the former perceived as following the settlement edge.
- 6.2 Nonetheless, any development within the Site would need to ensure that the boundary vegetation is retained and enhanced, so as to sensitively and sympathetically integrate the development into its setting. Furthermore, it is recommended that the easternmost field is kept free of built form due to its relationship with the built forms nestled amongst the woodland area to the east. This principle is similarly reflected in the Gravesham Greenfield and Green Belt Site Assessments and Options Consultation (2011), which recognises that the western plateau part of the Site is less sensitive to development in landscape terms.

Site Opportunities and Constraints

Opportunities

- 6.3 Opportunities for development within the Site are that:
- The Site is not covered by any landscape designations;
 - There are no Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) enforced within the Site;
 - There is an existing vegetation framework bordering and enclosing the Site, which in combination with the very gently sloping nature of the Site and its orientation, results in a very localised visual envelope;
 - The Site does not exhibit any rare landscape features; and
 - The Site is not crossed by any PRoW and is not publicly accessible, and therefore is of no recreational value.

Constraints

- 6.4 Constraints to development within the Site include:
- Development should be offset from the existing boundary vegetation structure in response to Root Protection Areas (the extent of which should be determined by an arboricultural survey); and
 - Development in the eastern part of the Site would be visible from the elevated landscape to the east due to the orientation of the landform, and accordingly it is recommended

that this part of the Site is kept free of built form. In any event, a robust landscape framework would aid in screening and softening views, with the potential to incorporate advanced planting.

Response to Landscape Character

- 6.5 The development proposals could respond positively to the environmental and landscape opportunities identified for the North Downs NCA through the protection and enhancement of green corridors/ecological networks (including the vegetation bordering the Site) and the creation of new landscape features (restoring lost hedgerows, where practicable) and areas of green space, providing a robust landscape framework.
- 6.6 In relation to the Ash Downs LCA and the Meopham Downs LCA the development proposals could conserve the enclosed nature of the settlement of Culverstone Green through the retention and enhancement of the boundary vegetation, while also reintroduced new areas of planting and that reflects the historic field pattern. Furthermore, there is the potential to incorporate traditional land uses within the Site, such as an area of orchard, while the built forms introduced could also utilise traditional building materials and building techniques.

Response to Planning Policy

- 6.7 The development proposals within the Site could respond positively to the identified policies within the NPPF and the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy, in addition to the principles set out within the Kent Design Guide. As part of the development, the existing vegetation both within and enclosing the Site could be retained and enhanced, and could be supplemented through the provision of additional areas of planting (utilising locally distinctive species) to create green infrastructure linkages through the Site while fragmenting and softening the overall perceived scale, mass and extent of introduced built forms.
- 6.8 The siting, density, layout and materials of introduced built forms could contribute positively to the character of Culverstone Green, while the visual amenity of receptors passing through the area could be enhanced by creating a gateway development with a clear sense of place and identity that helps reinforce the unique attributes of Culverstone Green and its separate identity.

Design Strategy

6.9 A series of design considerations have been identified as a result of the landscape and visual appraisal, as illustrated on Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan, and include:

- Ensure that the introduced built forms contribute positively to the sense of place and local distinctiveness by using materials that reflect or complement the local vernacular and exhibit a high quality of design as advocated in the Kent Design Guide;
- Soften the appearance of the introduced built form by ensuring that the built forms are set within robust structural planting;
- Ensure that the eastern part of the Site remains free from built forms so as to not adversely impact upon the setting of the wooded housing character type to the east;
- Retain and enhance the existing vegetation bordering the Site and establish green infrastructure linkages;
- Provide new areas of planting, with appropriate locally distinctive species, to soften and fragment the perceived mass of the introduced built forms in views; and
- Ensure that any built forms are offset in relation to the root protection areas of existing vegetation to be retained within and bordering the Site.

7.0 GREEN BELT REVIEW

- 7.1 An assessment of the contribution of the Site to the first four purposes of the Green Belt, as set out in Paragraph 80 of the NPPF, has been undertaken in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1: Contribution of the Site to the Purposes of the Green Belt

Purpose	Critique	Contribution
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	As the Site occupies an area of largely open land that lies beyond the defined settlement boundary, its redevelopment will undoubtedly result in a physical extension of the settlement pattern. However, given that this area of land is physically enclosed by additional built development to the north, and which perceptibly defines the settlement edge, the Sites' redevelopment would largely be perceived as infill development amidst the existing settlement and not as unmanaged sprawl. Furthermore, the substantial vegetation that encloses the Site will further diminish any perceived sense of sprawl, with any introduced built development within the Site confined to being within these robust physical features.	Limited
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	The Site is perceived to be physically contained by existing built development to the north, south and west. The built form to the north of the Site, which lies adjacent to Heron Hill Lane and extends westwards along Chapmans Hill, is perceived as defining the northern extent of Culverstone Green despite being washed over by the Green Belt designation. Given the above, the redevelopment of the Site will clearly not physically or perceptually reduce the separation distance between Culverstone Green and Meopham Green (lying a further 1.2km to the north of the perceived settlement limits of Culverstone Green).	None
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Although there is some built form present within the Site, its overriding land use (consisting of farmland) combined with the sylvan character to its setting ensures that there is an air or rurality over the Site such that it is perceived as forming part of the countryside. Nonetheless, due to the containment of the Site by dense vegetation its' redevelopment will not likely result in an urbanising influence over the surrounding area.	Some
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	The Site does not have a physical, visual or character connection with the historic part of any town.	None

