

Landscape and Visual Impact and Green Belt Appraisal

Land West of Norwood Lane, Meopham

August 2025

Turley

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal and Green Belt Appraisal (referred to as the LVIA) for Land at Norwood Lane, Meopham has been prepared by Turley Landscape and VIA on behalf of Taylor Wimpey to assess the effect of the outline planning application proposal for a new residential development. The description of development is described within the Planning Statement by Turley.
- 1.2 For the purpose of this report the site is referred to as the 'Site' and the application proposal is referred to as the 'Proposed Development'. The report has been undertaken to ascertain the likely effect of the Proposed Development on landscape and visual receptors and to assess whether the Site meets the criteria of 'grey belt' land as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024) and supporting Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (February 2025 update). It has been prepared by chartered landscape architects from Turley Landscape and VIA.
- 1.3 The LVIA is set out in nine sections. Section two provides a summary of the methodology used for the appraisal and section three summarises the relevant planning policy context. The fourth and fifth sections discuss the baseline situation of the Application Site and the surrounding area in terms of 'landscape character', 'landscape elements' and 'visual amenity'. The sixth section provides a summary of the Proposed Development (including proposed landscape mitigation measures) and an appraisal of the effects of the Proposed Scheme on the identified baseline situation is provided in section seven. Section eight is an assessment of the Site's contribution to the Green Belt and whether it can be defined as grey belt land. Finally, in section nine, a summary of the appraisal and conclusions is provided.
- 1.4 The LVIA is supported by a series of appendices that can be found at the end of this document. **Appendix 1** provides figures and photos that support the appraisal; **Appendix 2** sets out our LVIA methodology; and **Appendix 3** provides an extract from the Planning Practice Guidance on Green Belt Assessment (published February 2025).
- 1.5 The LVIA should be also read in conjunction with the following information produced to support the planning application, on which this assessment is based:
 - Illustrative Masterplan, Parameter Plans and Design & Access Statement, prepared by ECE Architects;
 - Access Plan and Transport Assessment, by i-Transport;
 - Cultural Heritage Desk Based Assessment, by RPS;
 - Ecology Survey and Report, by Aspect Ecology;
 - Tree Survey & Report, by Keen Consulting; and,
 - The Landscape Strategy, by Turley Landscape Design.

2. Appraisal Methodology

- 2.1 The methodology and approach adopted in undertaking this appraisal uses structured, informed and reasoned professional judgement taking into account a combination of quantitative and qualitative factors.

Application Site Location and Description

- 2.2 The Site is located on the eastern edge of Hook Green which forms part of the settlement of Meopham. The Site Boundary follows Green Lane to the south, Norwood Lane to the east, a property accessed off Norwood Lane to the north, and the houses on Tradescant Drive, Mulberry Close, Lilac Place and Dormers Drive to the west.
- 2.3 The location of the Site and its relationship with Camer Park Country Park and the surrounding settlements of Hook Green, Sole Street and the hamlet of Camer is shown on **Figure 2.1** below.



Figure 2.1: Application Site Location

- 2.4 The Site itself comprises a gently sloping arable field and small woodland block (Churchway Wood). Its boundaries are defined by Norwood Lane to the east, Green Lane/Camer Road to the south and residential development to the west and north. A public footpath (ref NS250) crosses the Site.

Surveys

- 2.5 A preliminary desk study was undertaken to establish the physical components of the Appraisal Site and its surroundings along with potential visual receptors. Ordnance Survey (OS) maps and aerial photography were utilised to identify these features. A field study was undertaken by a chartered landscape architect from Turley Landscape and VIA in October 2024 and a further site visit was made in March 2025 to capture winter photography. The visibility during both visits was good. Features of the Appraisal Site and the surrounding area were identified and verified along with the visual receptors previously established. The field study also involved travelling through parts of the study area and producing a working photographic record of key views and features.

Methodology

Landscape and Visual Appraisal Methodology

- 2.6 The landscape and visual appraisal is carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (2013)¹; An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (2014)²; the Landscape Character Assessment: Technical Information Note 08/2015 (2016)³; and, Visual Representation of Development Proposals (2019)⁴. The full LVIA methodology is set out in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.7 In summary, the approach is to establish the baseline condition of the existing landscape character and visual receptors of the Site and its surroundings. The Proposed Development is then discussed and the potential degree of 'effect' it will have on the identified landscape and visual receptors is predicted. Consideration is then given to the residual effect of the Proposed Development once proposed landscape planting has matured.
- 2.8 In accordance with best practice, the baseline landscape and visual appraisal was commenced at an early stage in the scheme development process and was used to inform the proposals. This included identification of a series of landscape design principles to mitigate potential landscape and visual effects of the proposals and deliver landscape enhancements. These principles have been accommodated within the site layout and landscape design proposals.

Green and Grey Belt Appraisal Methodology

- 2.9 The revised NPPF (December 2024) introduced a new sub-type of Green Belt which is referred to as 'grey belt' land and is defined as:

'land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas

¹ The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (Third Edition 2013) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment*

² Natural England (2014) *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*

³ The Landscape Institute (2016) *Landscape Character Assessment: Technical Information Note 08/2015*

⁴ Landscape Institute (2019) *Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Information Note 06/19*

or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.'

- 2.10 Supporting guidance on the methodology and criteria to be used when undertaking green belt assessments and identifying grey belt land was provided in a Planning Practice Guidance update on Green Belt Assessment (February 2025). Section eight of this report provides an assessment of the Site against the confirmed definition of grey belt set out in the December 2024 NPPF and uses the criteria and methodology set out in the new Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). It has been informed by a desktop appraisal of relevant mapping data, background documents and a site visit.
- 2.11 The grey belt assessment considers whether the land makes a '*strong contribution*' to any of Green Belt purposes: a) – restricting urban sprawl; b) – preventing towns from merging; or d) preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. The assessment has been informed by the PPG which provides guidance on the illustrative features that should be considered when making judgements on the level of contribution for each of these purposes. These are included in **Appendix 3** to this report. The assessment also considers whether applying the policies relating to the areas or assets of particular importance identified in footnote 7 to paragraph 11 of the NPPF could potentially provide a '*strong reason for refusing or restricting development on the Site*'.
- 2.12 A final, further stage of assessment was then undertaken to assist in judging whether the Proposed Development could be regarded as 'not inappropriate' development in the Green Belt in the context of NPPF paragraphs 155a and 156c. This comprised firstly, an assessment of whether development of the Site would '*fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan*⁵' and secondly, whether the development proposals could make appropriate green space improvements to land within the Green Belt.

Consultations

- 2.13 A pre-application submission for the proposed scheme was made to Gravesham Borough Council on 30th May 2025. This included summary information on the landscape and visual baseline conditions and the proposed representative viewpoints to be covered within the LVIA. No comments on these were raised during the pre-application meeting and at the time of writing of this LVIA, a written response from the council was still awaited.
- 2.14 The landscape officer at Kent Downs National Landscape was also consulted in July 2025⁶ with details of the proposed development, proposed landscape mitigation measures and proposed representative viewpoints to be included in the LVIA. A response was received in August 2025⁷ stating that they don't have capacity to provide a pre-application service but noting the following:

'We note and welcome reference to relevant Kent Downs NL guidance documents in your email. The changes introduced to the CroW Act S85 (Protected Landscape Duty) will be

⁵ NPPF para 155a

⁶ Email dated 29th July 2025

⁷ Email from Katie Miller dated 8th August 2025

applicable by GBC in considering any application and you may wish to consider how this can be addressed. Guidance on the new duty can be found [here](#)'.

3. Planning Policy and Designations

Summary of Planning Policy Context

- 3.1 The national and local planning policy context of the Site of relevance to landscape and visual matters is summarised below. Further detail in relation to planning policy is set out in the Planning Statement.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW)

- 3.2 The Site lies adjacent to the Kent Downs National Landscape (formerly AONB). National Landscapes are protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act). Under section 85 of this Act, local authorities have a statutory duty *“In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land”* and relevant authorities *“must seek to further⁸”* the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape. This duty extends to land outside the designation (i.e. within its setting) insofar as it may affect land within the National Landscape where its landscape character and quality affects the natural beauty of the National Landscape. Guidance on complying with this duty is set out by DEFRA in: ‘Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes’ (16th December 2024)⁹.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024)

- 3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced in March 2012 and provided a full statement of the Government’s planning policies. A revision to the NPPF was adopted by MHCLG in July 2018, with further revisions in February 2019 and December 2024.
- 3.4 The NPPF sets out a hierarchical approach to landscape protection. Paragraph 187 states that the planning system should *‘contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment’* by a number of things including:
- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...(in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside...*
- 3.5 No specific guidance is provided within the NPPF on what constitutes a ‘valued landscape’ but paragraph 188 states that *‘Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of*

⁸ This general duty was introduced by section 254(6)(a) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act in December 2023 and replaced the previous version of section 85 CROW 2000 which imposed a duty to *“have regard to”* that statutory purpose.

⁹ [Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-relevant-authorities-on-seeking-to-further-the-purposes-of-protected-landscapes)

habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries’.

- 3.6 Paragraph 189 states that the highest status of protection should be afforded to National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscapes). The setting of these designated areas is not protected but paragraph 189 goes on to state that *‘the scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.’*
- 3.7 The Site is not covered by a statutory landscape designation and Gravesham do not have local landscape designations. However, part of the southern boundary of the Site adjoins the northern boundary of the Kent Downs National Landscape and the Site is considered to lie within part of its setting.

National Planning Practice Guidance

- 3.8 National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) has been issued by the Government as a web based resource. This is intended to provide more detailed guidance and information with regard to the implementation of national policy set out in the NPPF. Paragraph 037 (ID: 8-037-20190721) supports the use of Landscape Character Assessment as a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It also supports the use of LVA/LVIAs to demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on a landscape.
- 3.9 In the Design guidance category of the PPG, (Paragraph 001 Reference ID: 26-001-20191001) the guidance supports paragraph 130 of the NPPF which states that ‘permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents’. It also refers to the accompanying National Design Guide which sets out ten characteristics for a well-designed place:
- Context – enhances the surroundings.
 - Identity – attractive and distinctive.
 - Built form – a coherent pattern of development.
 - Movement – accessible and easy to move around.
 - Nature – enhanced and optimised.
 - Public spaces – safe, social and inclusive.
 - Uses – mixed and integrated.
 - Homes and buildings – functional, healthy and sustainable.
 - Resources – efficient and resilient.

- Lifespan – made to last.

- 3.10 Further guidance on development within the setting of National Parks and AONBs is set out in paragraph 042 (Reference ID: 8-042-20190721). Recognising that land within the setting of these areas often makes an important contribution to maintaining their natural beauty and as a result, *'development within the settings of these areas will therefore need sensitive handling that takes these potential impacts into account'*.
- 3.11 Detailed guidance on Green Belt Assessment is set out in updated Planning Practice Guidance (published February 2025).

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (September 2014)

- 3.12 The Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted by Gravesham Borough Council in September 2014. Policies from this which are of relevance to this appraisal are summarised below:
- 3.13 Strategic Objective SO8 seeks to preserve the openness of the Green Belt, maintain its national and local planning purposes and protect it from inappropriate development.
- 3.14 Strategic Objective SO9 aims to conserve and enhance the diverse rural landscape within the borough, including the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting.
- 3.15 Strategic Objective SO13 aims to protect and enhance the Borough's heritage assets and historic environment
- 3.16 Strategic Objective SO14 aims to ensure that all new development makes a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness of the borough, minimising the risk of crime, responding to climate change, and integrating it into the existing built, historic and natural environment.
- 3.17 Policy CS02 relates to the Scale and Distribution of Development. It notes 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'*.
- 3.18 Policy CS12 relates to Green Infrastructure. It covers requirements to deliver green infrastructure, protect biodiversity and to conserve, restore and enhance the overall landscape character and valued landscapes.
- 3.19 Policy CS19 is concerned with Development and Design Principles; it states that new development should 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.
- 3.20 Policy CS20 is concerned with heritage and the historic environment and states that the Council will accord a high priority towards the preservation, protection and enhancement of its heritage and historic environment as a non-renewable resource,

which is central to the regeneration of the area and the reinforcement of a sense of place.

Designations

3.21 The Site is not covered by any landscape related statutory designations, however it falls in close proximity to a number of other landscape designations and heritage assets as summarised below and illustrated on **Figure 2 of Appendix 1**. Detailed information relating to the significance of the identified heritage assets and the contribution the Site makes to this significance is set out in the Cultural Heritage Desk Based Assessment by RPS Group.

- The boundary of the **Kent Downs National Landscape** follows the south side of Camer Road, c. 7m from the southern boundary of the Site.
- The deciduous woodland of Churchyard Wood is identified on the Natural England Priority Habitats Inventory as a '**habitat of principal importance**'
- **Camer Park Country Park** lies to the south-east of the Site beyond a cluster of buildings which form the hamlet of Camer.
- **Listed Buildings** in the vicinity of the Site include:
 - Bailiff's House (Grade II) and Camer House (Grade II) - c. 75m and c.200m to the east of the south-eastern corner of the Site.
 - Norwood Farmhouse (Grade II) – c. 250m north of the Site
- **Hook Green Conservation Area** (focussed along Wrotham Road) is c. 180m west of the Site

4. Baseline Landscape Appraisal

4.1 The baseline landscape appraisal comprises the following five parts:

- review of the relevant landscape character assessments (at national, AONB, county and district level) to understand the landscape character context of the Application Site.
- assessment as to whether the Application Site's landscape elements reflect and contribute to the characteristics of the recognised landscape character types or areas within the AONB or the district level landscape character assessment.
- analysis of the local landscape elements and characteristics of the Application Site and its immediate context; and,
- identification of key landscape receptors against which the impact of the proposals should be assessed.

Landscape Character Context

4.2 The key landscape character assessments of relevance to the Site and immediate context were identified as:

- National level: National Character Area (NCA) Profiles prepared by Natural England;
- The Landscape Assessment of Kent (2004);
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009);
- Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (2016);
- Design for Gravesham Design Code (2024);
- The Kent Downs Landscape Character Assessment 2020 (reviewed and published 2023);
- The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2021-2026;
- The Kent Downs Setting Position Statement (2018, updated 2022);
- Kent Downs AONB Guidance on the Selection and use of Colour in Development (2019); and,
- The Kent Downs Landscape Design Guide.

4.3 The above studies were reviewed as part of the baseline desktop appraisal and were used to inform the development proposals and Landscape Strategy for the Site. Key findings of the desktop appraisal are set out below including the relevant landscape character areas (LCAs) within the Study Area.

National Level Character Assessment

4.4 At a national level, the NCA Profiles prepared by Natural England, provide a high level overview of landscape character in England. Within this, the Site is centrally placed in NCA119: North Downs. The Summary of NCA: North Downs describes the area 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. The settlement pattern is characterised by traditional small, nucleated villages, scattered farms and large houses with timber framing, flint walls and Wealden brick detailing. Twisting sunken lanes, often aligned*

along ancient drove roads, cut across the scarp and are a feature of much of the dip slope. The Kent Downs and Surrey Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty designations are testament to the scenic qualities and natural beauty of the area’.

- 4.5 The National Character Assessment provides the strategic framework for the County and District level assessments which are discussed below.

The Landscape Assessment of Kent (2004)

- 4.6 An analysis of landscape character at county level is provided in the Landscape Assessment of Kent (2004). This is now over twenty years old and significantly out of date. However, it provides some strategic landscape character context and a summary of key points of relevance to this appraisal is provided below.
- 4.7 Within the County Landscape Character Assessment, the Site is located within Landscape Character Area (LCA): Ash Downs and is adjacent to the Luddesdown West Kent Downs LCA to the east, as illustrated on **Figure 4.1**, below:

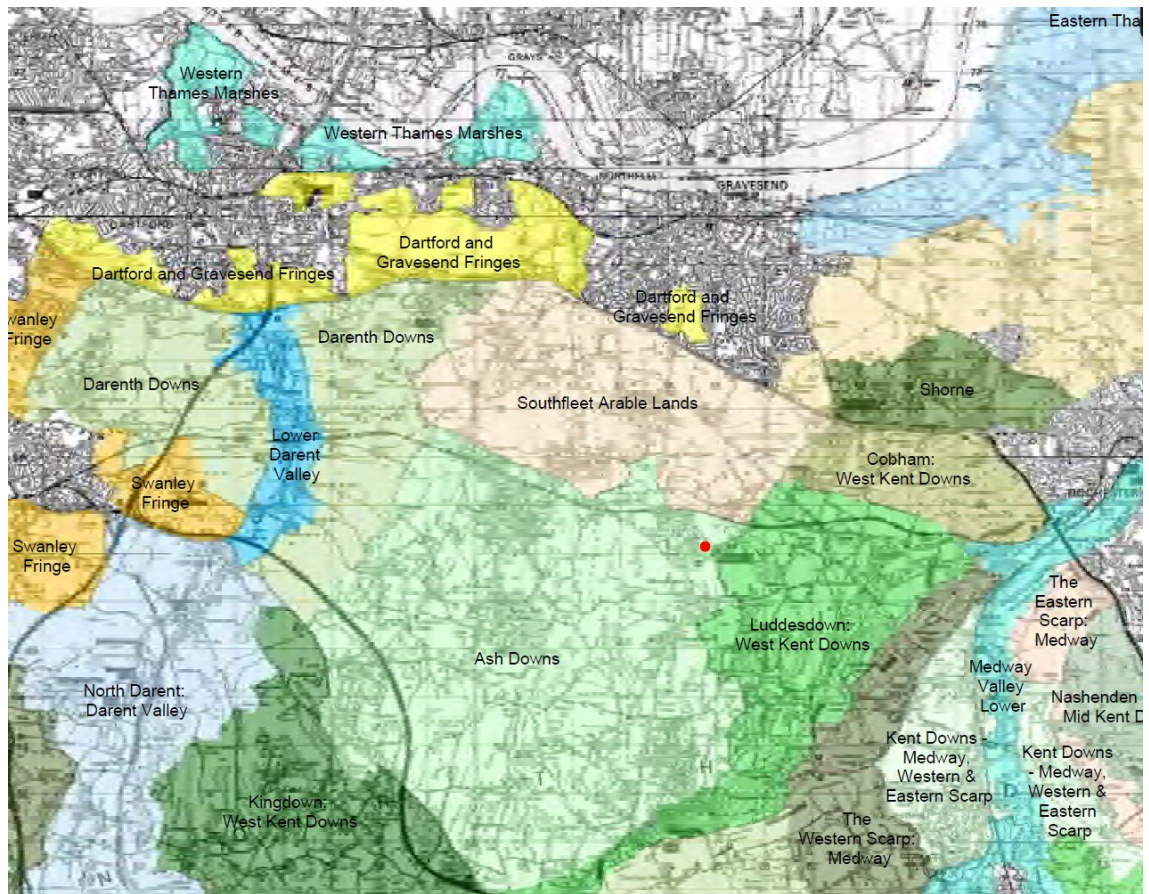


Figure 4.1: Extract from The Landscape Assessment of Kent (2004): *broad location of Site indicated by red dot*

- 4.8 The identified key characteristics are as follows, those considered to be reflective of the characteristics of the Site have been underlined:
- *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.
 - A winding network of narrow, historic lanes often eroded by traffic
- 4.9 The condition of the LCA is described by the Assessment as follows: *'The pattern of landscape elements is coherent and in most cases reflects the underlying landform. Some visual detractors such as commercial buildings and unsympathetic land uses intrude into some of the views. The high ecological value of the area in general, supported by the wooded network on ridges and shaws, is reduced by the intensity of arable cultivations on the plateau. 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. Overall, the area is considered to be in good condition'.*
- 4.10 The sensitivity of this LCA is considered, by the Assessment, to be High with the following rationale provided: *'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'.*
- 4.11 The Landscape Actions guidance section of the landscape character assessment identifies the following key positive features within the Ash Downs that contribute to the character of the area and that should be conserved and enhanced:
- *Conserve the small scale of the agricultural use of the valley slopes, retaining hedged enclosure and applying long-term management plans for this purpose.*
 - *Conserve the wooded edge to the arable plateau which encloses the landscape and contains the wider views.*
 - *Conserve and enhance the use of vernacular materials and the scale of historic built form.*
 - *Resist the intrusion of large-scale buildings or groups of buildings into the view.*
 - *Conserve the settlement pattern with isolated, small villages on valley bottoms and hamlets on the plateau.*
 - *Conserve the dominance of the broadleaf woodland in the landscape.*

Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

- 4.12 The Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment was commissioned by Gravesham Borough Council to support landscape and other planning policies. Within this, the Site is located in the Meopham Downs landscape character area.

