

Marling Cross Compound, Hever Court Road

Landscape and Visual Technical Note

Highways England

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Quality information

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 AECOM, working as part of Perfect Circle JV Limited, has been commissioned by Highways England to review the potential landscape and visual effects resulting from the proposed satellite compound associated with the ground investigation works being carried out for the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) project. The site is located on Hever Court Road, Gravesend, DA12 5UF, as shown on Figure 1. The proposal includes 10 two-storey modular units measuring up to 6.2m tall in total, 5 single-storey units, a car park, a storage area, new deciduous planting and a 3m tall perimeter fence (hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development'), as shown on Figure 2. Site elevations are shown on Figure 3.
- 1.2 This technical note has been informed by the principles set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA 3). GLVIA 3 explains that the approach should be proportionate to the project under consideration.¹ This technical note is not intended to form a comprehensive appraisal and catalogue of effects but rather provide an overview of the likely landscape and visual effects resulting from the Proposed Development.

2. Site Context

- 2.1 The site, located on the southern edge of Gravesend, covers approximately 0.25ha and comprises an area of hard standing which has recently been used as a lorry park. Woodland, scrub and mature hedgerow vegetation line the periphery of the site, other than a gap towards the southern end of the eastern edge where post and rail fence marks the site boundary.
- 2.2 Hever Court Road provides access into the site from the north. Valley Drive runs along the eastern edge of the site which, heading south, leads to a large roundabout providing access to the A2 located approximately 85m to the south. Two further large roundabouts and a road bridge associated with the A2 junction are located within 240m of the southern edge of the site. Singlewell Infrastructure Maintenance Depot and Channel Tunnel Rail Link are located approximately 300m south west.
- 2.3 Residential properties on MacKenzie Way and Franklin Road are situated 35m to the north and 40m to the east of the site respectively. An area of woodland and scrub is located west of the site.
- 2.4 The site and its immediate surroundings are mostly level, sitting at approximately 70m AOD.
- 2.5 No public rights of way cross the site although an off road cycle route follows Hever Court Road on the northern boundary. The closest footpath is NG17 which runs east from the eastern side of Valley Drive before turning south towards the A2. An interactive map showing local public rights of way is available at: <https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/countrysideaccesscams/standardmap.aspx>
- 2.6 The site is not covered by any landscape designations, nor is it close to any listed buildings or conservation areas. The northern boundary of the Green Belt boundary runs up to the two roundabouts located south of the site. The site itself is not located in the Green Belt. The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located approximately 1.5km to the south east of the site.