- 7.2 The NPPF states that the key characteristics of the Green Belt are "*their openness and their permanence*". As demonstrated in Table 7.1, the Site is considered to be inherently open due to its agricultural land use. However, it is pertinent that the Site is physically related to the built-up area of Culverstone Green and is perceived to already lie within the confines of this settlement due to the presence of built form aligned to Chapman's Hill and Heron Hill Lane to the north-west of the Site. Therefore, despite the technical reduction in openness that would

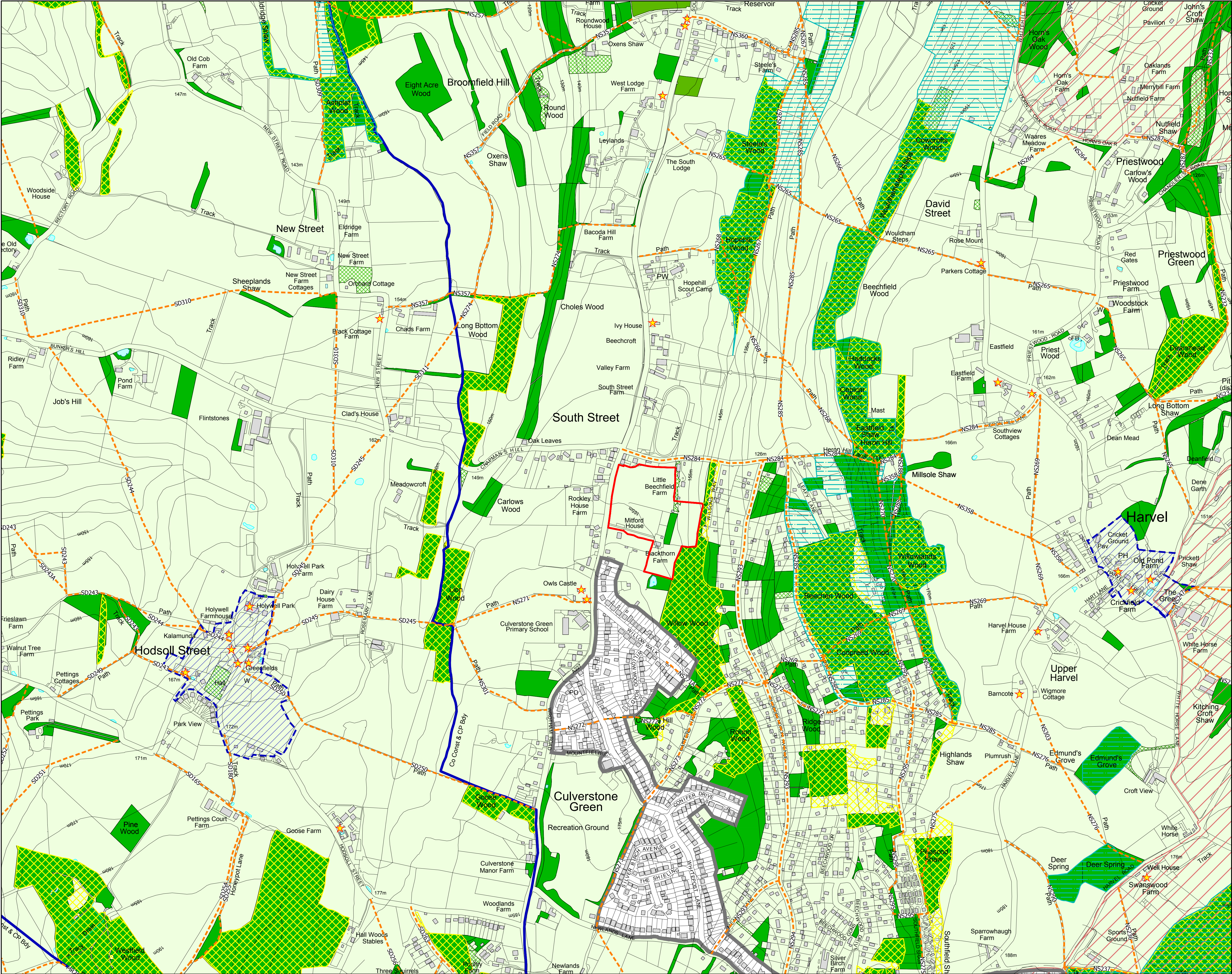
occur should the Site be developed, this area of land is not actually perceived to form part of the Green Belt.