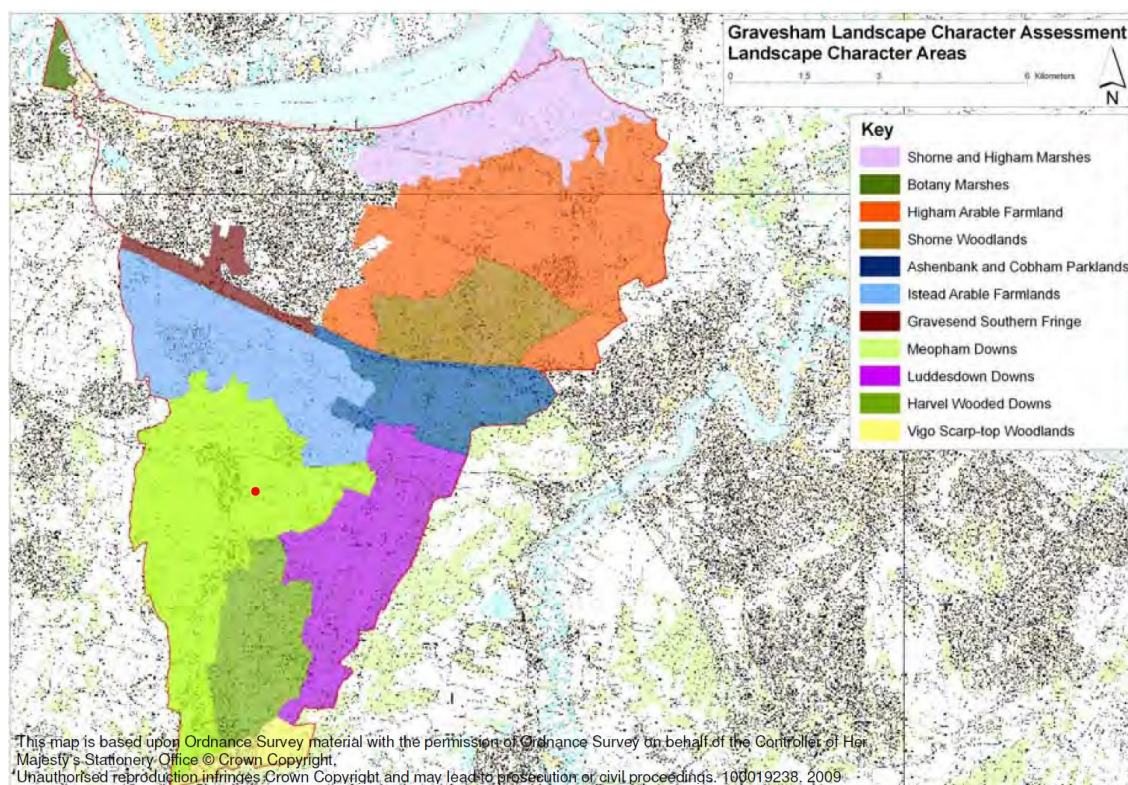


Figure 4.2: Extract from the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009): broad location of Site indicated by red dot

4.13 The key characteristics identified for Meopham Downs LCA are as follows; those considered reflective of the characteristics of the Site have been underlined:

- *Meopham Downs is a large character area, stretching from the centre to the south of Gravesham Borough along the eastern edge of Sevenoaks District.*
- *The majority of the geology comprises Upper Chalk and a wide band of Clay with Flint, stretching from north to south. An area of Blackheath / Oldhaven Beds sits beneath the large village of Meopham and an area of Claygate Beds sits west of the neighbouring village Meopham Green. Soils across the character area are silty, with loam to clay across high areas.*
- *The topography is gently undulating with clear views across the immediate landscape and occasional wider views from the main road towards the residential settlements of Istead Rise and New Barn.*
- *The dominant land use is agricultural, with a mixture of grazed pasture and arable use. Small clumps of woodland, neglected orchards and commercial horticulture exist in parts. There is a presence of horse related activity scattered throughout the landscape.*
- *Field shape and size differs, with a neat pattern of small square fields in the south and broader irregular shaped fields to the north. Field boundaries are distinctly formed by native hedgerows, with hedgerow trees.*

- *The large village of Meopham is located to the north of the area, with Meopham Green located at the centre of the area and Culverstone Green to the far south. Traditional architecture surrounds village greens in both Meopham and Meopham Green, providing a strong sense of place and local vernacular.*
- *All three settlements comprise dense clusters of buildings that have formed along the A227 that runs from north to south and links all three villages. In addition the small recent settlement of South Street is located to the north-east.*
- *Small traditional clusters of isolated farmsteads can be found to the east and west. Small traditional Victorian red brick architecture and elements of flint are common, reflecting their locality within the Kent landscape.*
- *Meopham Windmill, located along Wrotham Road, provides a unique and traditional attraction within the area. Overhead wires run across the landscape near the small settlement of Henley Street.*
- *The A227 is the area's largest highway and acts as a busy link between the north and south. Narrower, winding, hedge lined roads and lanes run east and west from the A227 into the adjacent landscape.*

4.14 The study identified the landscape sensitivity of Meopham Downs as **Moderate**. It states that the key characteristic elements are distinct and thereby provide coherency and a strong sense of place. The study notes that woodland is restricted to small clumps and the hedgerow field boundaries are historic and distinct. The settlement of Meopham and Meopham Green have distinct traditional centres and traditional local vernacular architecture can be found across the LCA. The study also notes '*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*'.

4.15 The Landscape Actions guidance section of the landscape character assessment identifies the following key positive features within the Meopham Downs that contribute to the character of the area and that should be conserved and enhanced:

- *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.*
- *Conserve and reinforce agricultural land use.*

Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (2016)

4.16 The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment is the most recent published landscape assessment relevant to the Site. It was undertaken by Land Use Consultants and focuses on the main settlements and a search area surrounding. It also includes areas of development within and adjoining Gravesham Borough. The study splits the landscape surrounding the settlements into Landscape Character Parcels, of which the Site is located within a combined parcel: HG2 / SS4. It is adjacent to the village of Hook Green and joins parcels HG1 And SS1 to the north, and HG3 to the south.

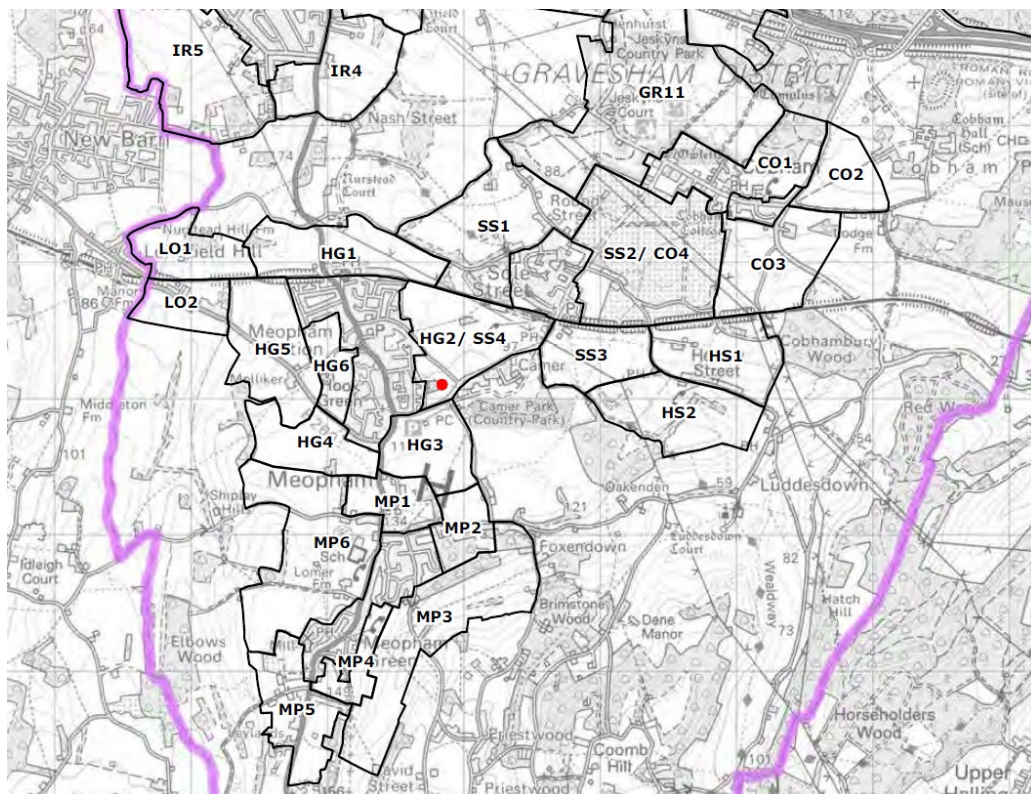


Figure 4.3: Extract from the Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study: approximate location of Site marked with red dot

- 4.17 The Study notes that ‘Parcel SS4 encompasses a section of the 500m zone around Hook Green and SS2 encompasses a section of the 500m zone surrounding Sole Street. Sensitivity to development extending out from Hook Green and Sole Street is considered separately under the assessments for those settlements (as parcels HG2 and SS4 respectively)’. This LVIA therefore focuses on a review of Parcel HG2.
- 4.18 HG2 is defined within the Study as an area measuring 56 hectares consisting of one large, arable field to the north/east of Norwood Lane, a smaller hedged area between the edge

of Hook Green and the arable field, and a smaller arable field to the south/west of Norwood Lane (the Site). Key points made by the Study, with relevance to the Site are:

- **Physical and Natural Character** - *There is no particular sensitivity associated with the landform within the parcel, which is consistent with the north-south sloping terrain on which the existing Hook Green settlement is located, but the three shaws, although relatively small, are prominent landscape features.*
- **Settlement form and edge** - *The eastern side of Hook Green is fairly linear in form, consisting mostly of post-war estate development. There is little ribbon development along Norwood Lane beyond the former farmstead of Norwood...'*
- **Settlement setting** - *The relative openness of Hook Green's defined settlement boundary means that the fields making up this parcel contribute to the setting of the settlement. The shaws, views to Camer Park and the wooded backdrop further to the east make this a distinctly rural setting, although in terms of settlement separation it is woodland adjacent to Sole Street that prevents intervisibility with Hook Green. The parcel also forms part of the setting for dwellings within the former Camer Park estate.*
- **Views** - *The parcel is open to residential views from Hook Green and Camer, the latter being located within the AONB. The public parkland does not overlook the parcel, but a public footpath links central Hook Green to Camer Road, providing access to the Park. A public footpath also runs east-west through the parcel, connecting Hook Green to Sole Street via a footbridge across the railway line. There are clear views into the area from Norwood Lane, Green Lane and Camer Road, and a linear view over the north-western edge of the parcel towards Thames-side industry and infrastructure.*
- **Perceptual qualities** - *The defined settlement edge is evident, trains are audible and also briefly visible where there is a lack of screening on the north-western edge of parcel, and the pylons are a detracting feature, but the character of the parcel is still rural, with trees forming much of the visual backdrop on all sides.*
- **Cultural or historical value** - *There are no known cultural or historic associations within the parcel itself, but the open, undeveloped space between Hook Green and Camer contributes to the historic, rural character of the Camer Park estate, in which several Grade II listed buildings have views in this direction. Norwood Farmhouse is also Grade II listed, but its setting is largely compromised by adjacent 20th century development.*

4.19 The assessment summarises the key sensitivities to development as:

- *An open, rural character, to which the shaws make a significant contribution, which contributes to the setting of Hook Green but more importantly to the estate hamlet of Camer, set within the Kent Downs AONB*
- *Contribution to separation of Sole Street from Hook Green and Camer Park.*
- *Clear views from public footpaths and local roads crossing and bounding the parcel*

- 4.20 Parcel HG2 is identified as having Medium-High sensitivity and **Medium capacity** for development when considering a small development scenario¹⁰. The assessment notes: *‘Extensive development in this parcel would compromise its open rural character and its positive contribution to the setting of the AONB settlement of Camer and to Hook Green. This would therefore be likely to result in significant adverse landscape effects. However, the edge of Hook Green is not distinctly separated from its rural setting, other than in the south-western corner adjacent to Churchway Wood, so limited, incremental development to the north of the footpath between Norwood Lane and Sole Street which preserved the shaws within a sizeable open setting would be unlikely to have a significant impact on rural character, settlement form or setting, or key views. Hedgerow planting, perhaps with some wider woodland block planting in one or two places, could be used to define and soften an extended settlement edge’.*
- 4.21 Within the Hook Green area, Parcel HG2 (which the Site falls within) is deemed (equally with Parcel HG6) to have the greatest capacity for small-scale development, as illustrated on **Figure 4.4**, below.

Summary of Landscape Capacity for Small-Scale Development

Settlement											
Cobham	CO1	CO2	CO3	CO4							
Culverstone Green	CG1	CG2	CG3	CG4							
Gravesend & Northfleet	GR1	GR2	GR3	GR4	GR5	GR6	GR7	GR8	GR9	GR10	GR11
Harvel	HA1	HA2	HA3	HA4							
Henley Street	HS1	HS2									
Hook Green	HG1	HG2	HG3	HG4	HG5	HG6					
Higham	HI1	HI2	HI3	HI4	HI5	HI6					
Istead Rise	IR1	IR2	IR3	IR4	IR5						
Longfield Hill	LO1	LO2									
Lower Higham	LH1	LH2	LH3								
Lower Shorne	LS1	LS2	LS3								
Meopham Green	MP1	MP2	MP3	MP4	MP5	MP6					
Nuralite Industrial Area	NI1										
Shorne & Shorne Ridgeway	SH1	SH2	SH3	SH4	SH5	SH6	SH7				
Sole Street	SS1	SS2	SS3	SS4							
Three Crutches	CR1	CR2									
Vigo	VI1	VI2	VI3	VI4	VI5						
Key:		= low		= medium-low		= medium		= medium-high		= high	

Figure 4.4: Extract from the Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study: summary table.

Design for Gravesham Design Code (2024)

- 4.22 The Gravesham Design Code analyses the borough’s historic towns, villages and neighbourhoods, providing a vision and expectation of quality and placemaking to be used when developing proposals and engaging with planning officers. An overview of the Meopham/Hook Green origins and history is provided. The design guidance within the Code is incorporated into the masterplan proposals by ECE Architects, evidenced by the Design and Access Statement.

¹⁰ Small development is defined by the Study to be two-storey residential dwellings: either terraced/semi-detached/detached at a density of c. 30 dwellings per hectare (where adjacent to rural settlements).

Contribution of the Application Site to Landscape Character Area

- 4.23 Consideration has been given as to whether the Application Site's landscape elements reflect and contribute to the characteristics of the recognised landscape character types or areas within the district level landscape character assessment.
- 4.24 It is considered in this LVIA that the Application Site contributes to the identified characteristics of the Meopham Downs LCA of: agricultural land use comprising an irregular shaped field, formed by native hedgerows and trees with a small clump of woodland. The topography is gently undulating with clear views across the immediate landscape (to the east).
- 4.25 The post war housing along the eastern edge of Hook Green has an urbanising influence on the Site which is generally considered to be an unremarkable, intensively farmed field. It is typical in the context of the series of fields which extend eastwards. The small block of woodland (Churchway Wood) is an important landscape element, however the boundary hedgerow and hedgerow trees are fragmented and in mixed condition. The Ecology Appraisal has concluded '*the site is dominated by habitats not considered to be of ecological importance*¹¹'.
- 4.26 As noted within the LCA document the Hook Green settlement comprises more recent architecture (in comparison to other villages and settlements within Meopham Downs), '*that is less in keeping with the local vernacular*'. The Site and immediate context is not characterised by traditional architecture which features strongly (contributing to a '*strong sense of place and local vernacular*') in other parts of the Meopham Downs LCA. Overall, it is considered that the Application Site makes a moderate contribution to the identified characteristics of Meopham Downs.