¹ GLVIA page 121

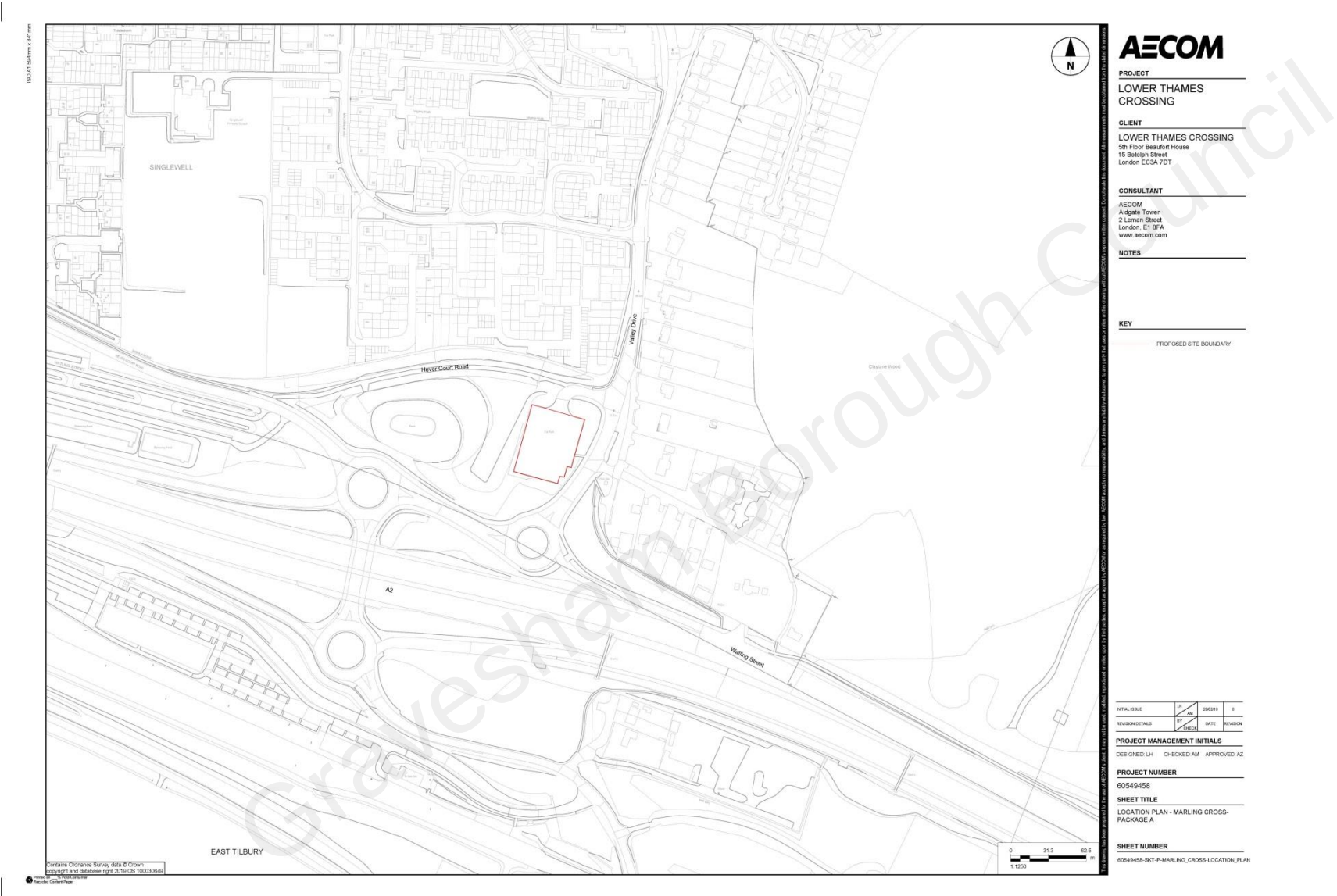


Figure 1: Site Location

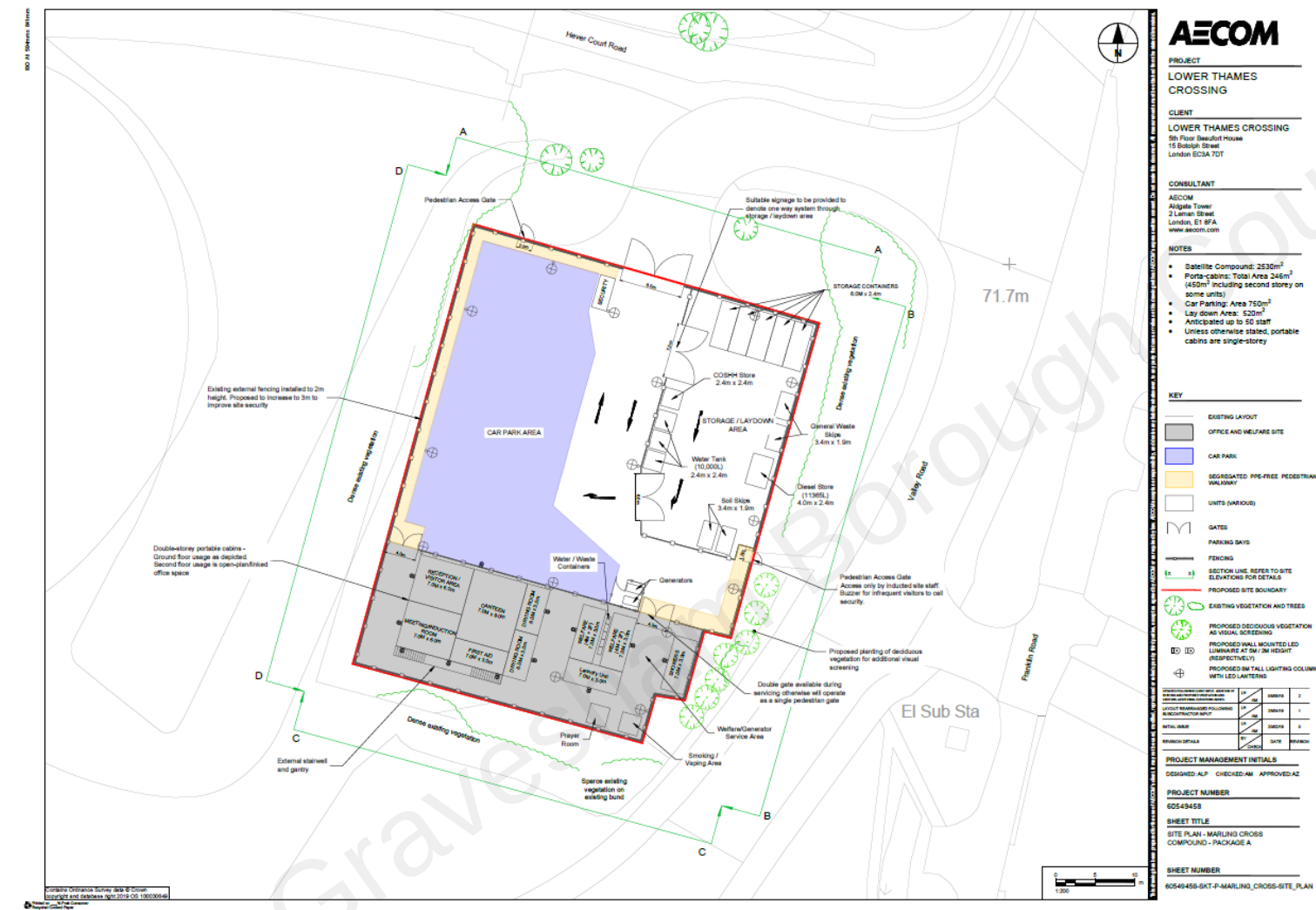


Figure 2: Proposed Site Layout

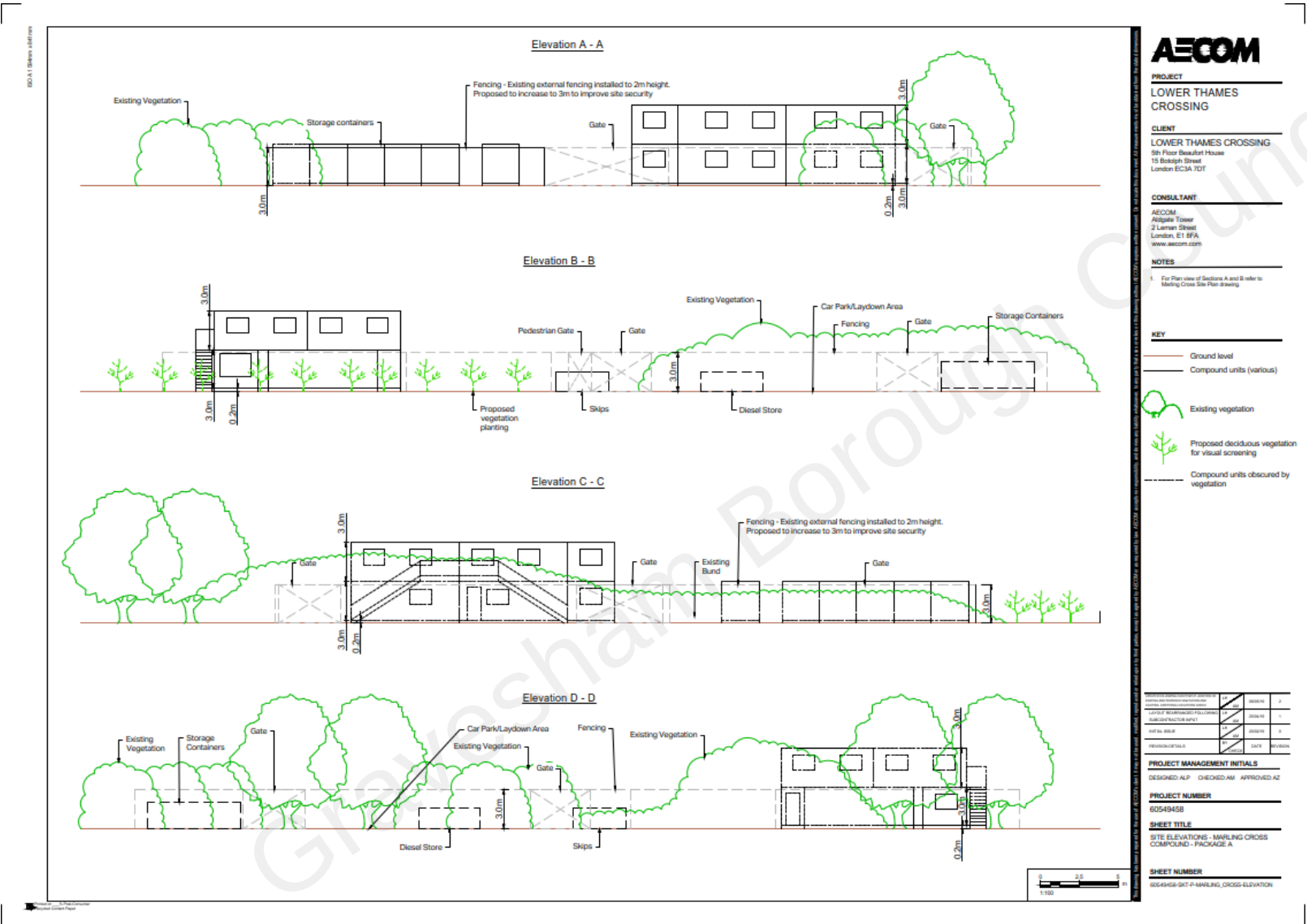


Figure 3: Proposed Site Elevations

3. Relevant Policy

The following policies and supporting documents are considered relevant to landscape and visual matters in respect of the Proposed Development.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019

The NPPF² sets out the environmental role of sustainable development based upon improving biodiversity; core planning principles, including taking account of the character of different areas; and the importance of good design.

National Planning Practice Guidance, 2018

The government's National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)³ supports the NPPF by providing more detailed guidance. Matters of relevance to landscape and visual amenity are found within 'Design' paragraphs 001 and 002, relating to the importance of good design and the contribution of local distinctiveness; and 'Natural Environment' paragraph 001, relating to the role of landscape character assessment in informing planning decisions.

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy

The Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy is the "*main document in the Gravesham Local Plan*".⁴ It includes 18 strategic objectives including:

- SO1: "*Make the efficient use of land by concentrating development on underused, derelict and previously developed land...*"; and
- SO14: "*Ensure that all new development makes a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness of the Borough...*"