- 7.3 The existing Green Belt boundary is somewhat ambiguous on the ground, as while it is in part defined by the area of woodland to the south of the Site, the Green Belt boundary abruptly terminates at the interface between two residences lining the A227 South Street. This means that built development either side of the A227 South Street, north of the defined settlement boundary, is 'washed-over' by the Green Belt designation (including the built form lining Chapman's Hill and Heron Hill Lane).
- 7.4 Given the above and the way in which the settlement pattern has evolved over time, the release of the Site from the Green Belt offers the potential to consolidate the settlement pattern and redefining the boundary of the Green Belt (and northern extent of the defined settlement boundary) to a feature that is already perceived as the settlement edge, i.e. along Chapman's Hill and Heron Hill Lane, with the latter featuring dense vegetation along its course.
- 7.5 The Site's eastern boundary coincides with Willow Wood, an area of ancient woodland, which would similarly form a robust and defensible boundary that is likely to be of permanence. In light of the above considerations and those set out in Table 7.1 it is clear that the Site should be released from the Green Belt, with a new Green Belt boundary defined by Heron Hill Lane and Willow Wood as illustrated in Figure 7: Green Belt Release Plan. This position is supported by the Gravesham Greenfield and Green Belt Site Assessments and Options Consultation (2011), which highlights that if the Site was developed it would actually strengthen the Green Belt boundary.
- 7.6 Moreover, it is crucial to note that as set out in Paragraph 85 of the NPPF, when defining Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities should "*not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open*" and "*define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent*". The release of the Site from the Green Belt, in conjunction with the land immediately adjoining the Site to the north, will satisfy the policy requirements of the NPPF.
- 7.7 Should the Site be released from the Green Belt and subsequently be developed as per the principles set out in Section 6 of this report, the openness of the remaining designated area would remain intact given the exceptionally limited visual envelope of the Site and that it is already perceived as forming part of the existing settlement pattern of Culverstone Green. On this basis, development of the Site would not compromise the purposes and function of the remaining Green Belt.

8.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 BWLPD was commissioned by Esquire Developments Ltd to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Review of the Site in relation to its suitability for residential development and informing Gravesham's Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) Call for Sites, which will support the forthcoming Stage 2 Preferred Options consultation on the Local Plan. The NPPF endorses the permanence of Green Belts as an essential characteristic and stipulates in Paragraph 83 that "*once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan*". As such, there is an opportunity to refine the Green Belt boundary through the forthcoming consultation on the Local Plan.
- 8.2 The NPPF, as set out in Paragraph 84, seeks to align Green Belt boundary reviews with sustainable patterns of development. Paragraph 85 of the NPPF notes that when defining boundaries to the Green Belt the Local Planning Authority should take into account meeting the identified requirements for sustainable development and not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open. In this regard, a review of the Green Belt boundary in the vicinity of the Site provide the opportunity to shape future sustainable development in order to meet the longer-term needs of the Borough in a coherent and logical manner.
- 8.3 It is recommended that in accordance with Paragraph 85, the Local Planning Authority seek to maximise the potential of a revised Green Belt boundary in the vicinity of the Site for land that could be brought forward and contribute positively to the local area and promote sustainable development in line with the NPPF Core Principles.
- 8.4 A Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Review has been undertaken to establish the opportunities and constraints to residential development from a landscape and visual perspective; the suitability of the Site to accommodate residential development; and to assess the contribution that the Site makes towards the purposes of the Green Belt (both nationally and locally) and to ascertain whether it is unnecessary to keep the Site permanently open.
- 8.5 The appraisal has included a review of published landscape character information, planning policy, and field work, to determine the landscape characteristics of the Site, its function in the wider landscape, and its influence within views from the surrounding area.
- 8.6 As previously noted, the NPPF seek to align Green Belt boundary reviews with sustainable patterns of development. Emphasis is placed on the purposes of the Green Belt as opposed to the quality of the landscape when undertaking a Green Belt Review. However, the consideration of landscape and visual opportunities and constraints provides a greater understanding of, and aids in the identification of, appropriate sustainable locations for development in the area.

- 8.7 The findings of this report demonstrate that the Site is very well contained from the wider landscape due to the extent of enclosure afforded by existing vegetation, with visibility of the interior of the Site generally restricted to very localised areas and the immediately adjoining properties that overlook the Site.
- 8.8 The Site itself is generally not of noteworthy scenic beauty, insofar that it largely comprises a series of commonplace gently sloping fields, contained by woodland and tree vegetation. Notably, the Site is perceived as a discrete area of land that is physically contained by existing built development to the north, south and west, with the built form to the north perceived as defining the northern extent of Culverstone Green. In this regard, the Site is physically and visually related to the existing settled area of Culverstone Green, and distinct from the more open rural landscape north of Heron Hill Lane towards Meopham Green.
- 8.9 The Green Belt Review identifies that the existing Green Belt boundary is somewhat ambiguous as it abruptly terminates at the interface between two residences lining the A227 South Street. As such, built development either side of the A227 South Street north of the defined settlement boundary is 'washed-over' by the Green Belt designation. However, the NPPF specifically notes in Paragraph 85 that local planning authorities should "*not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open*" and "*define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent*". In this regard is apparent that the Green Belt boundary in this part of the landscape is inappropriately defined and it should be redefined to relate to a more defensible boundary that does not keep land unnecessarily open (aligning with the findings of the Gravesham Greenfield and Green Belt Site Assessments and Options Consultation).
- 8.10 In light of the above and on consideration of the policy requirements of the NPPF, re-aligning the Green Belt boundary to Heron Hill Lane and Willow Wood will provide the opportunity to establish a more defensible and permanent Green Belt boundary. Accordingly, the area of land as shown in Figure 7: Green Belt Release Plan should be released from the Green Belt, with the western and southern part of the Site allocated for residential development.
- 8.11 In conclusion, development of the Site could be effectively assimilated from a landscape and visual perspective and would not compromise the purposes and function of the wider Green Belt. On this basis, and on consideration of the NPPF policy requirements set out in Paragraph 85, the Site is considered appropriate for release from the Green Belt alongside the immediately adjoining land, such that the realigned Green Belt boundary will be defined clearly using physical features and it will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period.