The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment 2020 (revised and published 2023)

- 4.27 The Kent Downs National Landscape (formerly AONB) is an extensive area which extends from Surrey to the white cliffs of Dover, and includes an area of landscape to the immediate eastern margin of the Application Site itself. It is a diverse landscape predominantly based upon chalk which leads to vibrant and colourful chalk grassland where orchids and other chalk-loving plants thrive. It also features steep slopes (scarps) of chalk and greensand, hidden dry valleys, broad and steep-sided river valleys.
- 4.28 The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment was produced by Fiona Fyfe Associates in 2020 (revised in 2023) and covers all areas within the AONB – . It identifies 6 landscape types (LCT's) and 13 landscape character areas (LCA's). The Site lies adjacent to the West Kent Downs LCA which is described within the assessment as: '*a strongly rural and well-treed landscape with extensive woodlands, thick hedgerows and little settlement. A series of steep, enclosed, dry valleys are separated by rolling chalk ridges*'.

¹¹ Concluding paragraph 7.4: Ecological Appraisal by Aspect Ecology (file reference: 7007 EcoAp dv2/JB/JW)

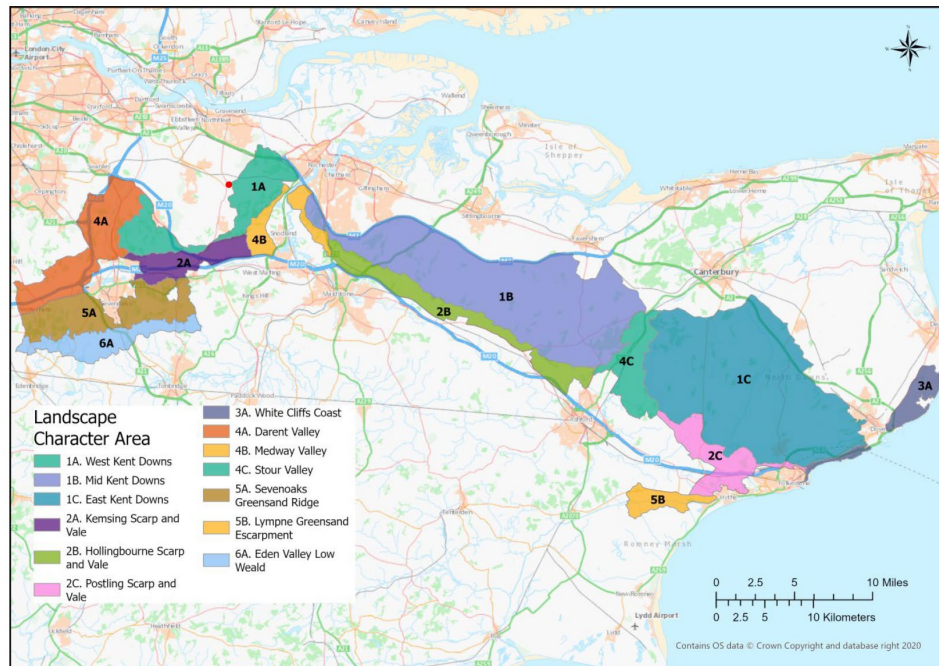


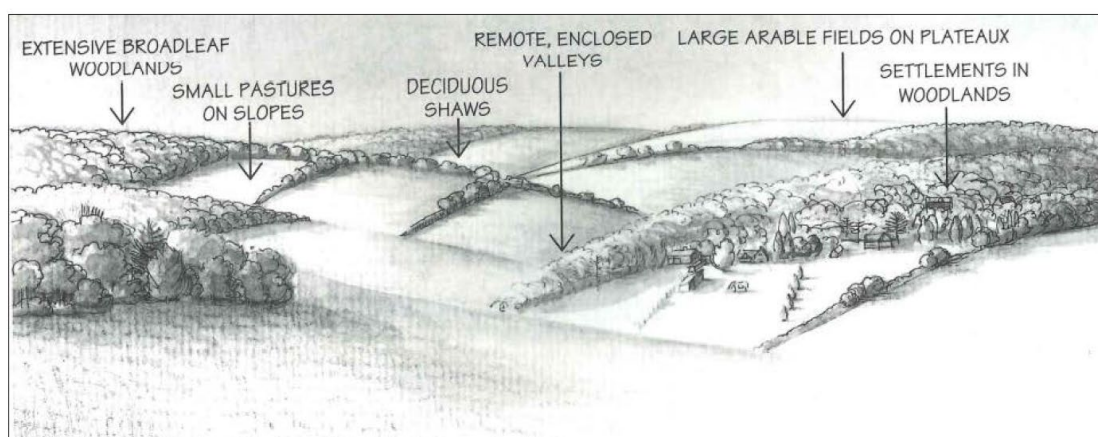
Figure 4.5: Extract from the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment: the Site is indicated approximately with a red dot.

4.29 The identified key characteristics LCA 1A West Kent Downs are set out below. Characteristics of particular relevance to the immediate context of the Application Site have been underlined:

- *Underlying geology of Cretaceous chalk, overlain with clay-with-flints, and occasional pockets of sand and gravel.*
- *A dip-slope landform of dry valleys running roughly north-south, interspersed with broad undulating ridges and plateaux.*
- *Very little surface water, limited to occasional pools where clay impedes drainage.*
- *Extensive blocks of woodland, as well as strips of woodland on valley sides. Luxuriant hedgerows and (in places) parkland trees add to the sense of enclosure and of a well-treed landscape.*
- *Arable agriculture is the predominant land use, with some pasture. Fields vary in shape and size, but are generally hedged.*
- *Semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, chalk grassland, scrub and occasional small quarry sites. Veteran trees occur in parkland and woodland.*
- *A strongly historic landscape, much of which has seen relatively little landscape change. Historic settlements and churches are linked by a network of ancient lanes, within a setting of fields, woodland and historic parkland.*

- *Main roads are limited to the periphery, and the lanes which run through it are generally narrow, quiet and lined with trees or hedges. Some are sunken, particularly where they cut through valley sides.*
- *In much of the area, the topography and/ or woodland restrict views, creating an insular and intimate feel, but with occasional long views along valleys.*
- *A peaceful, rural feel and a sense of isolation contrasts with the nearby urban areas and busy roads.*
- *Deciduous woodlands and trees create strong seasonal changes in the landscape, particularly in spring and autumn.*
- *Cobham Park, Ranscombe Farm Reserve, Ashenbank Woods and Shorne Woods Country park are popular places for local people to visit and enjoy the countryside.*

4.30 A sketch is enclosed within the Assessment, which provides a useful illustration of the typical key components of this landscape character area:



Sketch of the West Kent Downs from 'The Kent Downs Landscape' (1995)

Figure 4.6: Extract from the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment: sketch of the key landscape features.

4.31 The overall management objectives for the area include the protection of the deeply rural character including the rural lanes, the retention of the woodland and shaws and small scale pastures and enclosures. The overall Aspirational Landscape Strategy states: *'The West Kent Downs retain their rural character despite their close proximity to urban areas, and the suburbanisation which affects parts of the area is reduced. The historic features of the landscape, including woodlands, hedgerows, farms, villages and historic parks become an enhanced part of the landscape fabric'.*

The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2021-2026

4.32 The Management Plan sets out the vision for the Kent Downs and identifies the Special Qualities that make its landscape unique. These are grouped within the following headings and a short summary for each is provided:

- **Dramatic landform and views; a distinctive landscape character:** *breath-taking, long-distance panoramas are offered, often across open countryside, estuaries and the sea from the scarp, cliffs and plateaux. The dip slope dry valleys and river valleys provide more intimate and enclosed vistas.*
- **Biodiversity-rich habitats:** *chalk grassland and chalk scrub; woodlands (ancient woodland, veteran trees and wood pasture), traditional orchards and cobnut platts, chalk cliffs and the foreshore, chalk streams and wet pasture, ponds and spring lines; heath and acid grassland. Hedgerows and trees outside woodlands are key features of the landscape and serve an important wildlife function along with networks of linear features of shaws, flower-rich field margins and road verges.*
- **Farmed landscape:** *a long-established tradition of mixed farming has helped create and maintain the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. The pastoral scenery is a particularly valued part of the landscape. Farming covers around 64% of the AONB. Disconnected 'ribbons' of permanent grassland (shaves) are found along the steep scarp, valley sides, and on less-productive land having been created by grazing. Locally concentrated areas of orchards, cobnut plats (nut orchards), hop gardens other horticultural production are also present, their regular striate form can enhance the rise and fall of the land, increasingly widespread vineyards add to this ordered character.*
- **Woodland and trees:** *Woodland is a much-valued component of the landscape, the sights, changing colours, smells and sounds adding to the perceptual qualities of the landscape. Individual, hedgerow, fine and ancient trees outside woodlands are a most important, characteristic and sometimes dramatic element of the landscape.*
- **A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage:** *Fields of varying shapes and sizes and ancient wood-banks and hedges, set within networks of droveways and sunken lanes have produced a rich historic mosaic, which is the rural landscape of today. Architectural distinctiveness is ever present in the scattered villages and farmsteads and oast houses, barns and other characteristic agricultural buildings, farmsteads, churches and historic country houses. The diverse range of local materials used, which includes flint, chalk, ragstone, timber, brick and peg tile, contributes to the character, colour, tone and texture of the countryside.*
- **The Heritage Coasts:** *'The wildlife of the Heritage Coasts is internationally important, the clifftops consisting of nationally important chalk grassland and scrub...'*
- **Geology and natural resources:** *The imposing landform and special characteristics of the Kent Downs is underpinned by its geology. This is also the basis for the considerable natural capital and natural resources which benefit society. These include the soils which support an important farming sector and can sequester carbon; soil represent and is important biodiversity resource in its own right.*
- **Tranquillity and remoteness:** *Much of the AONB provides surprisingly tranquil and remote countryside – offering dark night skies, space, beauty and peace.*

- 4.33 The Site does not contribute to the National Landscape Special Qualities identified above, other than Churchway Wood and the hedgerow vegetation around its perimeter which contribute to the wider pattern of woodlands and trees visible in the National Landscape.

Kent Downs AONB: Setting Position Statement (2018, updated 2022)

- 4.34 The Position Statement describes what is considered as setting and provides guidance in relation to development within this area. It provides the following commentary on the fundamental aspects of the area's setting:

- *The views out from the chalk scarp of the Kent Downs over its setting was a key reason for the designation of the Kent Downs AONB back in 1968. This feature has remained critical to its value and to public enjoyment ever since and today is recognised as one of its special characteristics and qualities.* – The Site does not feature in views from the chalk scarp.
- *The Kent Downs AONB comprises a dramatic and diverse landscape that is based on its underlying geology. Landscape features of particular note include south facing steep slopes of chalk and greensand; scalloped and hidden dry valleys, expansive open plateaux, broad steep-sided river valleys and the dramatic, iconic white cliffs and foreshore.*– The Site does not demonstrate these particular landscape features of note.
- *Setting can also affect views within the AONB, such as where other landscapes are visible constituting part of the view however it may be difficult to distinguish between differences in landscape character. Similarly, development in the setting could detract from associated views within the AONB, for example polytunnels could be visible from a distance within the AONB, affecting the integrity of internal views of the AONB landscape.* – The Site does not affect views from within the AONB other than from the cluster of properties at Camer which lie on the northern edge of the National Landscape.

- 4.35 The Statement identifies locations where development and changes to the landscape may be 'more keenly' felt. The Site and context of the Site does not fall within any of these areas.

- 4.36 The Statement also provides examples of potential adverse impacts on the Kent Downs AONB:

- *development which would have a significant impact on views in or out of the AONB;*
- *loss of tranquillity through the introduction or increase of lighting, noise, or traffic movement or other environmental impact including dust, vibration and reduction in air quality;*
- *introduction of abrupt change of landscape character;*

- *loss or harm to heritage assets and natural landscape, particularly if these are contiguous with the AONB;*
 - *development giving rise to significantly increased traffic flows to and from the AONB, resulting in erosion of the character of rural roads and lanes; and*
 - *increased recreational pressure as a result of development in close proximity to the AONB.*
- 4.37 Impacts are not limited to visual effects and the Statement identifies that changes to land use/land management may also fail to conserve and enhance the setting of the National Landscape. Habitats and species of importance should be identified and resulting impacts mitigated.
- 4.38 The position statement sets out the following measures which are supported to minimise adverse visual impacts on the setting of the AONB:
- *care over orientation, site layout, height, scale and massing of structures and buildings to minimise impact when viewed from the AONB;*
 - *appropriate densities to allow for significant tree planting between buildings;*
 - *consideration not just of the site but also the landscape, land uses and heritage assets around and beyond it;*
 - *careful use of colours, materials and non-reflective surfaces;*
 - *restraint and care over the installation and use of external lighting including street lighting, to prevent harm to the dark night skies of the AONB. Where essential, lighting should be well-directed and full cut off and of low level in form and lumen intensity;*
 - *the grouping of new structures and buildings close to existing structures and buildings to avoid new expanses of development that are visible and out of context; and*
 - *detailed mitigation and management measures, for example including native landscaping that is locally appropriate (where possible contributing to Biodiversity Action Plan targets) and noise reduction.*
 - *measures to consider impact on the setting of the AONB, such as through Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments should be utilised where appropriate.*

Kent Downs AONB: Landscape Design Guide

- 4.39 The Design Guide is referenced within the Position Statement and provides guidance on ways to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the National Landscape. With particular relevance to the Site and its location next to the Kent Downs, the guide provides the following design principles (and a useful sketch is provided, as shown on **Figure 4.7**):

- *The presumption should be against AONB edge developments where they impact upon views into and out of the AONB landscape.*
- *Where this is unavoidable ensure that buildings and infrastructure are located to avoid loss of important off-site views towards features such as church towers, fine buildings, or the wider landscape, as well as avoiding intrusion onto sensitive ridgelines, prominent slopes and damage to distinctive landscape settings.*

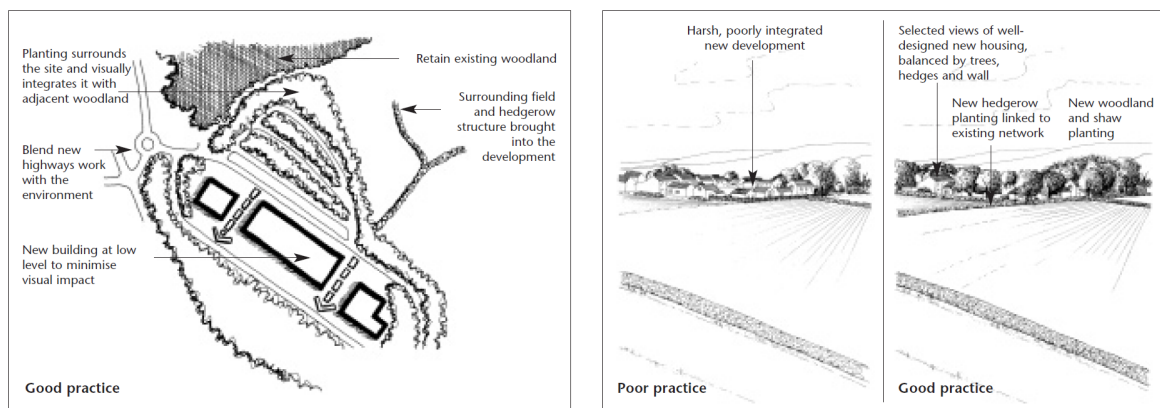


Figure 4.7: **Extract from the Kent Downs Landscape Design Guide:** illustrating how substantial planting along boundaries would help to mitigate impacts of new development on the edge of the AONB.

Local Landscape Elements

4.40 Analysis has been undertaken of the key characteristics and features which influence the Application Site and contribute to the local landscape character and visual amenity. These are set out below, prior to a summary of the landscape receptors with the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development.

Site Features

4.41 The Site measures approximately 7.2 hectares and comprises an arable field and small woodland block (Churchway Wood). Historic Mapping (including the 1888 published map) as shown on **Figure 4.5** (below), indicates the arable land may have been subdivided into two with a boundary extending east-west from the northern edge of Church Way wood. The existing PROW (ref: NS250) which traverses the Site is an historic footpath route. The small woodland block within the Site forms part of a larger series of shaws, wooded areas and orchards across the wider borough (including a large former orchard area to the west of the Site).



Figure 4.8: Historic map published 1888 (source: National Library of Scotland Maps)

- 4.42 The Site is well contained by the local road network (Norwood Lane to the east, Green Lane/Camer Road to the south) and the settlement edge of Hook Green: residential properties which line Tradescant Drive and three cul-de sacs which span eastwards: Mulberry Close, Lilac Place, and Dormers Drive. An established hedgerow (including some large mature trees) is present along most of the southern boundary of the Site but there is a substantial gap in the hedgerow close to the junction with Norwood Lane which allows open views across the Site from the road. A broken hedgerow line is present along Norwood Lane and there are also some substantial gaps which allow views across the site from the Lane and from the open countryside to the east.

Topography

- 4.43 The Site's topography is gently sloping with the higher area of ground located to the south of the Site. The topography of the Site and wider context is illustrated on **Figure 3** of **Appendix 1**. The elevation of the Site at its highest point is approximately 110m AOD and at its lowest point approximately 95m AOD. The Site boundaries (along Norwood Lane to the east and south along Camer Road) are mounded and noticeably higher than the vehicle carriageway. This landscape feature is recognisable for the neighbouring fields to the east and north. Access onto the footpath which crosses the Site is partially cut in to this mounding and slopes gently.



Figure 4.9: View towards the Site from Norwood Lane with Camer Road: illustrating the localised mounding along the Site perimeter to the east.

Land Use, Settlement Pattern and Built form

- 4.1 Hook Green is in the northern part of Meopham parish which comprises a number of settlements and villages. Hook Green has expanded from a small triangular shaped village green in the centre, into an urban area extending either side of the main road: A227 Wrothram Road which connects Meopham railway station at the north edge with other villages and settlements south of Hook Green: including Meopham and Meopham Green. The housing either side of Wrothram Road is generally modern: spanning 1930's and post ward periods of architecture.



Figure 4.10: View along Tradescant Drive illustrating the typical street form and architectural style of post-modern housing within Hook Green

- 4.2 The Hook Green Conservation Area boundary encompasses the village green and properties either side of the A227 Wrothram Road within the central area of the

settlement: termed within the conservation area appraisal as: the historic streets of Wrothram Road, Melliker Lane, Norwood Lane and modern Pine Rise. An appraisal of listed buildings and other heritage assets are set out within the Cultural Desk Based Assessment by the RPS Group. Key landmarks within the conservation area¹² include The White House, Hook Green Farm House, and Fox and Hounds public house.