The following policies are considered relevant:

- Policy CS12: Green Infrastructure
 - "*The overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced... Proposals will take account of the... Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment and the Cluster Studies where relevant.*"
- Policy CS19: Development and Design Principles
 - "*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...*"

Response to Policy

In response to Gravesham Local Plan's Core Strategy Policy CS12, it is not anticipated that the Proposed Development would have an adverse effect on any valued landscapes. The following section of this technical note will take account of the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment.

In response to Policy CS19, a section of new deciduous planting is proposed to fill the current gap of approximately 25m towards the southern end of the eastern site boundary. This would "*enhance the character of the local built, historic and natural environment, integrate well with the surrounding area*", as stated in the policy. Whilst such planting would not establish in time to screen westerly views of the Proposed Development, it would outlast the temporary use of the site thereby providing a long term improvement to the character of the local landscape.

²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779764/NPPF_Feb_2019_web.pdf

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

⁴ <https://www.gravesham.gov.uk/home/planning-and-building/local-plan/gravesham-local-plan-core-strategy>

4. Baseline Conditions

Published Landscape Character Assessments

The site is covered by National Character Area 113 North Kent Plain.⁵ The National Character Assessment is considered to have limited value with respect to informing the baseline of the Proposed Development given its scale in comparison to the site.

At the local level, the site covered by the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment⁶ and is located on the northern edge of the Gravesend Southern Fringes Landscape Character Area (LCA). The LCA is recorded as being “sandwiched between the urban edge and the realigned A2 trunk road and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL)” and having the following key characteristics:

- “Dominant settlement on urban edge of Gravesend”;
- “Limited tree cover mostly consisting of small clumps of non-native tree material...”;
- “Wire fence lines and gappy native hedgerows”;
- “The A2 is a major busy road that cuts across the length of the character area”; and
- “Landscape dominated by large roads, Channel Tunnel Rail Link and associated infrastructure”.

Due to the incoherent pattern of elements that make up the LCA, the many visual detractors and the dominance of infrastructure, the condition of the LCA is recorded as Poor.

On account of the weak sense of place, the influence of infrastructure and development and the high visibility of the LCA, its sensitivity is recorded as Moderate.

The assessment concludes that the aim for the area should be to “Restore and Create” and sets out six guidelines including:

- “Consider ways to integrate new and existing development into the landscape using traditional landscape elements”; and
- “Improve design standards for new development within the area and consider ways to reduce impact of visual detractors and infrastructure.”