Revision

Date

Drn

Ckd

Legend

Site Boundary

Local Planning Authority Boundary ^

Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^

Existing Scrub ^

Existing Water Courses and Features ^

Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^

Public Rights of Way *

Listed Buildings ~

Conservation Area **

Ancient Woodland #

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty #

Green Belt ^^

Local Wildlife Areas **

Rural Settlements inset from Green Belt **

Sources:

^

 OS Mapping

#

 Natural England GIS Data Set

~

 Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set

*

 Kent County Council P1011 Online Definitive Maps

+

 Department of Transport (DfT) GIS Cycle Network Data

^^

 Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data

**

 Gravesham Local Core Strategy - Policies Map - Adopted September 2014

Data collated for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation inserted using the British National Grid and may itself not be accurate. Barton Willmore shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

FIGURE 1

Project

Land at Blackthorn Farm, Culverstone Green

Drawing Title

Site Context Plan

Date

25.04.2018

Scale

1:5,000 @A1

Drawn by

SS

Check by

GM

Project No

28573

Drawing No

LN-LP-01

Revision

-

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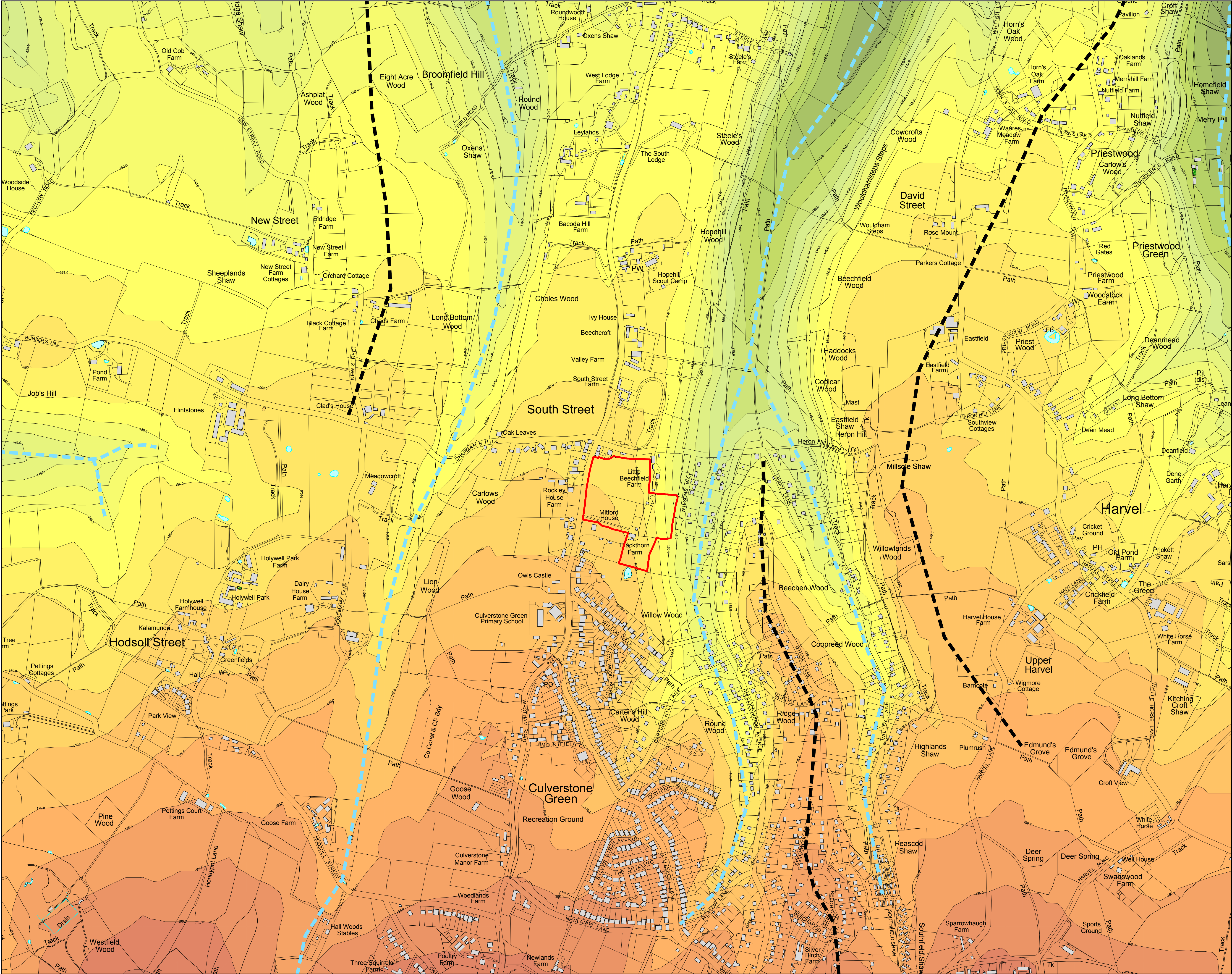
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\\SRV\\NF\\LES3\\Files\\28000-28999\\28500-28599\\28573 - Blackthorn Farm, Culverstone Green - DWG & Registers\\Landscape\\28573 LN-LP-01 Site Context Plan.dwg - A1



The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured

Revision _____ Date _____ Dm _____ Ckd _____

Legend

- Site Boundary
- Existing Water Courses and Features
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD)
- Ridgelines
- Valleys

Elevation (metre AOD)

195 to 200
190 to 195
185 to 190
180 to 185
175 to 180
170 to 175
165 to 170
160 to 165
155 to 160
150 to 155
145 to 150
140 to 145
135 to 140
130 to 135
125 to 130
120 to 125
115 to 120
110 to 115
105 to 110
100 to 105
095 to 100