Figure 4.11: View of the village green, the historic origin of the settlement. Hook Green Farm House (identified as a landmark building within the conservation area appraisal) is visible in the background.

- 4.3 The Site is located along the south-eastern edge of the settlement, adjacent to postwar and modern development along Tradescant Drive, Mulberry Close, Lilac Place and Dormers Drive. The recent buildings are predominantly faced in red and beige brickwork with pitched roofs of corrugated roof tiles, and featuring white UPVC windows. (**Figure 4.12**).

¹² Figure 12 7.3 Landmarks, focal points and views (map) within the Hook Green, Meopham Rural Conservation Area Appraisal Supplementary Planning Document, Gravesham Borough Council



Figure 4.12: View towards the Site from Dormer's Drive. Image illustrates the settlement pattern and local vernacular.

- 4.4 The Cultural Desk Based Heritage Appraisal considers the contribution of the Site as an element of Setting to the Grade II listed Camer House and Grade II Bailiffs House, set within Camer Park (now a Country Park, formerly an 18th Century park) which share an historical relationship with the Site, through an early-mid 19th century mutual owner. The Appraisal concludes that the Site does not contribute strongly to the significance of these heritage assets: whilst the Site forms part of the wider setting, the specific relationship is now solely identified through documentary sources.

Vegetation and Open Space

- 4.5 With the exception of the small woodland block within the central-western area, the majority of trees and hedgerows within the Site are along the Site boundaries. The Site appears from historic mapping to have been subdivided equally into two. The overall historic field pattern remains, including the footpath route which traverses the Site. A tree survey has been carried out by Keen Consultants to establish species and arboricultural value of existing trees. The block of woodland and 8 further trees to the south and along the boundary with Green Lane have been identified as Category A. The woodland mix primarily comprises Ash and English Oak as the upper canopy with mid-canopy Cherry species, understorey of hazel, some hollow and field maple. The woodland floor is dominated by bramble patches of bluebell. This woodland softens the existing settlement edge and is a notable feature of the landscape (**Figure 4.13**). Other Category A trees include Sweet Chestnut, English Oak, Field Maple, and other groups of mixed native broadleaf. The boundary hedgerows are generally fragmented with areas dying (or at risk: such as areas of Elm species) or outgrown. The recommendations are to re-stock with new mixed native species to complement the existing palette.



Figure 4.13: Churchway Wood: softening / enclosing the existing settlement edge of Hook Green

- 4.6 Camer Park Country Park is located to the south-east of the Site within the National Landscape. This is a significant and well-used public open space comprising a small lake, woodland areas and park land. Facilities include: a car park, toilets and café.

Accessibility and Movement

- 4.7 There is currently no vehicular access into the Site other than an informal access for farm vehicles at the junction of Norwood Lane and Camer Road. The Site is crossed by a public footpath ref: 0169/NS250/1 as illustrated on the extract from the Kent County Council definitive footpath map set out in **Figure 4.14**. Public footpath ref: 0169/NS192/8 runs to the north of the Site, connecting the A227 Wrotham Road within Hook Green to the west with Sole Street to the north-east.

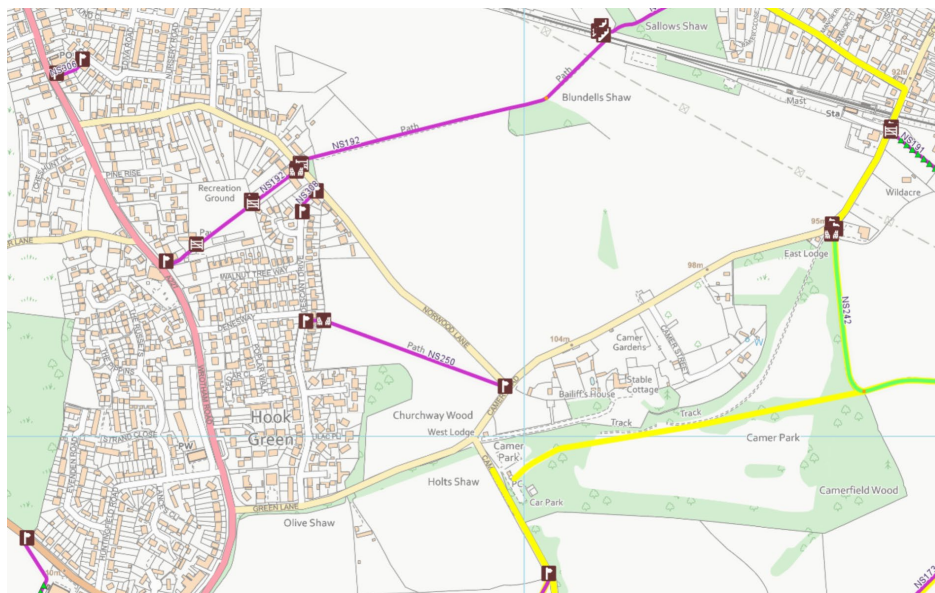


Figure 4.14: Extract from Kent County Council's definitive footpath map

- 4.8 The main approach route into Hook Green is from the A227 Wrotham Road, which runs through the centre of the settlement, with residential areas either side of this. The A227 is a key local access route which connects the various linear settlements of Meopham north/south. The northern and western boundaries of the Site are well contained by the

adjoining rear garden of residential properties. As previously described, the Site sits at a relatively elevated level to the carriageways to the south and east/north-east with localised mounding. Green Lane along the southern edge becomes Camer Road and connects Hook Green with Sole Street to the north east. Norwood Lane runs along the east/north-eastern Site boundary connecting Camer Road, adjacent to Camer Country Park, with the northern area of Hook Green.

Local Landscape Character Areas

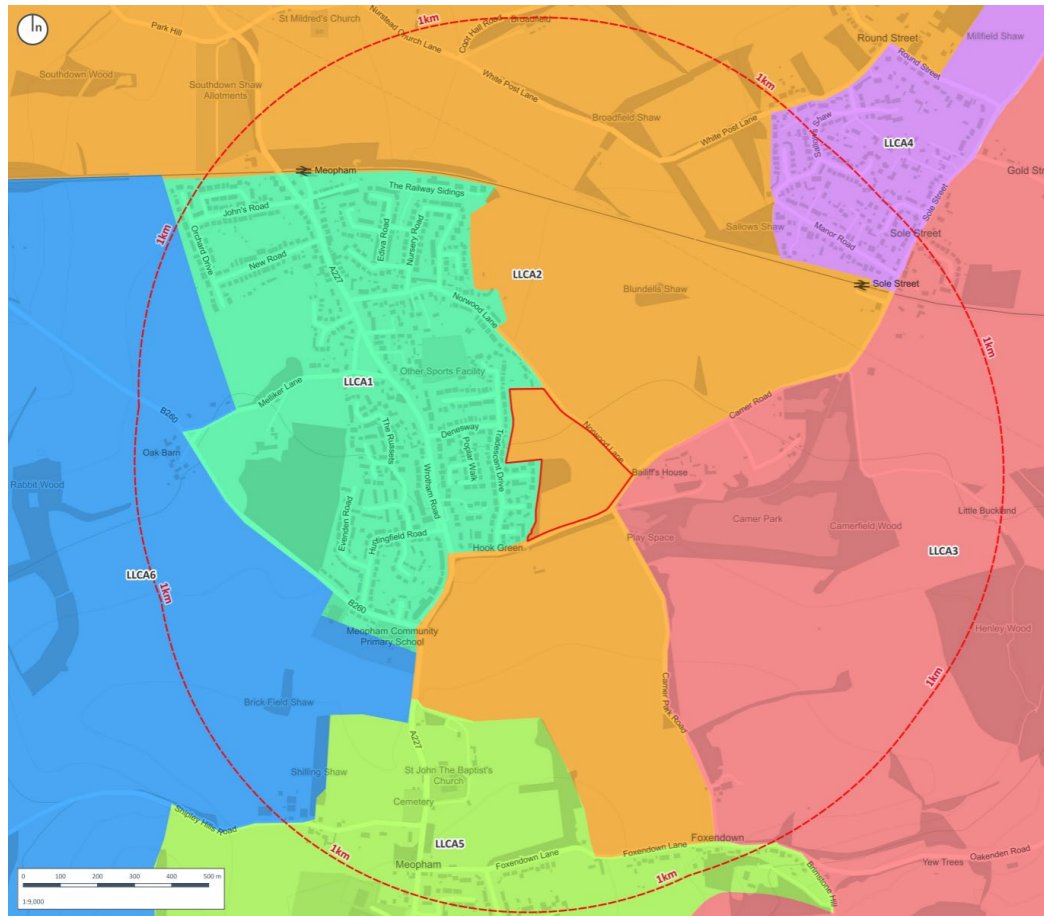
4.9 Following the baseline landscape assessment, local landscape character areas (LLCA) were identified within a 1km radius of the Site.¹³ The following six areas of locally distinct character were identified and are shown on Figure 4.15 below (**Appendix 1 – Figure 6**) :

- LLCA1 – Hook Green Village
- LLCA2 – Agricultural land east of Hook Green¹⁴
- LLCA3 – Camer Park and surrounds (part of LCA 1A West Kent Downs in the Kent Downs National Landscape)
- LLCA4 - Sole Street Village
- LLCA5 – Meopham Village
- LLCA6 - Agricultural land east of Hook Green¹⁵

¹³ The 1km radius was selected as an appropriate assessment area as the ZTV demonstrated that this represents the principal area from which the development is likely to be visible and in which the landscape character has potential to be affected by the proposals.

¹⁴ Incorporating landscape parcels HG1, HG2, HG3, SS1 and MP2 identified in the Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity study

¹⁵ Incorporating landscape parcels HG4, HG5 and MP6 identified in the Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity study



- LLCA1 – Hook Green Village
- LLCA2 – Agricultural land east of Hook Green
- LLCA3 – West Kent Downs (National Landscape)
- LLCA4 - Sole Street Village
- LLCA5 – Meopham Village
- LLCA6 - Agricultural land west of Hook Green

Figure 4.15: Local Landscape Character Areas within 1km study area of the Site

- 4.10 It was considered that LLCA4 – 6 were sufficiently distant and separated from the Site that the character of these areas would not be affected by the proposals; no further assessment of these areas was therefore undertaken.

Landscape Receptors and Sensitivity

- 4.11 The landscape comprises a number of resources or receptors; these are defined within GLVIA3 as the ‘*constituent elements of the landscape, its specific aesthetic or perceptual qualities and the character of the landscape in different areas*’. They consider the landscape at different scales and form the elements or ‘units’ which need to be

considered when assessing the potential landscape effect of a Proposed Development or other change. The final stage of the baseline landscape appraisal was therefore to identify the key landscape receptors with potential to be affected by redevelopment of the Site. The landscape receptors are summarised in **Table 4.1**.

- 4.12 An assessment of the existing value of each receptor in accordance with the criteria for defining Landscape Value in the LVA methodology is set out below and a summary is provided in **Table 4.1**. This takes reference from the value and sensitivity identified in the published character assessments. Consideration has also been given to the 'range of factors that can be considered when identifying landscape value' which are identified in Table 1 of Technical Guidance Note 02/21¹⁶: 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations' published by the Landscape Institute. The factors for consideration include natural heritage; cultural heritage; landscape condition; associations; distinctiveness; recreational; perceptual (scenic); perceptual (wildness and tranquillity); and, functional.
- **Meopham Downs LCA** – This district character area is identified in the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment as being of Medium sensitivity and in good condition. It has a coherent pattern of landscape elements with few visual detractors. It is not covered by a national or local landscape designation but has a number of positive attributes including characteristic narrow lanes, dense native hedgerows and the settlements of Meopham and Meopham Green which have distinct traditional village centres. Overall, the area is considered to be of **Medium Value**.
 - **LLCA1 - Hook Green Village** - This local area contains the urban townscape which adjoins the western and northern edge of the Site. It includes a small number of listed buildings set within the Hook Green Conservation Area, which is located within the central core of the settlement. Outside the conservation area boundaries, the townscape comprises a series of relatively ordinary modern and post war housing areas which span from the main A227 Wrotham Road. The overall area is therefore considered to be of **Medium Value**.
 - **LLCA2 - Agricultural land east of Hook Green** - This landscape area forms part of the setting to the Kent Downs National Landscape. It comprises agricultural land parcels which are generally unremarkable and common place. With the exception of the small woodland blocks and shaws, the condition of landscape features is fragmented and varied with tree and hedgerow boundaries selectively in need of replacement. The public rights of way provide effective links between the Camer Park Country Park, Hook Green and Sole Street. Overall it is considered to be of **Medium Value**.
 - **West Kent Downs in the Kent Downs National Landscape (LLCA3)** – this area is considered to be of **High Value** due to its designation at national level as a National Landscape, and the presence of a number of listed buildings and Camer Country Park – a well-used recreational resource.

¹⁶ Landscape Institute (2021) *Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing landscape value outside national designations*

- **Application Site** – The Application Site forms part of the setting to the Kent Downs National Landscape. With the exception of the Churchway Wood, which forms a local landscape feature and softens the visibility of Hook Green, the Site does not generally have features which contribute positively to the character of the National Landscape. It is therefore considered to be of **Medium Value**.
- **Site Trees and Hedgerows** - The trees and hedgerows within the Application Site are currently considered to be of **Medium Value** due to the importance of the mature trees and hedgerows as local landscape features which contribute to the character of the Site but the variable condition of these features across the Site. Several groups and specimen trees have been identified in the tree survey as being of high arboricultural quality.

4.13 Other than LLCA3 – West Kent Downs National Landscape, none of the landscape receptors identified above were assessed to have sufficient positive attributes for them to be considered as ‘valued landscapes’ in the context of NPPF paragraph 187a.

Summary Landscape Receptors Baseline Situation

Landscape Receptor	Landscape Value	Susceptibility to Change	Sensitivity
Meopham Downs LCA	Medium	Medium – The area is a settled landscape with dispersed villages including residential areas of a similar type and scale as that proposed. The character of the receptor would not be significantly altered by the type of development proposed.	Medium
LLCA1 – Hook Green Village	Medium	Low – The village has a close relationship to the type and scale of development proposed due to the presence of existing residential uses and the settled nature of the landscape. The character of the receptor would not be significantly altered by the type of development proposed.	Medium-Low
LLCA2 - Agricultural land east of Hook Green	Medium	Medium - The landscape has some relationship to the type and scale of development proposed due to its location between the settlements of Hook Green, Meopham and Sole Street. The general features and character of the receptor would remain but would be marginally weakened by the type of development proposed.	Medium
LLCA3 – West Kent Downs (National Landscape)	High	Medium-High – the landscape receptor has an existing relationship with the type of development proposed, given it is in close proximity to the settlements of Sole Street,	High

		Hook Green, and Meopham. The flat topography, woodland blocks within the landscape and extensive planting at Camer Park Country Park visual containment and reduce the potential to be affected by changes in the surrounding area.	
The Site	Medium	Medium – The landscape has some relationship to the type and scale of development proposed due to its location between the two settlements of Hook Green and Sole Street and proximity to existing residential development. The general features and character of the receptor would remain but would be marginally weakened by the type of development proposed.	Medium
Trees and Hedgerows	Medium	Medium – Potential for retention and enhancement within layout of development of the type and scale proposed. The woodland block is particularly sensitive to change.	Medium

5. Baseline Visual Appraisal

- 5.1 The visibility of the Site from the surrounding area was established through both desktop analysis of the surrounding area and by confirming on site the localised screening effect of the landform, vegetation and built form. A zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) plan was also prepared to understand the potential visibility of the proposed development in the surrounding area. This was used to inform the development proposals and identify visual receptors and the location of representative viewpoints. The ZTV is set out at **Figure 4, Appendix 1**.

Existing Visibility of the Site

- 5.2 The ZTV and site visit confirmed that the visibility of the Site is influenced by the surrounding low-lying topography and the influence of built form and mature vegetation in the surrounding landscape. Key features associated with the visibility of the Site and views experienced from within the Site are described below.

- The western and north-western sides of the Site are strongly contained by existing built development on the east side of Hook Green and mature vegetation in Churchway Wood and a tree belt which follows the south-western boundary of the Site. There are no views across the Site from the west or north-west other than from the private properties that back on to the Site.
- The southern edge of the Site is contained by a mature hedgerow with trees which forms the boundary to the Site and by a belt of mature trees on the south side of Green Lane. The south-eastern edge (adjoining Camer Road) has gaps in the hedgerow and fewer trees but mature vegetation on the northern side of Camer Park provides strong visual containment and restricts intervisibility between the Site and the country park (and wider National Landscape) to the south-east.
- The eastern/north-eastern edge of the Site is partially contained by boundary vegetation which comprises an intermittent, overgrown hedgerow with occasional trees. This partially contains views between the Site and the arable landscape to the east. Views from Norwood Lane are also partially contained due to the sunken nature of the road. In places, where boundary vegetation is absent or sparse, there are open views between the Site and the agricultural land to the east.

Visual Receptors and Representative Views

- 5.3 The key visual receptors which have been identified as having existing views of the Appraisal Site and/or with views with potential to be affected if development were introduced on the site are:

- Road users and pedestrians on Camer Road and Green Lane.
- Road users and pedestrians on Norwood Lane.
- Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS192) to the north of the Site
- Road users and pedestrians on Camer Park Road
- Visitors to Camer Park and the Kent Downs National Landscape

- Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS250) which crosses the Site

- 5.4 Residents of properties on the east side of Tradescant Drive and north side of Mulberry Close are a further visual receptor group. However, in accordance with best practice set out in GLVIA3, private residential properties have not been included in this assessment as there is an accepted legal principle (established by Aldred's Law in 1610) that there is no private 'right to a view'. Views from private properties are not protected by planning policy other than in relation to preserving the residential amenity of properties. Details of residential amenity would be addressed as part of a reserved matters application and would need to include sufficient separation distances between existing and proposed dwellings. On the basis of the scheme parameters and illustrative masterplan it is considered that a layout can be accommodated on the Site which would provide acceptable separation distance such that the residential amenity of the existing and proposed dwellings would be preserved. No further assessment of visual impacts for surrounding residential properties has therefore been undertaken.
- 5.5 The visibility of the Appraisal Site and general visual amenity experienced from the above receptors is described in the following paragraphs. Key Representative Views (RVs) that provide a snapshot of this experience are also referenced alongside photography and a viewpoint plan provided at **Figure 7 of Appendix 1**. The RVs were submitted to the council within the pre-application stage, as part of a Viewpoint Scoping exercise. Full size images of the Representative Viewpoint photographs are provided in **Appendix 1**. These should be referred to alongside the reduced scale versions which are incorporated in the text below.