Visual baseline

The following visual receptors have been identified who have views of the site. A brief description of their current relationship to the site is recorded below:

- Residents of MacKenzie Way
 - Development on MacKenzie Way is dense and views are typically focussed inward and channelled along the residential streets. Intervening features, including brick walls on curtilage boundaries and mature trees, are located between the site and the residential properties. Views toward the site are therefore substantially screened and very limited.
- Residents of Valley Drive
 - Properties on Valley Drive face east and west. As the site is located to the south west of the properties, views are oblique and very limited. Only residents at the southern end of Valley Drive would experience any views of the site. Such views are likely to be glimpsed from gable end upper storey windows and filtered by intervening vegetation.
- Residents of Franklin Road
 - Houses located on Franklin Road face toward the site but are set back from Franklin Road beyond large driveways. Intervening features including brick walls on curtilage boundaries and mature trees

⁵ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/2900242?category=587130>

⁶ http://selfservice.gravesham.gov.uk:8081/webdocs/Environment%20and%20Planning/GLP/HER-01_Gravesham_Landscape_Character_Assessment_May_2009.pdf?_ga=2.233395358.1077403465.1554972156-1193341557.1554972156

filter views toward the site. Existing views include traffic on Valley Drive in the foreground and may include glimpses of vehicles parked within the site.

- Recreational receptors walking on footpath NG17
 - People walking westward on footpath NG17 currently arrive on Valley Drive opposite the site's eastern boundary. From this location, people experience views of Valley Drive and associated traffic. The lack of vegetation on the southern portion of the site's eastern boundary affords views into the site and therefore of vehicles parked on the existing hard standing.
- Recreational receptors cycling on the off-road cycle route following Hever Court Road, north of the site
 - People cycling past the site currently experience fleeting, glimpsed, oblique views into the site, which would typically include vehicles parked on hard standing. Such views may be filtered by vegetation on the site's northern boundary.
- Road users of Valley Drive
 - People driving along Valley Drive would not typically be focused on the view. The site is located at an oblique angle to the direction of travel. Any views of the site would typically comprise fleeting, filtered views of parked vehicles and hardstanding.

5. Potential Effects of the Proposed Development

Landscape

The Proposed Development would cover the same extent of land as has previously been used as a lorry park. The Proposed Development would be temporary, lasting up to 2 years, and landscape effects would be reversible. No existing landscape features are proposed to be removed. It is therefore expected that the Proposed Development would not cause any perceptible change to the character of the local landscape and therefore the effect of the Proposed Development would be negligible.

Visual

Residents of MacKenzie Way and Valley Drive would likely experience very little or no change as a result of the Proposed Development given the orientation of houses and intervening vegetation. Should any change be experienced, visibility would be limited to occasional glimpses and, given the similar nature of the Proposed Development to the existing site use; it is unlikely that there would be any deterioration to the receptor's experience of the view.

Residents of Franklin Road and recreational receptors walking on footpath NG17 would be likely to experience some change in their view. However, Franklin Road and associated traffic would continue to occupy the foreground of the view. The taller elements of the Proposed Development would be located at the southern end of the site and therefore at an acute angle to the orientation of the houses. The lower elements of the Proposed Development, located in the northern section of the site and therefore in line with the front of the properties, would likely be heavily screened by existing vegetation. Given that the Proposed Development would be temporary, reversible and similar in nature to the existing site use, it is unlikely that there would be any deterioration to the receptor's experience of the view. Once the proposed mitigation planting suggested in section 3 is established, the Proposed Development would be expected to result in a long term improvement for westerly views.

Recreational receptors cycling on the off road cycle route following Hever Court Road and road users travelling on Valley Drive would experience only fleeting views of the Proposed Development. Given the similar nature of the Proposed Development to the existing site use, it is unlikely that there would be any deterioration to the receptor's experience of the view.

6. Summary

The Proposed Development is similar in nature to the existing transient use of the site and is not likely to result in any noticeable change to the landscape character of the local area. It would not exceed the extent of land recently occupied as a lorry park and no existing landscape features would be lost.

The site is well screened by existing vegetation such that very few visual receptors would notice any change in views. Any change that would be experienced would be unlikely to cause deterioration in receptor's experience of the view, given the similar nature of the Proposed Development to the existing use of the site.

All effects would be temporary and reversible.

A section of planting measuring approximately 25m is proposed in the southern portion of the eastern boundary to fill an existing gap. This planting is anticipated to bring long term improvement to the local landscape character and in westerly views toward the site.

Gravesham Borough Council