Sources:
OS Mapping

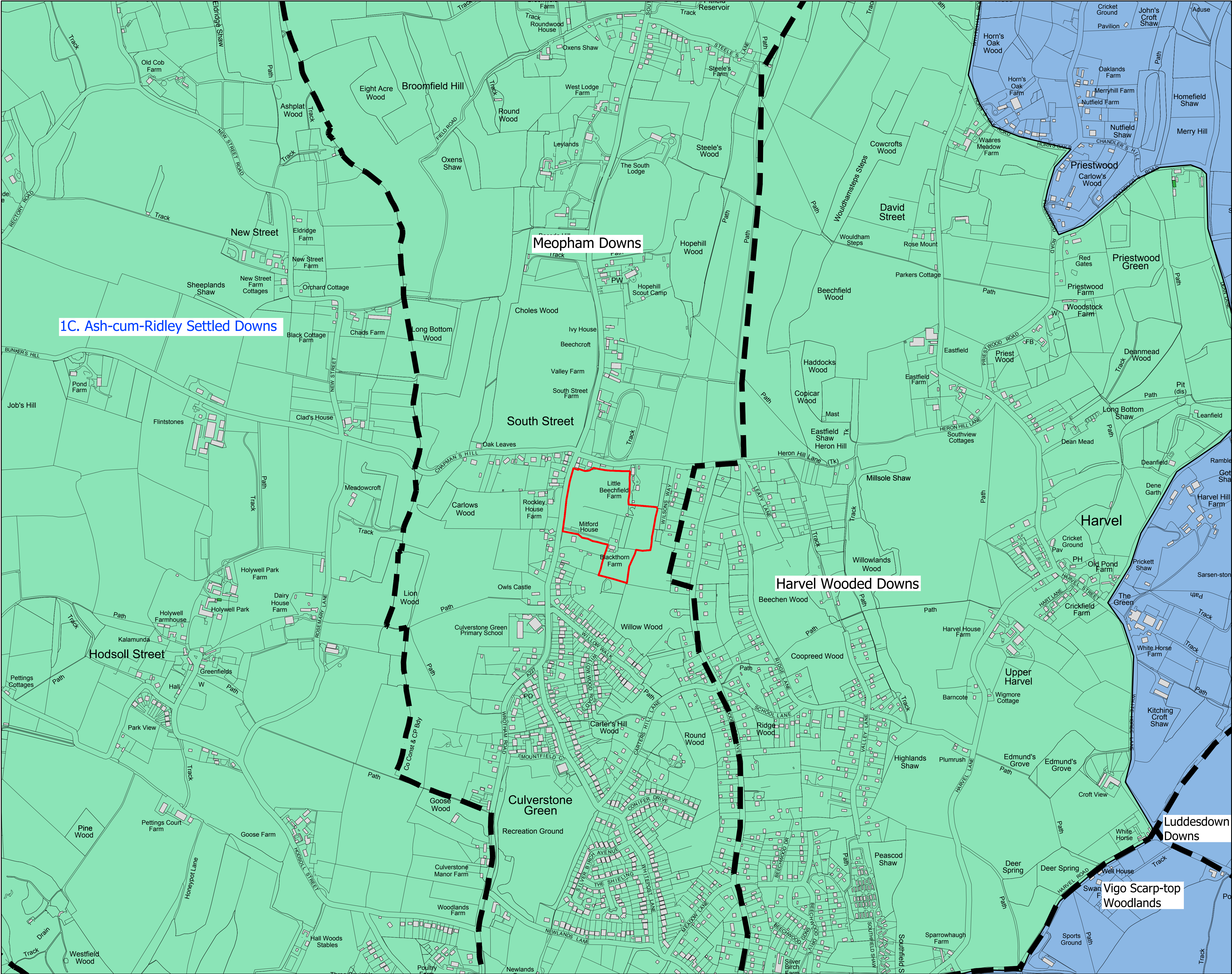
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FIGURE 2

Project
Land at Blackthorn Farm,
Culverstone Green

Drawing Title
Topography Plan

Date 25.04.2018	Scale 1:5,000 @A1 1:10,000 @A3	Drawn by SS	Check by GM
Project No 28573	Drawing No LN-LP-03		Revision -



1C. Ash-cum-Ridley Settled Downs

Meopham Downs

Harvel Wooded Downs

Luddesdown Downs

Vigo Scarp-top Woodlands

The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured

Revision

Date

Drm

Ckd

N

0

100

200

300

400

500

600

700

800

900

1000

Legend

Site Boundary

National Character Area (NCA) Profiles #
The entire extent illustrated lies within NCA Profile 119: North Downs

County Landscape Character Areas (Kent) +

Ash Downs

Luddesdown: West Kent Downs

District Landscape Character Areas

Gravesham *
Landscape Character Area Boundary

Sevenoaks ++
Landscape Character Area Boundary

Sources:
Natural England GIS Data Set
+ The Landscape Assessment of Kent - October 2004
* Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment - May 2009
++ Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment - January 2017

Data collated for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation inserted using the British National Grid and may itself not be accurate. Barton Willmore shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