Road users and pedestrians on Camer Road and Green Lane - as demonstrated by Representative Views (RVs) 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, and 3a.

- 5.6 Camer Road and Green Lane form a local route which connects the settlements of Sole Street and Hook Green. It also forms part of the access route to Camer Country Park. When approaching Hook Green from Sole Street in the east, there are intermittent views (e.g. RV1a, 1c, 1d and 1e) across arable fields in which the Site can be seen in the background. Churchway Wood and the adjacent tree belt to the south west are prominent landscape features which are visible on the skyline. Existing residential development on Tradescant Drive is also often visible. At the eastern end of the route (e.g. RV1a and 1b) the Site is predominantly screened from view. As the road passes the junction with Norwood Lane (e.g. RV1e), there are open direct views across the Site with the edge of Hook Green seen in the distance behind.



RV1b: View west from Camer Road approaching the Site from Sole Street – illustrating enclosure of the road by hedgerow and



RV1c: View west from Camer Road approaching the Site from Sole Street – illustrating intermittent breaks in vegetation which allow open views towards Hook Green. Churchway Wood and the settlement edge of Hook Green are visible in the background.



RV1e: View west across the Site from Camer Road at junction with Norwood Lane – illustrating open view of the Site with properties in Hook Green seen behind.

Road users and pedestrians on Norwood Lane - as demonstrated by Representative Views (RVs) 1d, 4a and 4b

- 5.7 Norwood Lane is a narrow, slightly sunken, byroad around the eastern side of Hook Green. It runs along the eastern edge of the Site and connects with Camer Road in the south. From the northern end of the lane, views of the Site are predominantly screened by roadside vegetation (e.g. RV4a) and the principal visual interest is eastwards across open arable fields towards Sole Street. Further south, there are large gaps in the hedgerow and the Site is visible beyond the banked road verge (e.g. RV 4B). In these views, Churchway Wood forms a prominent feature and residential properties on the edge of Hook Green extend across the background.



RV4b View south along Norwood Lane – illustrating partial containment of views across the Site by roadside vegetation and open views across arable land to the east



RV4b View west from Norwood Lane – illustrating open view across the Site with Hook Green visible beyond

Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS192) to the north of the Site - as demonstrated by Representative Views (RVs) 5a and 5b

- 5.8 Public footpath NS192 crosses arable fields to the east of the Site and connects Norwood Lane with Sole Street, passing north of Blundells Shaw, a small woodland block. On the west side of Blundells Shaw there are long, open views across the field towards Hook Green (e.g. RV5a and 5b). In these, the Site can be glimpsed in the distance, beyond the vegetation which lines Norwood Lane. Residential properties facing onto Norwood Lane are clearly visible in the middle distance. To the north and east of Blundells Shaw, views from the footpath towards the Site are screened by the wood.



RV5A View south from Public Footpath NS192 – illustrating open character of views across the field and prominence of properties facing on to Norwood Lane.

Road users and pedestrians on Camer Park Road - as demonstrated by Representative View (RV) 3a

Camer Park Road forms the principal access road to Camer Country Park. Views along the road are contained by mature trees within the country park and further south by trees which line the road (e.g. RV3B). Further enclosure is provided by a mature tree belt which lines the southern side of Green Lane. However, there is a framed view at the north end of the road (RV3A) which extends across the Site in which the tower of St Mildred's Church, Nurstead can be glimpsed in the distance, set amongst trees.



RV3A – View north along Camer Park Road towards the Site – the tower of St Mildred’s Church, Nurstead can be glimpsed in the distance, set amongst trees

Visitors to Camer Park and the Kent Downs National Landscape - as demonstrated by Representative Views (RV’s) 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 3a, 3b and 7.

- 5.9 Camer Park and the wider Kent Downs National Landscape lie to the south-east of the Site. As demonstrated by the ZTV, views towards the Site from the National Landscape are screened by the dense vegetation within and surrounding the country park. The principal area within the National Landscape from which the Site is visible is the northern boundary along Camer Road and in the garden of Bailiff House (Grade II listed house). These views are similar to those described above for RV1d and RV1e.

Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS250) which crosses the Site - as demonstrated by Representative View (RV) 1e and 8

- 5.10 Public footpath NS250 crosses the Site, connecting Tradescant Drive with Camer Road and the southern end of Norwood Lane. Footpath users walking in an easterly direction experience open views across the Site with agricultural fields to the east of Norwood Lane seen beyond (e.g. RV8). Views have a rural character although properties adjoining the Site on Mulberry Close are visible to the edge of the view and have an urbanising influence. Footpath users walking in a westerly direction towards Hook Green, experience views which are more urban in character due to the presence of housing along Tradescant Drive which is clearly visible (e.g. RV1E).

Visual Receptor’s Sensitivity

- 5.11 The value of the visual receptor’s view relates to whether the views are associated with designated landscapes, protected views or designated heritage assets and the quality of the view in terms of visual amenity. The susceptibility of the visual receptor to change

considers the occupation or activity of people experiencing the view; and extent of attention or interest that may therefore be focused on the views; and, visual amenity they experience. **Table 5.1** summarises the sensitivity of each of the previously identified visual receptors. This is based on the combined evaluation of susceptibility and value attached to the receptor together with informed professional judgement and guidance provided in GLVIA3.

Table 5.1: Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Visual Receptor	Value	Susceptibility to change	Sensitivity
Road users and pedestrians on Camer Road and Green Lane	Medium – views include edge of land within the National Landscape but views not protected or identified as special views and scenic qualities are generally unremarkable	Medium - views and visual amenity likely to be of moderate importance to road users and pedestrians.	Medium
Road users and pedestrians on Norwood Lane	Medium – views include edge of land within the National Landscape but views not protected or identified as special views and scenic qualities are generally unremarkable	Medium - views and visual amenity likely to be of moderate importance to road users and pedestrians	Medium
Rights of way users on the footpath ref: NS192 - to the north of the Site	Medium – views include edge of land within the National Landscape but views not protected or identified as special views and scenic qualities are generally unremarkable.	High - views and visual amenity likely to be of high importance to users of the public right of way.	Medium - High
Road users and pedestrians on Camer Park Road	Medium – views not protected and scenic qualities are generally unremarkable but views include edge of land within the National Landscape.	Medium - views and visual amenity likely to be of moderate importance to road users and pedestrians.	Medium
Visitors to Camer Park and the Kent Downs National Landscape	Medium - High – views not protected but are associated with the National Landscape and have attractive scenic qualities.	High - views and visual amenity likely to be of high importance to visitors to the Country Park and National Landscape	High

Rights of way users on footpath ref: NS250 - which crosses the Site	Medium – views include edge of land within the National Landscape but views not protected or identified as special views and scenic qualities are generally unremarkable.	High - views and visual amenity likely to be of high importance to users of the public right of way.	Medium - High
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6. Proposed Development and Mitigation Measures

- 6.1 The LVA has been prepared to inform and accompany the outline planning application for a new residential development and public open space. The description of development is described within the Planning Statement by Turley.
- 6.2 The development of the scheme proposals has been landscape-led, through an iterative design process by Turley Landscape, who have worked alongside ECE Architecture in the development of the masterplan.
- 6.3 The drawings and documents submitted with the planning application include a: Design and Access Statement, Parameter Plan, Illustrative Masterplan and Landscape Strategy. Particular reference should be made to the Landscape Strategy as this provides information on the proposed approach to the landscape masterplan for the Site including demonstrating how the landscape guidelines for the Meopham Downs as set out in the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment have been followed and measures embedded in the scheme to mitigate potential effects on the local landscape including the National Landscape and deliver landscape enhancements.
- 6.4 Whilst the Proposed Development is in outline form and detailed proposals for the scheme would be the subject of a reserved matters application, the application documents and drawings set out the key design principles for the proposals. The Landscape Strategy sets out an approach and principles to ensure that built development is carefully positioned to be sensitively integrated within the context of Hook Green (and Meopham) and the surrounding rural landscape, including the Kent Downs National Landscape. The following design principles were identified for the Site and are embedded in the proposals:
- **Views:** development areas would be positioned to maintain a long range view corridor north-westwards towards the Church of St Mildred in Nurstead, and south easterly direction to allow for the appreciation of the Kent Downs National Landscape. Tree planting would be sensitively located so as not to obstruct these key views
 - **Public rights of way:** the existing public footpath (ref: NS250) which crosses the site would be preserved along its current alignment and integrated within a green corridor. Additional measures (to be secured at detailed design stage) which would further enhance this route include the introduction of tree planting along the route, new wayfinding at either end and surfacing of the route. A new connecting route along the southern edge of the Site would be provided which would provide a direct off road link between the development area and Camer Country Park via Camer Park Road. This would support local ambitions to improve access from Hook Green to the surrounding National Landscape.
 - **Existing landscape features and offsets:** existing trees and hedgerows would be preserved, enhanced and incorporated into the development area. These include blocks of woodland, tree belts and historic hedgerows. Landscape buffers would

be applied to ensure appropriate development offsets: including a minimum 15m zone of public open space to the perimeter of Churchway Wood, a minimum 10m buffer to the southern boundary along Green Lane. In addition, a minimum 15m landscape zone with tree planting would be created along the south-eastern boundary along Camer Road where the Site adjoins the boundary with Kent Downs National Landscape. This would form an appropriate transition between the development and the National Landscape and mitigate any potential impacts on the designated area.

- **Hedgerow enhancement:** new native hedgerows would be provided to compensate for the loss of a short section to be removed to facilitate access into the development. The Landscape Strategy seeks to enhance all existing hedgerows across the Site with supplementary native, species rich planting. This would also contribute to a minimum 10% gain in hedgerow biodiversity value; to be secured as part of the BNG strategy
- **Landscape Buffers:** a minimum 3m landscape buffer would be applied to the western boundary to ensure separation between the proposed dwellings and the existing properties on Tradescant Drive, Dormer Drive and Lilac Place.
- **Local vernacular:** Additional measures (to be secured at detailed design stage) include the use of a materials and colour palette which is informed by the recommendations within the Kent Downs AONB Guidance on the Selection and use of Colour in Development (2019). Built landscape features and elevations should have finishes with a tonality of NCS S 5500N to NCS S 6000N as a minimum to ensure integration with the contextual landscape.
- **Lighting:** To preserve the character of the National Landscape as a dark landscape (and the character of Hook Green which is a predominantly unlit village) proposed lighting is minimal. A single street light is proposed at the road access point and one further street light is proposed on Green Lane to provide a safe, lit route to the village facilities and bus stops. No other street lighting is proposed within the development area. This will help to meet local aspirations to conserve existing 'dark skies' in the National Landscape.

7. Landscape and Visual Assessment of Effects

- 7.1 The effect of the Proposed Development is assessed by predicting the magnitude of change on the previously identified landscape character and key visual receptors. The visual assessment does not attempt to predict the visual effects of seasonal changes throughout the year but describes the 'worst case' position in terms of the greatest potential visibility of the development i.e. in winter when the trees would have lost their leaves. Generally, in summer, vegetation would provide greater levels of filtering and screening and the Proposed Development would be less visible.
- 7.2 Night time effects have also not been separately assessed. In summary, street lighting would be limited to two lights on Green Lane (to light the road junction and provide a safe route to the village facilities) and no lighting is proposed within the residential development. Lighting effects would be limited to private lighting associated with the proposed dwellings which is likely to be low level. This would be seen in the context of lighting associated with other existing dwellings in Hook Green and is unlikely to have a significant impact on the character or appearance of the area. Existing and proposed planting would further restrict the visibility of lighting from the wider area and it is considered that lighting within the development would not have an adverse impact on the character or appearance of the adjoining National Landscape.
- 7.3 The assessment of effects is based on the plans submitted with the planning application. Reference has been made to the Parameter Plan, Illustrative Masterplan and the design principles included in the Design and Access Statement as described in Section 6 of this LVA.

Effects during the Construction Phase: Short Term

- 7.4 The key aspects of the construction phase which have potential to affect the previously identified landscape character areas, landscape receptors and visual receptors have been identified as:
- Stripping of topsoil to enable construction.
 - The temporary effect of the construction plant and traffic, which will include small Application Site compounds, temporary lighting; and, protective fencing to the Application Site's boundary vegetation and retained field trees.
 - The progressive construction of the features present within the development.
- 7.5 During the construction phase, as the development is progressed, the effect on the landscape character and visual receptors, would be similar to those changes experienced during the operational phase. The additional noticeable difference would be the presence of construction vehicles using the road network; and, the presence and movement of construction plant and vehicles within the Application Site.
- 7.6 These effects would be experienced directly on the Application Site and LLCA2 - Agricultural land east of Hook Green, with the change of land use from an arable field to that of a construction site. The main groups of visual receptors affected by the

construction activities would be pedestrians on footpath NS250 (which crosses the Site), as well as road users and pedestrians on local roads which surround the Site (Camer Road and Green Lane, Norwood Lane and Camer Park Road). The use of construction plant would also draw attention to the Application Site in views from roads and the wider public right of way network (including ref: NS192 to the north of the Site).

- 7.7 Construction effects would be short term, temporary and experienced over a relatively small area.

Effects during the Operational Phase: Long Term

- 7.8 The effects of the Proposed Development on its first year of operation (when the development is complete and occupied) would be permanent. Within the appraisal of effects, consideration is given to the effects on the Proposed Development at year 1 when buildings would be implemented but the proposed planting would not yet be matured. Consideration is also given as to whether the effects on landscape character and visual receptors would change by year 15 on account of the establishment of this planting. The effects are set out in **Tables 7.1** and **7.2** and the changes experienced are described in the following paragraphs.

Summary of changes to Landscape Features

Land Use

- 7.9 The Proposed Development would permanently change the land use of the Site from arable to residential development and associated open space. This would change the character of the Site from rural to suburban. This land use change is considered appropriate in this location due to the adjacency of the Site to existing residential development on the edge of Hook Green village.

Settlement Pattern

- 7.10 The developable area would extend residential development to the east of Hook Green into an area located on the edge of the settlement boundary. The development area is of an appropriate size relative to the existing village, and would be well contained within the framework of the existing road network (and historic field pattern). It would be well connected and integrated with the existing settlement pattern and would not appear as an incongruous incursion into the countryside.
- 7.11 The landscape along the edges of the arable field would be kept free from built development and utilised for new planting and the enhancement of existing hedgerows and trees. This would maintain the separation between Hook Green, the wider rural environment and other settlements including Sole Street. Due to the relatively low lying and flat topography of this area and the soft landscape boundary proposals, there would continue to be a clear sense of leaving one settlement area and arriving at another.

Topography

- 7.12 The proposed development would not affect the topography of the Application Site other than minor grading works required to accommodate the new built form and drainage infrastructure.

Built form

- 7.13 Detailed proposals for the built form are not available and would be the subject of a reserved matters application. However, the parameter plan indicates the maximum extent of the development area and the DAS and illustrative masterplan provides further information on the type of built form that is envisaged. The parameter plan indicates two principal development areas with a central green space and further green space around the perimeter of the Application Site. Development is proposed to be a mix of two and two and a half storey buildings with the density of development reducing towards the east of the Application Site. This would allow an appropriate transition to the countryside edge and National Landscape. The proposed approach to built form, which is set out in the DAS and parameter plan, is considered appropriate to the local context.

Vegetation and Open Space

- 7.14 Detailed planting proposals would be developed as part of a reserved matters application and detailed landscape condition. However, the DAS, illustrative masterplan and landscape strategy set out a framework for the proposed approach to planting across the Application Site. This indicates that the development would be set within a well-treed landscape with tree planting provided along streets, in the areas of public open space and within private gardens. The protection and enhancement of Churchway Wood is of key importance.
- 7.15 The proposed retention and enhancement of existing trees and hedgerows around the perimeter of the Application Site will ensure these remain as local landscape features. The introduction of new planting across the Application Site (as set out in the Landscape Strategy) has been informed by the guidance set out in Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment.

Accessibility and Movement

- 7.16 Vehicular access into the Application Site would be obtained from Green Lane at the south-western corner of the Site. The existing public right of way will be retained on its current alignment and enhanced through new surfacing and wayfinding.

Assessment of effects on Landscape Character Areas and Landscape Receptors

Meopham Downs LCA

- 7.17 The Proposed Development would directly affect a localised part of the Meopham Downs LCA. The effects experienced would be limited to the local area around the Site with the introduction of built development in an area which is currently an open arable field. Adjoining built form to the west and established vegetation to the south and east provide containment and limit the potential influence of the development on the wider character area.
- 7.18 The proposed built form would sit within the existing landscape structure comprising local roads, a single field, Churchway Wood and the existing settlement edge of Hook Green. The wider landscape of Meopham Downs, which is less densely developed, comprises a higher intensity of sensitive landscape features and makes a stronger contribution to the rural character of the area, would be largely unaffected.

- 7.19 At year 1, the magnitude of change to the Meopham Downs LCA is considered to be **Low** and the type of effect would be **Adverse**. Taking into account the Medium sensitivity of Meopham Downs LCA, this represents a **Minor Adverse** effect. By year 15, due to the establishment of the landscape strategy, the visibility of the built form would decrease in the wider landscape and the magnitude of change would be **Very Low**. The overall effect would reduce to **Minor to Negligible** by year 15.

LLCA1 – Hook Green Village

- 7.20 The Proposed Development lies outside LLCA1 Hook Green village character area and there would therefore be no direct effects on the area arising from the proposals. However, there would be some small scale indirect effects arising from the increase in residential population on an area of land adjacent to the existing village. Indirect effects would include: an increase in the area of public open space available to village residents and increase in tree cover; a small increase in traffic and pedestrian footfall particularly along Tradescant Drive and around the main entrance to the Site off Green Lane; the introduction of development on land which currently forms part of the agricultural setting of the village; and the introduction of an improved pedestrian route between the village and Camer Country Park
- 7.21 The introduction of built form would be to an area that is already influenced by a series of post war/modern residential estates along the eastern side of the village. The Proposed Development would not be incongruous with the local character and the outline development parameters and design principles set out in the Design and Access Statement provide the framework for a development of good quality design. It is considered that from within the settlement, the new development would not be discernible. The enhanced public right of way and access to open and informal play spaces within the Site would introduce a positive local amenity.
- 7.22 At year 1 and year 15, the magnitude of change and type of effect on Hook Green village would be **Low** and **Neutral** (comprising a mix of Adverse and Beneficial effects). Hook Green village was identified as an area of Medium-Low sensitivity in the baseline appraisal. Therefore, the overall level of the effect would be **Minor Neutral**.