FIGURE 3

Project
Land at Blackthorn Farm,
Culverstone Green

Drawing Title
Landscape Character Plan

Date
25.04.2017

Scale
1:5,000 @A1
1:10,000 @A3

Drawn by
SS

Check by
-

Project No
28573

Drawing No
LN-LP-04

Revision
-

0

50

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150

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650

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750

800

850

900

950

1000

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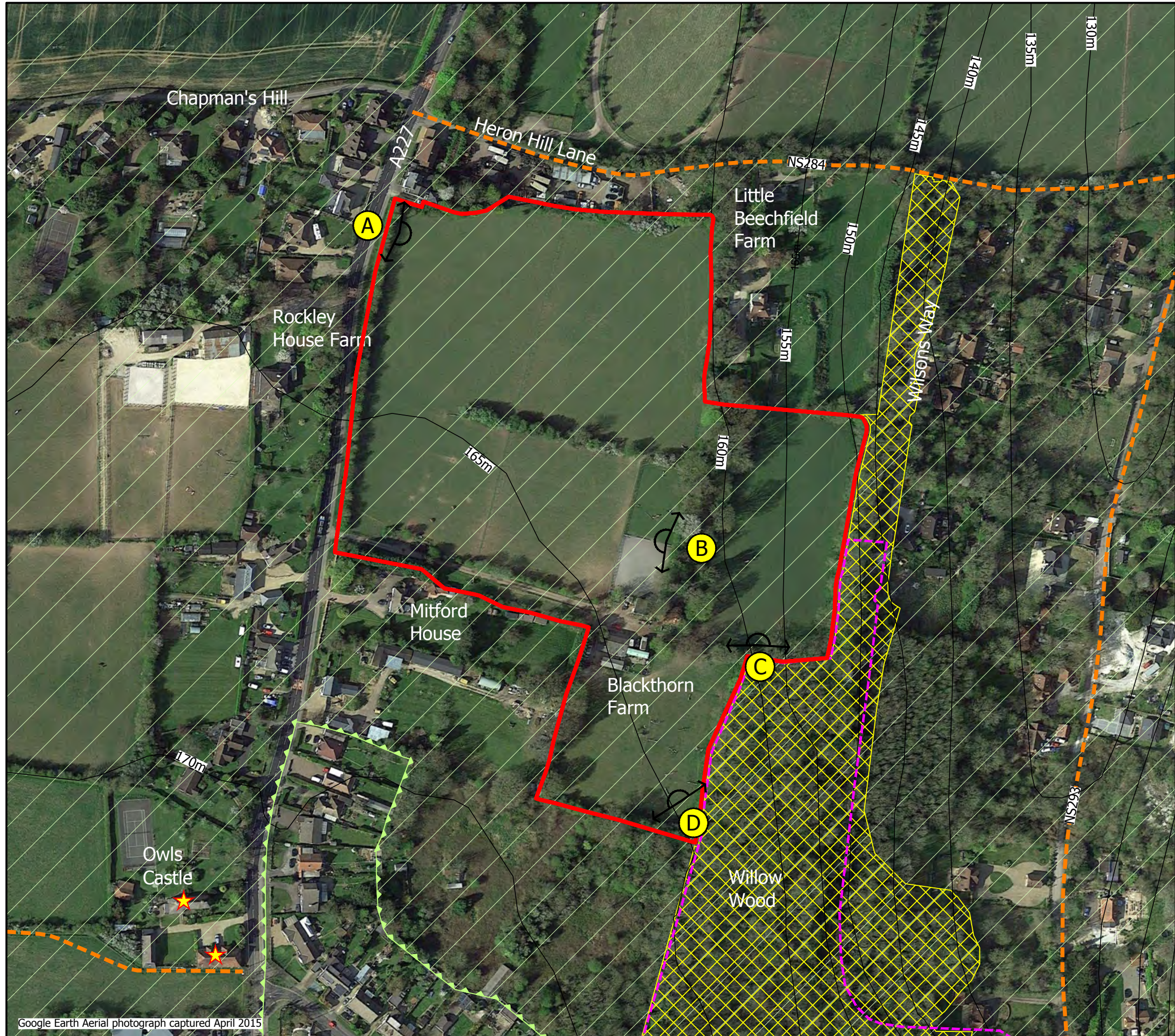
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The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured

Revision _____ Date _____ Drn _____ Ckd _____

Legend

- Site Boundary
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
- Listed Building ~
- Public Rights of Way *
- Ancient Woodland #
- Green Belt ^^
- Tree Preservation Order ##
- Location of Photographic Viewpoint (Site Appraisal Photographs: A - D)

Sources:

- ^ OS Mapping
- ~ Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set
- * Kent County Council PRoW Online Definitive Maps
- # Natural England GIS Data Set
- ^^ Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data
- ## Gravesham Borough Council - Delivering for the Community

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FIGURE 4

Project
**Land at Blackthorn Farm,
Culverstone Green**

Drawing Title
Site Appraisal Plan

Date 25.04.2018	Scale 1:2,000 @A3	Drawn by SS	Check by GM
Project No 28573	Drawing No LN-LP-02	Revision -	