LLCA2 - Agricultural land east of Hook Green

- 7.23 The proposed development would have direct effects on a small part of LLCA2. An area of open agricultural land would change to residential development enclosed by planting. The development area would be enclosed by the existing road network including Norwood Lane which separates the Site from the wider local landscape. The development would integrate with the existing edge of Hook Green village which is already apparent within the landscape and would not appear as an incongruent feature. It would include landscape enhancements (set out in the Landscape Strategy) which respond to the local context including identified landscape management guidelines set out in the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment. The development would be a noticeable feature on the approach to Hook Green village from the east: including from the public right of way and local road networks, but it would be read in context with the existing settlements in the area.

- 7.24 Due to the strong containment of the Application Site by the local road network and existing mature tree and hedgerow planting, which is to be enhanced as part of the proposals, there would be limited awareness of the proposed development from the wider area of LLCA2, particularly once the landscape framework has established.
- 7.25 The proposed development would conserve and enhance the landscape elements that contribute to its character or are important in their own right such as the woodland block, mature trees and historic hedgerows. A nominal amount of hedgerow would be removed and replanted (where possible) to accommodate the proposed access road but additional tree planting in greater numbers across the Site is proposed which would provide appropriate mitigation for the loss of this vegetation.
- 7.26 The magnitude of change to Parcel LLCA 2 as a result of the implementation of the proposed development would be **Low** with a permanent change to a small part of the character area that is largely in keeping with the existing settlement pattern of Hook Green village and visually contained from the wider character area. As the proposed landscape framework matures the new housing would become well integrated with the existing settlement of Hook Green. The overall type of effect would be **Minor Adverse** at year 1 and 15.

West Kent Downs (National Landscape) (LLCA3)

- 7.27 There would be no direct effects on LLCA3/West Kent Downs within the National Landscape as the Site lies outside this area. However, the Site is within its setting and the proposed development would affect a short stretch (c.110 linear metres) of land which abuts the National Landscape.
- 7.28 The area of the Site, which lies closest to the National Park is proposed as an area of open space with native species planting. Proposed planting would meet one of the stated key management requirements within the Kent Downs National Landscape Design Guide which seeks for new development to be integrated visually by balancing the new housing with trees and hedgerows which are linked to the existing (historic) network. Furthermore, the existing woodland block – Churchway Wood would be retained within the Site and would continue to form a local landscape feature in the setting of the National Landscape.
- 7.29 The introduction of a new footpath around the south-eastern corner of the Site would provide an improved footpath connection between Hook Village and the Camer Country Park in the National Landscape. (The route would remove the need to walk along a section of Camer Road that has no footway and would connect with a safe crossing point to Camer Park Road.). This would facilitate higher quality opportunities for enjoyment and recreational use of the Kent Downs National Landscape. The path would be well sign-posted and accessible to residents of the Proposed Development and also to the wider community of Hook Green village. The proposed path, open space and associated planting would comply with the following objectives of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2021-2026:
- *(AEU1) Co-ordinated investment in making access more diverse and inclusive for recreation, access, education, and health and well-being across the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.*

- *(AEU4) The sustainable and enhanced management and promotion of Public Rights of Way, permissive paths and open access sites will be pursued.*
- *(AEU7) Improvements to the Rights of Way Network to overcome barriers provide and improve countryside access, health and well-being opportunities, including, connecting with NHS social prescribing, enhanced way-marking, signposting and maintenance, new routes and establishment of higher rights which conforms with Kent Downs AONB policies and design guidance, will be pursued. Support for investment in access from the new Environmental Land Management payments will be pursued.*

7.30 There would also be indirect effects to the character of the West Kent Downs and the National Landscape arising from the change in land use from agricultural to residential on an adjacent area of land and the repositioning of the settlement edge of Hook Green village closer to the National Landscape. However, as indicated by the ZTV, these changes would only be evident from a very small area adjacent to Camer Road on the boundary of the National Landscape. The existing edge of Hook Green village is already evident in these areas and the Proposed Development would therefore not appear incongruent in the landscape. The development would also be well away from the visually sensitive features of the National Landscape (steep slopes (scarps) of chalk and greensand, hidden dry valleys, broad and steep-sided river valleys) and the scenic beauty and Special Qualities of the National Landscape would be preserved.

7.31 The magnitude of change to the West Kent Downs area of the National Landscape as a result of the Proposed Development would be **Very Low**. Proposed landscape works within the Site would result in a permanent change which would be in accordance with the stated management objectives for the character area. There would also be changes to a small part of the setting of LCA 1A with the introduction of a new area of residential development which would be in keeping with the existing settlement pattern to the eastern side of Hook Green village. The overall type of effect would be **Minor Adverse** at year 1, changing to **Minor Neutral** by year 15 as proposed planting establishes and enhances the new footpath connection to the National Landscape.

Application Site

7.32 The Proposed Development would directly affect the characteristics of the Application Site through the change in land use that would introduce built development into an area that is currently agricultural land outside of the settlement boundary. There would be adverse impacts on the character of the site itself due to the introduction of built development which would have an urbanising effect on the character and appearance of the Site and result in the loss of an arable field.

7.33 Due to the positioning of the development area within a strong landscape framework and the existing historic hedgerow boundaries and woodland block, the visual and physical separation between Hook Green village and the wider rural landscape would be maintained. The development area would be set back from the open fields to the south, east and north of the Site with planting introduced around the perimeter. This would provide an appropriate transition between the development area and the open countryside to the east and would soften the appearance of built form in views, once established.

- 7.34 Once established, proposed planting associated with the Proposed Development would strengthen the existing pattern of hedgerows and trees to the boundaries of the Site and reinforce the landscape framework. This accords with an appraisal of the local landscape context and guidelines from the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment.
- 7.35 The built development would reduce the amount of open landscape within the Site however it would provide an increase in publicly accessible space and recreational facilities: from currently providing a single footpath across an open field to a walking route through an area with open and play space.
- 7.36 At year 1, the magnitude of change on the character of the Site would be **High**. The effects would comprise both Beneficial and Adverse changes but overall would be **Adverse**. The character of the Site was identified as an area of Medium sensitivity in the baseline appraisal. Therefore, the overall effect would be **Major Adverse**.
- 7.37 By year 15, following the establishment of the landscape strategy, planting would soften and screen the effect of the built form and the Proposed Development would further integrate with the landscape. The proposals would include the establishment of new tree planting, creation of new habitats, new open space and improved green infrastructure connections throughout the Site. The change of land use from agricultural land to residential development would still constitute adverse effects on the Site but these effects would be reduced/mitigated by the proposed landscape improvements. By Year 15, the magnitude of change would reduce to **Medium-High**. The overall effect would reduce to a **Moderate to Major Adverse**.

Trees and Hedgerows

- 7.38 The landscape strategy for the proposed development includes: retention and enhancement of the mature planting around the perimeter of the Application Site (large sections of which are dead, dying and/or gappy and in need of enhancement); removal of a section of hedgerow to accommodate the proposed access road (and visibility splays) and planting of a replacement hedgerow; and the introduction of tree planting throughout the development area.
- 7.39 The Landscape Plan indicates that the development would sit within a strong framework of tree planting and that there would be a substantial increase in the tree cover on the Application Site. The proposed planting would contribute to the identified landscape guidelines in the local landscape character assessment which includes guidelines for an increase in deciduous tree planting and the protection and enhancement of the existing hedgerow structure. Overall, at year 1 the magnitude of change on the Application Site's trees and hedgerows would be **Low** and the type of effect would be **Beneficial**. The trees and hedgerows were identified in the baseline appraisal as landscape features of Medium sensitivity. Therefore, the overall level of the effect would be **Minor Beneficial**.
- 7.40 By year 15, the Scheme Proposal's planting would have established, reinforcing the mature landscape framework of the Application Site. The tree and hedgerow structure is considered a characteristic of the surrounding landscape and the additional tree and hedgerow planting would result in a significant increase in tree cover and length of hedgerow. By Year 15, the magnitude of change would increase to **Medium** and the overall effect would change to a **Moderate Beneficial**.

Summary of effects on landscape character receptors

7.41 The identified effects on landscape receptors are summarised in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1: Summary of effects on landscape character receptors at year 1 and 15

Landscape Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Level and Type of Effect
Meopham Downs LCA	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Adverse
		Year 15: Very Low	Year 15: Minor to Negligible Adverse
LLCA1 - Hook Green village	Medium-Low	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Neutral
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Minor Neutral
LLCA2 - Agricultural land east of Hook Green	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Adverse
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Minor Adverse
The Kent Downs National Landscape area LCA 1A West Kent Downs (LLCA3)	High	Year 1: Very Low	Year 1: Minor Adverse
		Year 15: Very Low	Year 15: Minor Neutral
Application Site	Medium	Year 1: High	Year 1: Major Adverse
		Year 15: Medium / Adverse	Year 15: Moderate to Major Adverse
Trees and Hedgerows	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Beneficial
		Year 15: Medium	Year 15: Moderate Beneficial

Effects on Visual Receptors and Representative Views

7.42 The likely key effects of the Scheme Proposal on the visual receptors identified during the baseline study are discussed below and summarised in **Table 7.2**. Reference is made to the changes experienced to the associated representative views within this analysis and a magnitude of change and type of effect for each receptor is identified and also set out in **Table 7.2**. Where changes are anticipated by year 15 on account of the establishment of the landscape strategy, these are also identified.

Road users and pedestrians on Camer Road and Green Lane - as demonstrated by Representative Views (RVs) 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, and 3a.

- 7.43 At the eastern end of the route along Camer Road and Green Lane, road users travelling westwards would experience intermittent views of the Proposed Development glimpsed in the distance (e.g. RV1A and 1C). In places the road is enclosed by hedgerows and there would be no changes to views (e.g. RV1B).
- 7.44 Closer to the Site there would be more open views of the development edge e.g RV1D and 1E, with Churchway Wood visible behind. Views of the development edge would replace existing views across an arable field and would become more urban in character. A planted landscape zone is proposed around the perimeter of the Site which, once established, would filter views and soften the appearance of the development edge.
- 7.45 At the western end of the route, road users travelling eastwards from the A227 (Wrotham Road) would experience no change to views (e.g. RV 2A) until the road passes Tradescant Drive and approaches the south-western corner of the Site (e.g. RV2B). As the road passes the Site, the southern edge of the proposed housing would be visible, beyond the roadside hedgerow and replacing existing views across the field. As the road passes the junction with Camer Road there would also be a glimpsed long view through the development towards the tower of Nurstead Church.
- 7.46 At year 1, the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by road users would range from **Negligible** (at the eastern and western ends of the route) to **Small** (glimpsed views through field gates/gap in hedgerow when approaching from the east) to **Large** (as the road passes adjacent to the Site). Overall, the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by road users would be **Medium** and the type of effect would be **Adverse**. Taking into account the Medium sensitivity of road users, this represents a **Moderate Adverse** effect.
- 7.47 By year 15, the proposed planting in the landscape zones around the perimeter of the Site would have established, softening views of the new development and forming an linear green space around the Site. However, the development edge would remain visible (particularly in winter) and the overall level and type of effect would remain **Moderate Adverse**.

Road users and pedestrians on Norwood Lane - as demonstrated by Representative Views (RVs) 1d, 4a and 4b

- 7.48 At the northern end of Norwood Lane, the Proposed Development would be screened from view by existing built development and roadside vegetation and there would be no changes to views (e.g. RV4A). Further south along the road, there are large gaps in the hedgerow and there would be clear views of the proposed housing replacing existing views across an arable field. Views would become more developed and urban in character. Existing open views eastwards across open countryside would be preserved. A planted landscape zone is proposed around the eastern edge of the Site, adjacent to Norwood Lane. Once established, this would filter views and soften the appearance of the development edge.
- 7.49 At year 1, the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by road users would be **Negligible** (at the northern end of the road) increasing to **Large** (where the road is unhedged and passes adjacent to the Site). Overall, as views from only part of the

route would be affected, the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by road users on Norwood Lane would be **Medium** and the type of effect would be **Adverse**. Taking into account the Medium sensitivity of road users, this represents a **Moderate Adverse** effect.

- 7.50 By year 15, the proposed planting along the eastern edge of the Site would have established, softening views of the new development. However, the development edge would remain visible and the overall level and type of effect would remain **Moderate Adverse**.

Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS192) to the north of the Site - as demonstrated by Representative Views (RVs) 5a and 5b

- 7.51 At the eastern end of footpath NS192, the Proposed Development would be screened from view by Blundells Shaw and there would be no changes to view. West of Blundells Shaw (eg RV5A and 5B), the open character in the foreground of views south-east from the footpath would be retained but the Proposed Development would be visible in the background of views. Proposed housing would be seen alongside the existing housing which fronts onto Norwood Lane. The top of Churchway Wood would be seen on the skyline beyond the housing. Existing planting along the eastern edge of the Site would partly screen the development (particularly in summer) and further screening would be provided as proposed planting matures.
- 7.52 At year 1, the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by footpath users would be **Negligible** (at the eastern end of the footpath) increasing to **Medium** (as the footpath approached Norwood Lane). Overall, as views from only part of the route would be affected, and changes would be in the background of views, the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by footpath users would be **Medium** and the type of effect would be **Adverse**. Taking into account the Medium-High sensitivity of footpath users, this represents a **Moderate Adverse** effect.
- 7.53 By year 15, the proposed planting along Norwood Lane would have established, reducing the amount of built development visible and introducing a more vegetated background to the view. The magnitude of change at the eastern end of the path would reduce to **Medium-low** and the overall level of effect would reduce to **Moderate-minor Adverse**.

Road users and pedestrians on Camer Park Road - as demonstrated by Representative View (RV) 3a and 3b

- 7.54 For road users on Camer Park Road (travelling north), for most of the route the road is not oriented towards the Site and the Proposed Development would be screened by the mature vegetation which lines the road. There would therefore be no change to the visual experience for road users on this part of the route. Towards the northern end, as the road becomes oriented towards the Site (e.g. RV3B) a very small part of the Proposed Development would become visible at the end of the road seen in the background of the view. As the road approaches the junction (e.g. RV3A), the development would become more visible. Housing would be visible lining either side of the view corridor through the Site which is focussed on the tower of Nurstead church.
- 7.55 At year 1, the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by road users would be **Negligible/None** (for the southern two-thirds of the route) increasing to **Low**

(as the road turns towards the Site (RV3B)) and **Medium-High** at the junction with Green Lane. Overall, as views from only the northern end of the route would be affected, (and views along the road align with the open view corridor through the Site), the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by road users would be **Low** and the type of effect would be **Adverse**. Taking into account the Medium sensitivity of road users, this represents a **Minor Adverse** effect.

- 7.56 By year 15, proposed hedgerow trees along Green Lane would have established (either side of the view corridor), slightly reducing the amount of built development visible at the junction of Camer Park Road and Green Lane. However, the difference with year 1 would be small and the overall level of effect would remain as **Minor Adverse**.

Visitors to Camer Park and the Kent Downs National Landscape - as demonstrated by the ZTV

- 7.57 As demonstrated by the ZTV (and confirmed by the site survey), there is no intervisibility between the Site and Camer Country Park and the Proposed Development would not be visible. There would therefore be no change to the visual amenity experienced by users of the Country Park as a result of the Proposed Development.

Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS250) which crosses the Site - as demonstrated by Representative View (RV) 1e and 8

- 7.58 Users of public footpath NS250 would experience substantial changes to views following completion of the Proposed Development. When walking eastwards, existing open views across arable fields would be replaced by a view along a green corridor within the proposed development area. Proposed housing either side of the route would enclose the view but a long view along the alignment of the footpath route towards the National Landscape would be preserved. Proposed planting either side of the route would provide some greening and softening of the new housing and intermittent views towards Churchway Wood would be preserved through gaps between the development areas.
- 7.59 When walking westwards towards Hook Green, existing open views across an arable field towards Churchway Wood and housing on the edge of Hook Green would be replaced with a view along the footpath corridor enclosed on either side by new housing. Gaps between the proposed development areas would preserve some views towards Churchway Wood. Proposed planting within the footpath corridor would provide some greening and soften the impacts of the proposed buildings.
- 7.60 At year 1, the magnitude of change to the visual amenity experienced by footpath users would be **High** and the type of effect would be **Adverse**. Taking into account the Medium-High sensitivity of footpath users, this represents a **Major Adverse** effect.
- 7.61 By year 15, proposed planting would have established in the green corridor which the public footpath passes through. This would create a leafy route and soften the visual effects of housing either side of the route. The magnitude of change would reduce to **Medium-High** and the overall level of effect would reduce to **Moderate to Major Adverse**.

Summary of effects on visual receptors

- 7.62 The identified effects on visual receptors are summarised in Table 7.2 below.

Table 7.2: Summary of effects on Visual Receptors

Visual Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Level and Type of Effect
Road users and pedestrians on Camer Road and Green Lane	Medium	Year 1: Medium Year 15: Medium	Year 1: Moderate Adverse Year 15: Moderate Adverse
Road users and pedestrians on Norwood Lane	Medium	Year 1: Medium-Low Year 15: Medium	Year 1: Moderate Adverse Year 15: Moderate Adverse
Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS192) to the north of the Site	Medium-High	Year 1: Medium Year 15: Medium-Low	Year 1: Moderate Adverse Year 15: Moderate to Minor Adverse
Road users and pedestrians on Camer Park Road	Medium	Year 1: Low Year 15: Low	Year 1: Minor Adverse Year 15: Minor Adverse
Visitors to Camer Park and the Kent Downs National Landscape	High	Year 1: no change Year 15: No change	Year 1: No impact Year 15: No impact
Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS250) which crosses the Site	High	Year 1: High Year 15: Medium-High	Year 1: Major Adverse Year 15: Moderate to Major Adverse

8. Green and Grey Belt Appraisal

Green Belt Context

- 8.1 The Green Belt in Gravesham is part of the London Metropolitan Green Belt. The most recent Green Belt study relevant to the Site is the Gravesham BC Stage 2 Green Belt Study, LUC, 2020. Within this, the north-western part of the Site was assessed as parcel HG4 and the remainder of the Site was assessed as parcel HG5.