0 20 40 60 80 100m

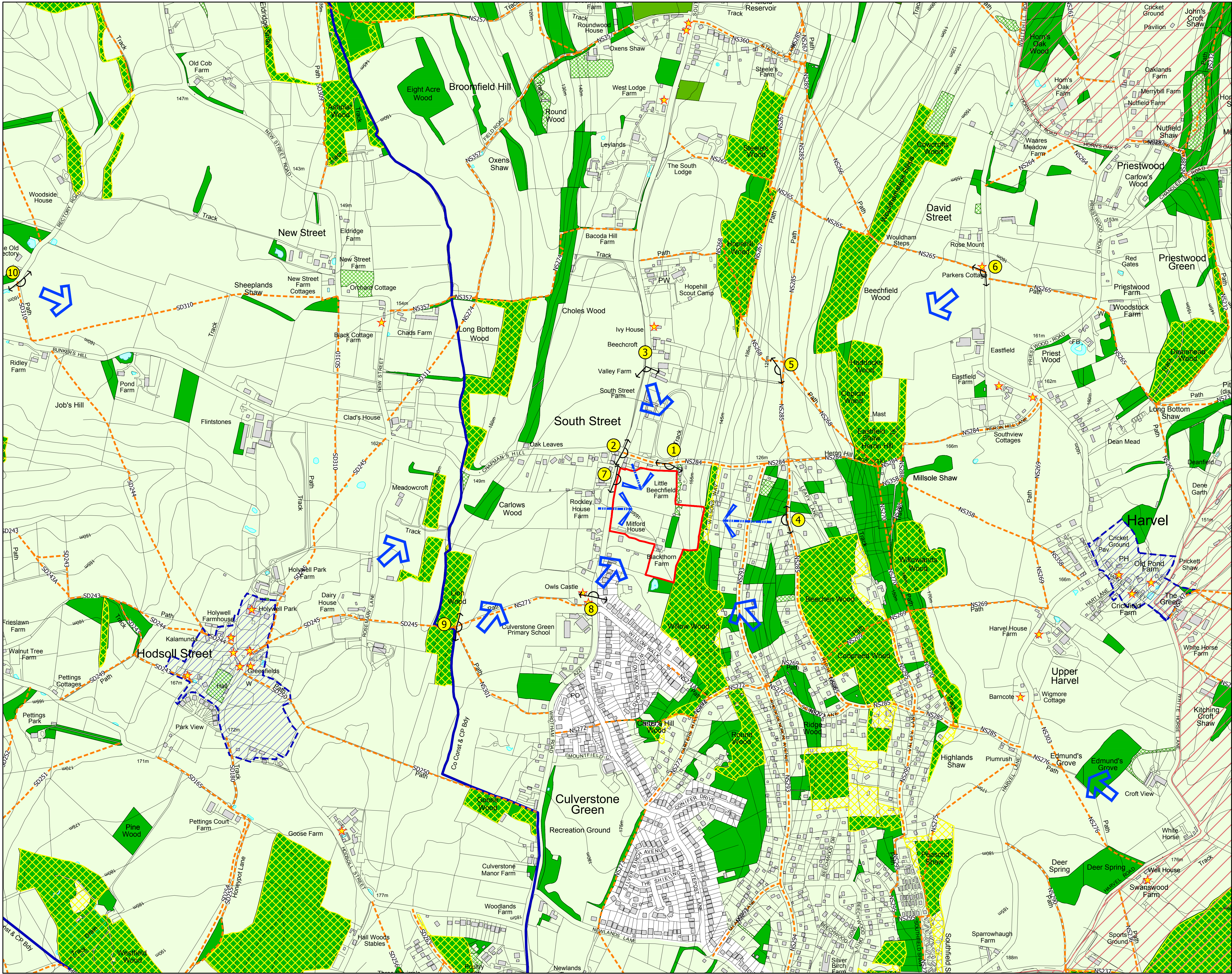
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Revision

Date

Drm

Ckd

Legend

Site Boundary

Local Planning Authority Boundary ^

Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^

Existing Scrub ^

Existing Water Courses and Features ^

Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^

Public Rights of Way *

Listed Buildings ~

Conservation Area **

Ancient Woodland #

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty #

Green Belt ^^

Filtered Views

Truncated Views

Location of Photographic Viewpoints (Site Context Photographs: 1-10)

Sources:

OS Mapping

Natural England GIS Data Set

Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set

Kent County Council PLOW Online Definitive Maps

Department of Transport (DOT) GIS Cycle Network Data

Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data

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FIGURE 5

Project

Land at Blackthorn Farm, Culverstone Green

Drawing Title

Visual Appraisal Plan

Date

Scale

Drawn by

Check by

25.04.2018

1:5,000 @A1
1:10,000 @A3

SS

GM

Project No

Drawing No

Revision

28573

LN-LP-05

-

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The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured

Revision	Date	Drn	Ckd
-	-	-	-

Legend

- Site Boundary
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
- Listed Building ~
- Public Rights of Way *
- Ancient Woodland #
- Existing Woodland Vegetation
- Existing Tree Belt / Hedgerow Vegetation
To be retained and enhanced to soften the appearance and mass of the introduced built forms and contribute positively to the character and quality of the natural environment, ensuring that the development proposals integrate with the surrounding area in line with Policy CS19.
- New Structural Planting
To provide green infrastructure linkages within the Site as well as fragmenting the overall scale and mass of the built form within the Site.
- Low Landscape and Visual Constraints Area
Limited intervisibility and localised visual envelope due to the existing contained provided by the existing vegetation structure, built form, and generally level plateau landform
- Medium Landscape and Visual Constraints Area
Some intervisibility with the elevated landform to the east due to its sloping form and orientation, while also forming part of the setting of this wooded housing character type

Sources:
^ OS Mapping
~ Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set
* Kent County Council ProW Online Definitive Maps
Natural England GIS Data Set

Data collated for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation inserted using the British National Grid and may itself not be accurate. Barton Willmore shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