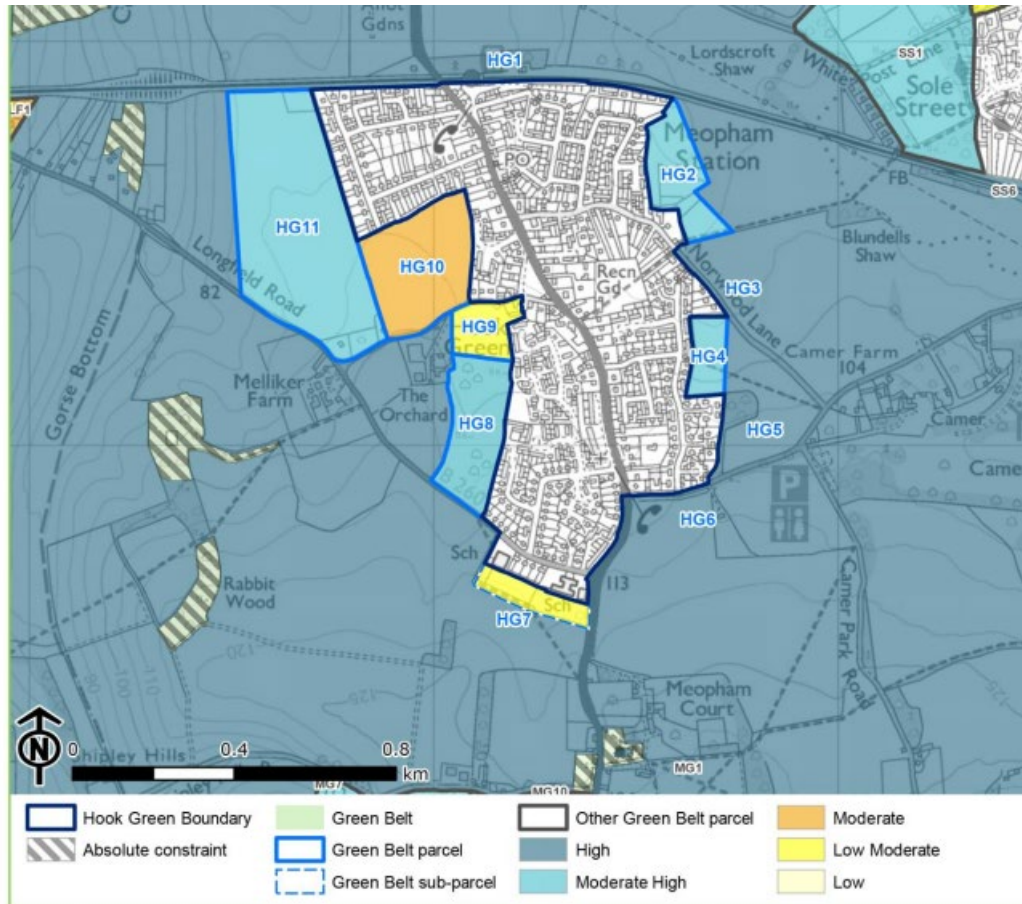


Figure 8.1: Gravesham BC Stage 2 Green Belt Study Assessment Parcels around Hook Green

- 8.2 The results of the assessment for parcels HG4 and HG5 are set out in Tables 8.1 and 8.2 below.

Table 8.1: Contribution Land Parcel HG4 makes to the relevant Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Assessment of contribution of the parcel to Green Belt Purpose
(1) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Limited / No contribution - Land is associated with Hook Green which is not a large built-up area and which does not have a strong enough relationship with any large built-up area to be considered to contribute to this purpose.
(2) To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another	Limited / No contribution - This land does not lie in a gap between neighbouring towns and does not make any contribution to this purpose.
(3) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Relatively Significant - Although the garden boundaries forming the settlement edge of Hook Green do not create any significant distinction between the Green Belt land and the settlement edge, which creates a degree of urban containment, the parcel is open, is perceived as countryside and has a stronger relationship with the wider countryside than with the settlement.
(4) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Limited / No contribution - Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town.
Overall harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land	Moderate-High - Release of the parcel would constitute relatively significant encroachment on the countryside and a minor weakening of the integrity of adjacent Green Belt land. Therefore, the harm to the Green Belt purposes of releasing this area would be moderate-high

Table 8.2: Contribution Land Parcel HG5 makes to the relevant Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Assessment of contribution of the parcel to Green Belt Purpose
(1) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Limited / No contribution - Land is associated with Hook Green which is not a large built-up area and which does not have a strong enough relationship with any large built-up area to be considered to contribute to this purpose.
(2) To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another	Limited / No contribution - This land does not lie in a gap between neighbouring towns and does not make any contribution to this purpose.

(3) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Significant - The area is open and uncontained, and the Churchway Wood woodland band and block defining the boundary between the Green Belt land and the inset settlement edge creates a relatively strong distinction between this area of Green Belt and the settlement edge. As such, the parcel is perceived as countryside and has a strong relationship with the wider countryside.
(4) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Limited / No contribution - Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town.
Overall harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land	Moderate-High - Release of the parcel would constitute relatively significant encroachment on the countryside and a minor weakening of the integrity of adjacent Green Belt land. Therefore, the harm to the Green Belt purposes of releasing this area would be moderate-high

8.3 In summary, for both parcel HG4 and HG5 the study concluded that the land does not make a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes 1, 2 or 4 (the equivalent of purposes a, b and d in the 2024 NPPF). For both parcels the assessment concluded that the only Green Belt purpose that the parcels contributed to was Purpose 3 (c): Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Parcel HG 4 was assessed as making a 'Relatively Significant' contribution to this purpose and Parcel HG 5 a 'Significant' contribution.

8.4 Whilst the 2020 Green Belt study provides some useful context in terms of the functioning of the Green Belt it should be noted that the assessment was carried out before the concept of grey belt land was established and before the 2025 PPG on Green Belt assessment was published. In particular, it uses a different methodology, assessment criteria and terminology to that now set out in the 2025 PPG. The following section therefore provides a Green Belt assessment of the Site using the approach and criteria set out in the 2025 PPG on Green Belt assessment.

Green/grey belt appraisal of the Site

Introduction

8.5 To meet the definition of grey belt land¹⁷, it is necessary to demonstrate firstly, that land does not contribute strongly to any of Green Belt purposes a, b or d and secondly, that the land is not affected by areas or assets of importance identified in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) that would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. Each of these matters is considered below.

¹⁷ As defined in the glossary of NPPF December 2024,

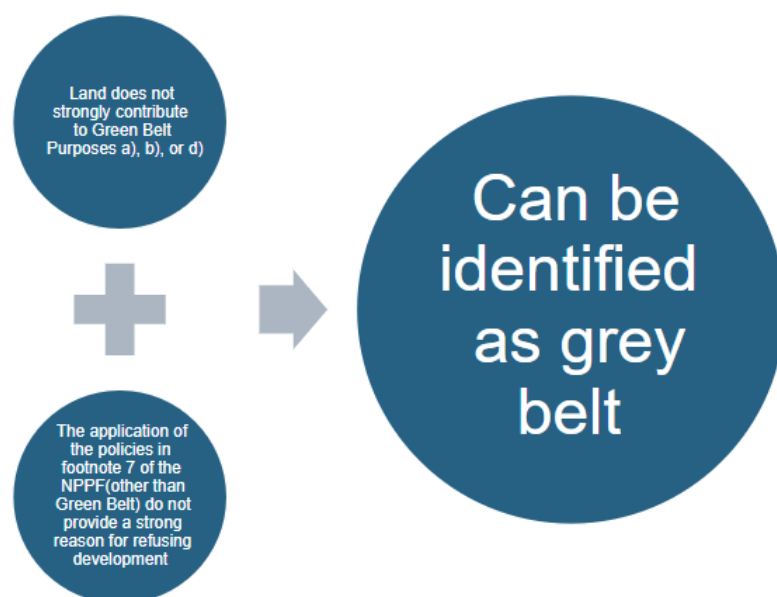


Figure 8.1: Extract from the Green Belt Guidance: ‘Figure 1. When can land be identified as grey belt’. Paragraph: 007 ID: 64-007-20250225

8.6 A detailed assessment of the Site with regards to Green Belt Purposes 1, 2 and 4 / a, b and d¹⁸, pertinent to assessing if land can be considered as grey belt, has been undertaken and is set out below. This assessment is based on the approach and criteria set out in the PPG on Green Belt Assessment (published February 2025).

Table 8.3: Contribution Site makes to the relevant Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Assessment of contribution of the Site to Green Belt Purpose
(a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Weak – The Site meets the PPG description for a ‘ <i>weak contribution</i> ’ to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large urban areas since it is not adjacent to or near a large built-up area.
(b) To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another	Weak – The Site meets the PPG description for a ‘ <i>weak contribution</i> ’ to preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another since it does not lie within a gap between towns. (The nearest surrounding settlements are Sole Street, Meopham and Istead Rise all of which are considered to be villages rather than towns and are therefore not relevant for this purpose.)
(d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Weak – the Site meets PPG description for a weak contribution to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.

¹⁸ Purposes 1, 2 and 4 in the 2020 Green Belt Study are purposes a, b and d in the December 2024 NPPF

(The Site is separated from the historic core of Rochester (the closest historic town) by existing topography, vegetation, development and distance. There are no important visual, physical or experiential relationships between the Site and historic aspects of Rochester.)

- 8.7 **Table 8.3** demonstrates that the Site is not considered to perform strongly against the Green Belt purposes a), b), or d).

National designations and Footnote 7 areas/assets of importance

- 8.8 Land defined as grey belt excludes areas ‘*where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development*’. The Site has therefore been reviewed against the areas/assets of particular importance identified in ‘*footnote 7*’ of the NPPF set out in **Table 8.4**.

Table 8.4: NPPF Footnote 7 Area or Asset of Importance

Area or Asset of Importance	Comment
Habitats sites ¹⁹ (and those sites listed in paragraph 194) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest	The Site is not covered by, or close to, an SSSI or any of the designations listed in NPPF paragraph 194. The closest Habitat Sites to the Site are: Shorne and Ashenbank Woods SSSI (c. 2.8km to the north-east), Cobham Woods SSSI (c. 3.3km to the east) and Halling to Trottiscliff Escarpment (c. 3.3km to the east). The ecological assessment (Aspect Ecology) concludes that the introduction of development on the Site would not result in any significant effects on these designated areas. They would therefore not result in a strong reason for restricting or refusing development on the Site.
Local Green Space	Site is not a designated Local Green Space.
National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast	The south-eastern boundary of the Site is adjacent to the Kent Downs National Landscape; the Site is wholly outside the designated area but lies within its setting. The proposed development area is set back from the protected landscape and separated by a landscaped buffer. The ZTV demonstrates that there is no significant intervisibility between the proposed development area and the National

¹⁹ Habitat sites are defined in the glossary to the NPPF (December 2024) as ‘Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites.’

	Landscape. As concluded in Section 7 of this report, residual impacts on the National Landscape arising from changes within its setting would be very low. Also, as set out within this report, in accordance with the requirements of NPPF para 189, it is considered that the Proposed Development has been ' <i>sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas</i> '. The presence of the National Landscape does not therefore provide a strong reason for restricting or refusing development on the Site.
Irreplaceable habitats	The ecology report (Aspect Ecology) confirms that no irreplaceable habitats have been identified on or near the Site.
Designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest)	There are no designated heritage assets within the Site. The closest designated heritage assets are Bailiff's House (Grade II) and Camer House (Grade II) - c. 75m and c.200m to the east of the south-eastern corner of the Site; Norwood Farmhouse (Grade II) - c. 250m north of the Site; and, Hook Green Conservation Area (focussed along Wrotham Road) c. 180m west of the Site. The Heritage Statement prepared by RPS confirms that the presence of these assets in the vicinity of the Site does not provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development on the Site.
Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change	A Flood Risk Assessment of the Site has been undertaken by RPS Group (29 th July 2025). This identifies that the Site is located in Flood Zone 1 (low risk of fluvial/tidal flooding) and has a low risk of surface water flooding. There are therefore no areas at risk of flooding within or close to the Site that would form a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

- 8.9 As demonstrated in Table 8.4 above, a number of Assets and Areas of Importance are present in the vicinity of the Site. However, the proposed development has been designed to respond appropriately to these and mitigate potential effects. As a result, the relevant technical assessments have not identified any Areas or Assets of Importance which would form a strong reason for restricting or refusing development.

Conclusion on the grey belt status of the Site

- 8.10 The analysis provided above, demonstrates that the Site meets the definition of grey belt land since it does not perform strongly against any of Green Belt purposes (a), (b) or (d)

and there are no Areas or Assets of Importance (identified in footnote 7) present which would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting the Proposed Development.

Assessment of impact of development proposals on the strategic functioning of the Green Belt

- 8.11 For development on grey belt land to be regarded as not inappropriate in the Green Belt, a number of criteria need to be met (as set out in paragraphs 155 and 156 of the NPPF). These criteria are illustrated in **Figure 8.2**. This section considers the criterion relating to whether Development of the Site would fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt. The other criteria fall outside the scope of this report and are covered in the Planning Statement.

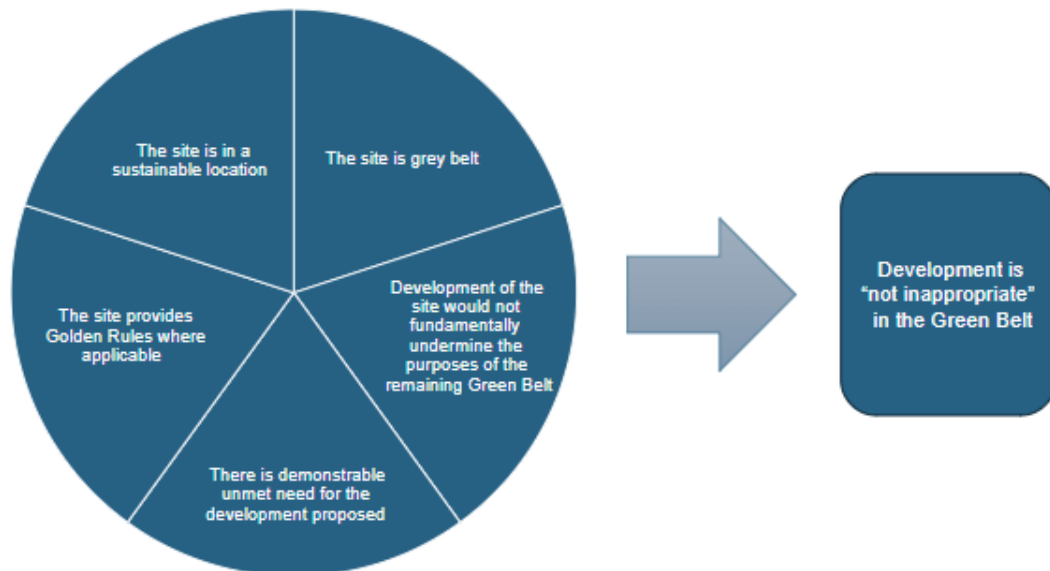
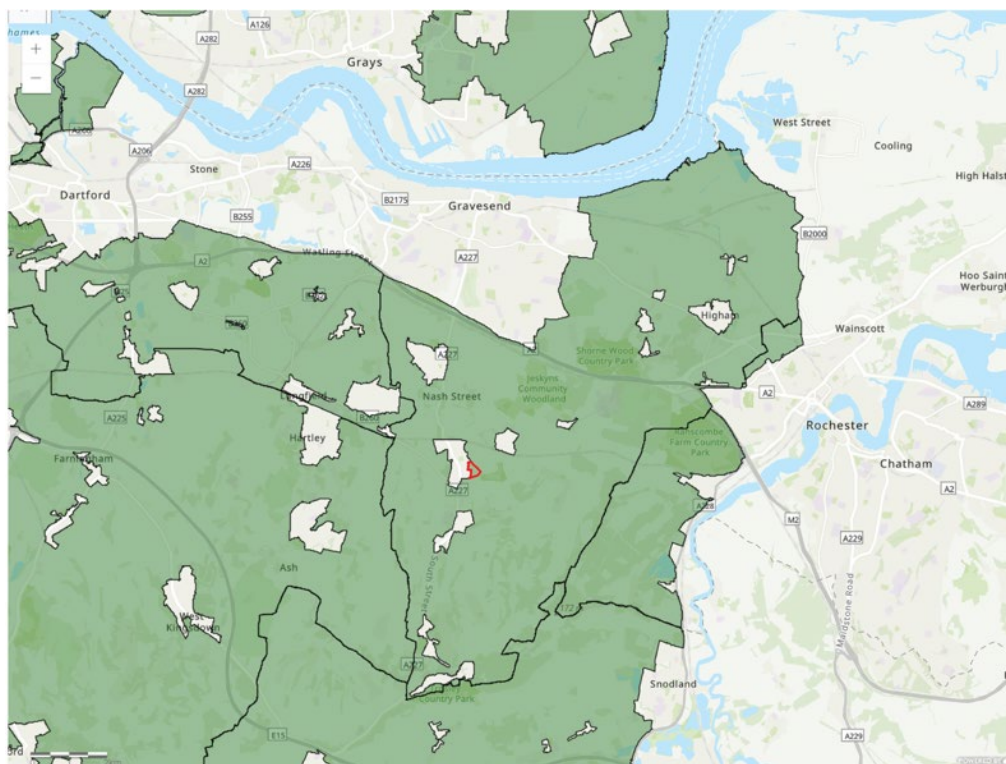


Figure 8.2: Extract from the Green Belt Guidance: ‘Figure 2. When is development in the Green Belt not inappropriate under paragraph 155 of the NPPF?’ Paragraph: 010. Reference ID: 64-010-20250225

- 8.12 Paragraph 155(a) requires proposals to demonstrate they ‘*would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan*’. To come to a judgement on this, the PPG states that ‘*authorities should consider whether, or the extent to which, the release or development of Green Belt Land would affect the ability of all the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the Green Belt purposes in a meaningful way*’.
- 8.13 The scale of the Site in the context of the Green Belt within Gravesham Borough is very small as demonstrated by the plan in **Figure 8.3**. It also adjoins an existing settlement (Hook Green) which lies outside the Green Belt.