FIGURE 6

Project
Land at Blackthorn Farm, Culverstone Green

Drawing Title
Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan

Date 23.04.2018	Scale 1:2,000 @A3	Drawn by MN	Check by GM
Project No 28573	Drawing No LN-LP-02	Revision -	



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Revision

Date

Drn

Ckd

Legend

Site Boundary

Revised Green Belt

Area to be released from Green Belt

Area to be allocated for Residential Development

N

FIGURE 7

Project

Land at Blackthorn Farm,
Culverstone Green

Drawing Title

Strategic Green Belt Release Plan

Date

Scale

Drawn by

Check by

25.04.2018

1:5,000 @A3

MN

GM

Project No

Drawing No

Revision

28573

LN-LP-07

-

0

50

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150

200

250m

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SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH A



SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH B



SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH C

BLACKTHORN FARM,
CULVERSTONE

SITE APPRAISAL
PHOTOGRAPHS: A - C

RECOMMENDED VIEWING
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: APR 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28573

Trees alongside Site Boundary

Blackthorn Farm

Ancient woodland alongside Site Boundary



SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH D

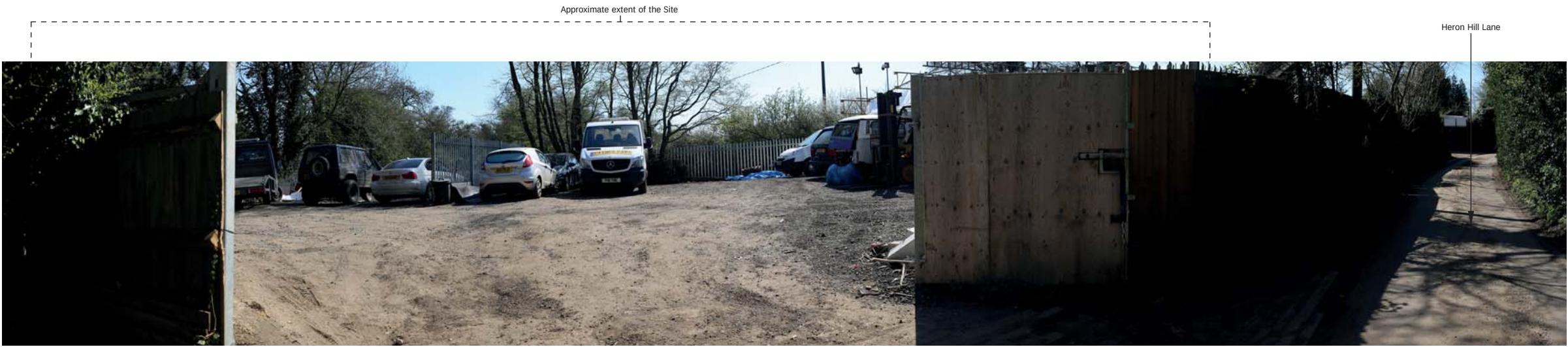
BLACKTHORN FARM,
CULVERSTONE

SITE APPRAISAL
PHOTOGRAPHS: D - E

RECOMMENDED VIEWING
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: APR 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28573



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 1: VIEW SOUTH FROM HERON HILL LANE/ PROW NS284
Distance: 20m
Elevation: 163m AOD



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 2: VIEW EAST FROM A227
Distance: 46m
Elevation: 156m AOD



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 3: VIEW SOUTH FROM A227
Distance: 295m
Elevation: 152.1m AOD

BLACKTHORN FARM,
CULVERSTONE

SITE CONTEXT
PHOTOGRAPHS: 1 - 3

RECOMMENDED VIEWING
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: APR 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28573

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SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 4: VIEW WEST FROM PROW NS285
Distance: 241m
Elevation: 150.5m AOD



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 5: VIEW SOUTH-WEST FROM PROW NS285
Distance: 421m
Elevation: 116m AOD



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 6: VIEW SOUTH-WEST FROM PROW NS265
Distance: 1.07km
Elevation: 158.7m AOD

BLACKTHORN FARM,
CULVERSTONE

SITE CONTEXT
PHOTOGRAPHS: 4 - 6

RECOMMENDED VIEWING
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: APR 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28573



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 7: VIEW EAST FROM A227
Distance: 5m
Elevation: 160.4m AOD



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 8: VIEW NORTH FROM A227
Distance: 164m
Elevation: 168.3m AOD



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 9: VIEW EAST FROM THE CROSSING POINT BETWEEN PROW SD245, PROW NS301 AND PROW NS271
Distance: 0.52km
Elevation: 163.8m AOD

BLACKTHORN FARM,
CULVERSTONE

SITE CONTEXT
PHOTOGRAPHS: 7 - 9

RECOMMENDED VIEWING
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: APR 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28573

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Approximate extent of the Site

PRoW SD310

Ridley Farm

Vegetation alongside Rectory Road



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 10: VIEW SOUTH-EAST FROM RECTORY ROAD

Distance: 1.82km
Elevation: 153.8m AOD

BLACKTHORN FARM,
CULVERSTONE

SITE CONTEXT
PHOTOGRAPHS: 10

RECOMMENDED VIEWING
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: APR 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28573

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TOWN PLANNING
MASTERPLANNING & URBAN DESIGN
ARCHITECTURE
LANDSCAPE PLANNING & DESIGN
PROJECT MANAGEMENT
& COST CONSULTANCY
ENVIRONMENTAL
& SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT
GRAPHIC DESIGN
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
RESEARCH