8.14 Analysis on this stage of the assessment, against the five purposes of the Green Belt is provided in **Table 8.5** below.

Table 8.5: Impact on the remaining Green Belt in the plan area

Green Belt Purpose	Commentary
Purpose a: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	The Site is not adjacent or close to any large built-up area, there would therefore be no change to the strategic functioning of the Green Belt in relation to this purpose.
Purpose b: To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Development within the Parcel would introduce a small area of new development to the east of Hook Green. In this location, the Site forms a very small part of a broad swathe of Green Belt where there are no towns in proximity which could be affected. If development were introduced on the Site, the remaining Green Belt within the plan area would continue to serve purpose b) in a meaningful way.
Purpose c: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	The introduction of development within the Site would introduce a small area of new development on land which is currently open countryside. This would constitute a small amount of encroachment into the countryside. However, the scale of this encroachment would be very small, relative to the area of open countryside across the plan area as a whole and would not undermine the strategic functioning of the Green Belt with regards to purpose c.
Purpose d: Preserve the setting and special	The Site has no connection with the historic core of Rochester. Therefore, development of the Site would not affect the ability of

character of historic towns	all the remaining Green Belt from serving purpose d) in a meaningful way.
Purpose e: assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All Green Belt within the plan area achieves purpose e) to the same extent. There would be no change to this as a result of development within the Site.

8.15 In conclusion, as demonstrated above, development within the Site would not *‘affect the ability of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the Green Belt purposes in a meaningful way’*. The proposed development therefore complies with the first test set out in NPPF para 155a regarding appropriateness of development in the Green Belt. Compliance with parts b-d of paragraph 155 and the Golden Rules (paragraph 156) is set out in the Planning Statement.

8.16 With regards to NPPF paragraph 156(c) of the Golden Rules, the following measures which are embedded in the scheme proposals are considered to constitute improvements to the Green Belt that would provide new, or improvements to existing, green spaces that are accessible to the public:

- Creation of new public open spaces within the Site with new planting and childrens play facilities (replacing an area which is currently an arable field);
- Creation of a new pedestrian link along the southern edge of the Site providing an improved link between Hook Green and Camer Country Park;
- Improvements to Churchway Wood with a programme of management works, new planting and long term management regime (secured through a condition for preparation and delivery of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan);
- Improvements to existing boundary hedgerows, including introduction of hedgerow tree and regular management regime;
- Introduction of new wayfinding and interpretation to aid accessibility and understanding of the National Landscape.

9. Summary and Conclusions

- 9.1 The LVIA has been founded on a thorough study of the Site and its landscape setting. Through understanding these features and resources, a robust impact appraisal of the Proposed Development has been undertaken. The LVIA accompanies an outline planning application for a residential development which is described in the Planning Statement by Turley.
- 9.2 In accordance with best practice, to ensure a landscape-led approach to the scheme, the LVIA process was undertaken alongside the development of proposals and has informed it.
- 9.3 The LVIA identifies the baseline situation of the Site and its surroundings in terms of 'landscape elements', 'landscape character' and 'visual amenity'. This takes into account the baseline position of the Site at the time of the latest field study undertaken by a chartered landscape architect from Turley Landscape and LVIA in March 2025.
- 9.4 The baseline appraisal identified that the Site is located within the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area, an area of Moderate sensitivity as identified within the Gravesham Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment. Key characteristics of this area include its undulating topography, mixture of arable and pasture farmland, irregular shaped fields and presence of settlements located along the A227 which passes through the centre of the area.
- 9.5 The North Kent Downs National Landscape lies immediately to the south-east of the Site. The Site lies within its setting and there are views towards the National Landscape from the public footpath which crosses the Site. However, ZTV modelling (confirmed with a site survey) identified that visibility of the Site from within the National Landscape is very low, due to the presence of mature vegetation around the edge of the National Landscape. The contribution of the Site to the Scenic Beauty and defined Special Qualities of the National Landscape was also assessed and found to be very low. The principal contribution being a small copse within the Site (Churchway Wood) which forms a local landscape feature and is part of a pattern of small woods and copses in the local setting to the National Landscape. Boundary hedgerows and trees around the perimeter of the Site were also identified as locally important landscape features.
- 9.6 The landscape value and sensitivity of the Site and adjoining arable landscape to the north-east and south-west (including the Meopham Downs LCA) was identified as Medium. The area was assessed against criteria to determine if it constitutes a 'valued landscape' under NPPF para 187a. This concluded that, whilst the Site demonstrates some positive attributes, these are not present to such an extent as to warrant consideration of the Site as a Valued Landscape. The National Landscape to the south of the Site was identified as an area of High landscape value and High sensitivity.
- 9.7 There are no formally protected local/strategic views or identified viewpoints covering the Site. However, a key view was identified from Camer Road (at the junction with Camer Park Road) which extends across the Site towards the tower of Nurstead Church. There are also views across the Site from Public footpath 0169/NS250/1 which crosses

the Site and intermittent views from Green Lane/Camer Road and Norwood Lane which adjoin the Site public footpath 0169/NS192/8 to the north of the Site.

- 9.8 The Site lies within the Green Belt and adjoins the settlement of Hook Green which is outside the Green Belt. An assessment of the contribution of the Site to the grey belt was undertaken (in accordance with the approach and criteria set out in the 2025 PPG on Green Belt Assessment). This concluded that the Site meets the definition of grey belt land.
- 9.9 The landscape and visual analysis has informed the evolution of the design principles and landscape strategy for the Site. In order to mitigate impacts on landscape and visual receptors (including, in particular, the National Landscape to the south-east) the developable area was set back from the Site boundaries and a strong framework of landscape zones and new planting proposed is proposed. The existing footpath across the Site across the Site would be retained and formalised with a new connection to Camer Park Road created to provide an improved, safer access to Camer Country Park (in the National Landscape). The landscape strategy would incorporate substantial planting, which would soften views of the Proposed Development from the approach routes to Hook Green from the east.
- 9.10 Following the introduction of the Proposed Development, there would be some localised adverse landscape effects on the Site and immediate surrounding landscape (as there would be for any development in areas of undeveloped landscape). This is due to the reduction in open landscape and the extension of the settlement edge to Norwood Lane. Due to the containment provided by the existing surrounding landscape structure, there would be little awareness of change in the more sensitive West Kent Downs character area to the south-east and the Scenic Beauty and Special Qualities of the National Landscape would be preserved. There would also remain clear separation between areas of development within Hook Green and the surrounding settlements of Sole Street and Meopham.
- 9.11 The following effects were identified on landscape receptors:

Landscape Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Level and Type of Effect
Meopham Downs LCA	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Adverse
		Year 15: Very Low	Year 15: Minor to Negligible Adverse
LLCA1 - Hook Green village	Medium-Low	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Neutral
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Minor Neutral
LLCA2 - Agricultural land east of Hook Green	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Adverse
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Minor Adverse
	High	Year 1: Very Low	Year 1: Minor Adverse

The Kent Downs National Landscape area LCA 1A West Kent Downs (LLCA3)		Year 15: Very Low	Year 15: Minor Neutral
Application Site	Medium	Year 1: High	Year 1: Major Adverse
		Year 15: Medium / Adverse	Year 15: Moderate to Major Adverse
Trees and Hedgerows	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Beneficial
		Year 15: Medium	Year 15: Moderate Beneficial

- 9.12 There would also be some adverse effects experienced by visual receptors in the immediate context to the Site. However, the extent of these adverse effects would again be limited in the wider landscape. The establishment of the proposed Landscape Strategy would provide containment to the Site and screen visibility from the surrounding, more open, countryside, including the National Landscape to the south-east.
- 9.13 There would be open views of new housing experienced by users of the public right of way which crosses the Site and from private residential properties which overlook the Site. There would also be intermittent views of the development from the surrounding roads (Norwood Lane, Green Land and Camer Road. The Proposed Development would have an urbanising influence on the appearance of these views but over time proposed planting would soften and mitigate these effects. The positioning of the development areas to retain an open view corridor would ensure long views across the Site to the tower of Nurstead church in the north and the National Landscape in the south are preserved.
- 9.14 The following effects were identified on visual receptors:

Visual Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Level and Type of Effect
Road users and pedestrians on Camer Road and Green Lane	Medium	Year 1: Medium	Year 1: Moderate Adverse
		Year 15: Medium	Year 15: Moderate Adverse
Road users and pedestrians on Norwood Lane	Medium	Year 1: Medium-Low	Year 1: Moderate Adverse
		Year 15: Medium	Year 15: Moderate Adverse
Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS192) to the north of the Site	Medium-High	Year 1: Medium	Year 1: Moderate Adverse
		Year 15: Medium-Low	Year 15: Moderate to Minor Adverse

Road users and pedestrians on Camer Park Road	Medium	Year 1: Low	Year 1: Minor Adverse
		Year 15: Low	Year 15: Minor Adverse
Visitors to Camer Park and the Kent Downs National Landscape	High	Year 1: no change	Year 1: No impact
		Year 15: No change	Year 15: No impact
Rights of way users on the footpath (ref: NS250) which crosses the Site	High	Year 1: High	Year 1: Major Adverse
		Year 15: Medium-High	Year 15: Moderate to Major Adverse

- 9.15 In conclusion, the Site is an area with relatively few landscape or visual constraints. It lies within the Green Belt but meets the definition of grey belt land. The Proposed Development would change an intensively farmed piece of open land, into an area of residential development. For reasons described in this appraisal, it is considered that the Site could form a logical extension to the settlement boundary of Hook Green. The Proposed Development would be integrated with its landscape setting and a Landscape Strategy has been developed which incorporates measures to mitigate potential adverse landscape and visual effects and deliver enhancements (including improved access to the National Landscape). Overall, beyond the direct impacts to the Site itself, the landscape and visual impacts of the proposals would be limited and localised and there would be very little change to the character or appearance of the wider surrounding area (including the National Landscape).



Appendix 1: Supporting Figures and Photographs



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-  Site Boundaries
-  Study Area

CLIENT: Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land

PROJECT: Land at Norwood Lane, Meopham

DRAWING: Figure 1 - Site Location Plan

PROJECT NUMBER: 02651

DRAWING NUMBER: 01

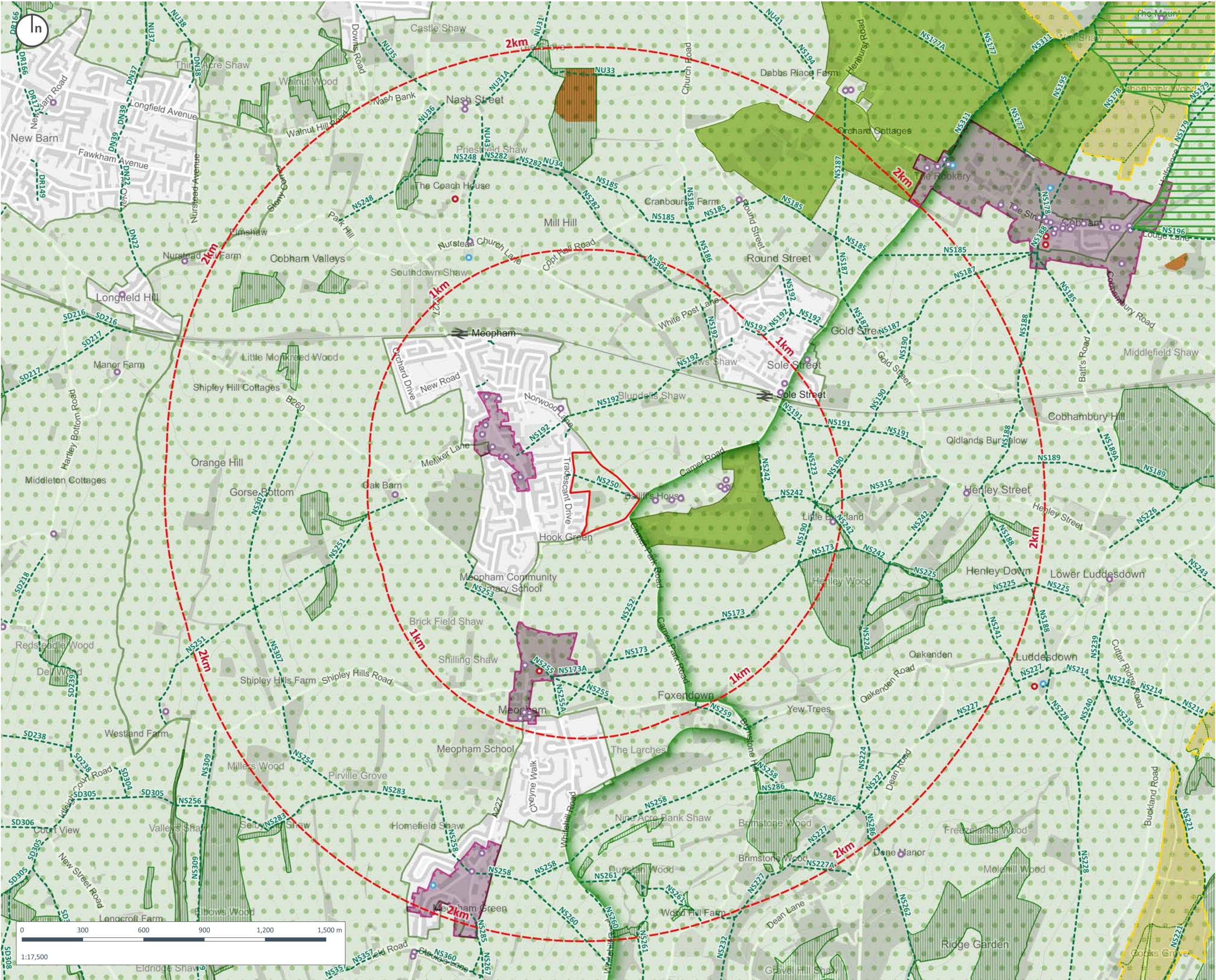
CHECKED BY: JE

REVISION: 1.0

STATUS: Draft

DATE: March 2025

SCALE: 1:17500 @ A3



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- Site Boundary
- Study Area
- PROW
- Listed Buildings
 - I
 - II
 - II*
- Scheduled Monument
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Kent Downs National Landscape
- SSSI
- Country Parks
- Green Belt
- Conservation Area
- Ancient Woodland

CLIENT:
Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land

PROJECT:
Land at Norwood Lane, Meopham

DRAWING:
Figure 2 - Designations plan

PROJECT NUMBER:
02651

DRAWING NUMBER:
02

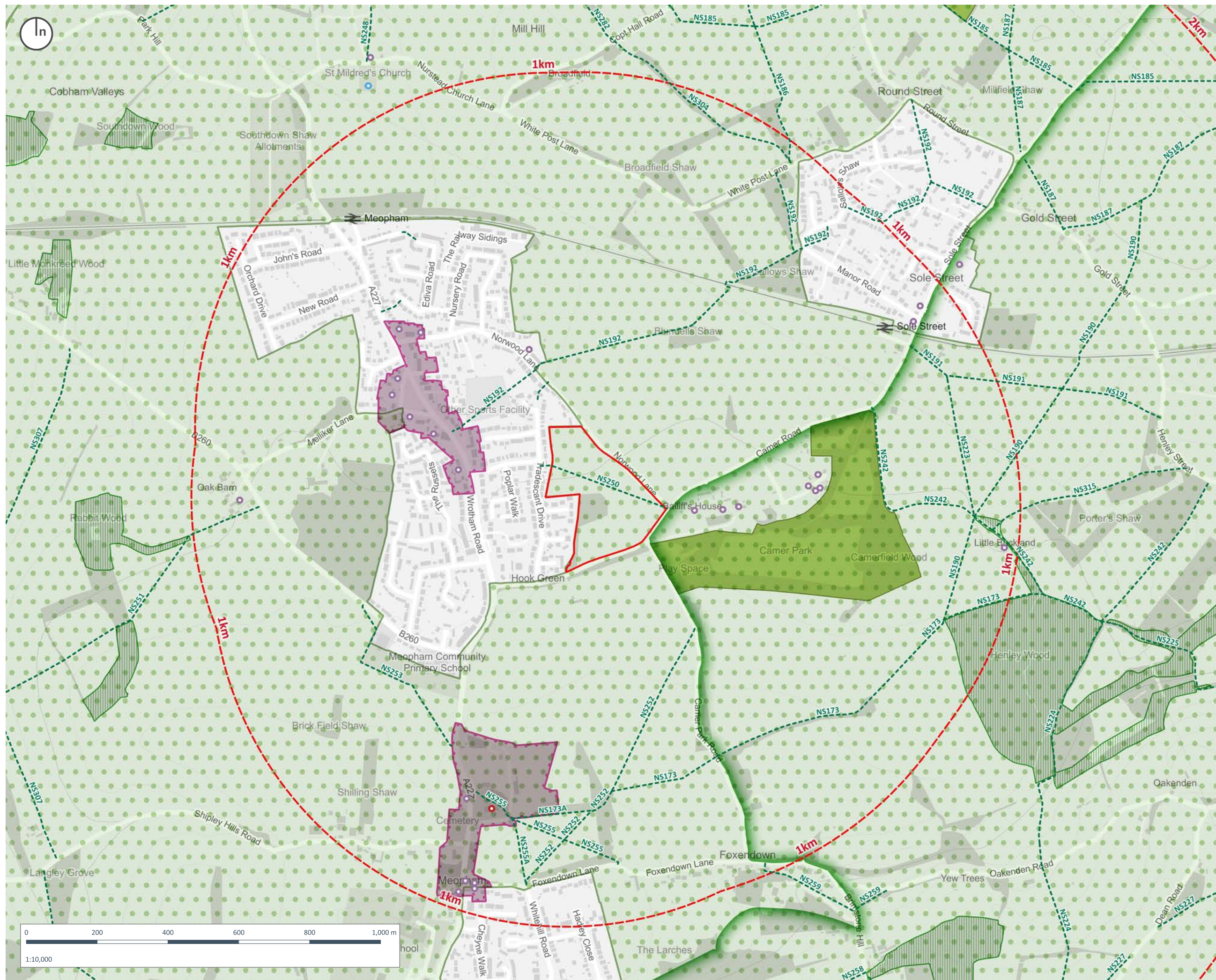
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CLIENT: Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land

PROJECT: Land at Norwood Lane, Meopham

DRAWING:

Figure 2 - Designations plan

PROJECT NUMBER: 02651

DRAWING NUMBER: 02

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REVISION: 1.0 STATUS: Draft

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