



Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Rose Farm, Istead Rise

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Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Stantec were commissioned to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) to accompany an outline planning application for the demolition of 64 Downs Road and erection of up to 154No. residential dwellings (including affordable housing), with all matters reserved except for access. Creation of a new access from Downs Road ('the Site').
- 1.1.2 BWLPD have previously undertaken two Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Reviews of the land to the east of the Site in August 2016 and April 2017. These reports concluded that the adjacent land to the east of the Site is suitable for residential development and removal from the Green Belt, due to its very localised visual envelope; coherent relationship to the existing settlement pattern; and existing defensible boundaries. The development of the Site and its potential release from the Green Belt is therefore considered in the context of the adjacent land being developed and providing access into the Site.
- 1.1.3 This report details the landscape character, landscape value and visual envelope of the Site, and provides an assessment of the contribution that the Site makes towards the purposes and function of the Green Belt, as set out in Paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.1.4 The objectives of this assessment are to:
- Assess the landscape characteristics and quality of the Site, its surrounding, and function within the landscape;
 - Assess the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of the existing views from the surrounding area;
 - Identify opportunities and constraints to Proposed Development on the Site, from a landscape and visual perspective; and
 - Assess the likely landscape and visual effects resulting from the Proposed Development during operation.
- 1.1.5 The study area for this assessment broadly equates to the extents of the landscape shown on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**. The study area has been informed by the baseline appraisal and field surveys.
- 1.1.6 The methodology used for the LVIA is drawn from principles of good practice in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013) and is set out in **Appendix A: LVIA & Greenbelt Methodology**.



2 Landscape Planning Policy

2.1.1 The relevant policies in relation to the Site and the Proposed Development are summarised below.

2.2 National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)ⁱ

2.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines that “the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development including the provision of homes, commercial development, and supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner”, which is defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

2.2.2 The NPPF also clarifies that planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions.

“The NPPF states that the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. The environmental objective is described as follows: “to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”

2.2.3 Paragraph 9 of the NPPF also notes that the objectives should be delivered through the planning process but recognises that planning policies and decisions should “take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area”.

2.2.4 Section 11 is concerned with making effective use of land, with Paragraph 124 stating:

“Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or ‘brownfield’ land”

2.2.5 Paragraph 125 states that planning policies and decisions should:

- a) *“Encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside;*
- b) *Recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production;*
- c) *Give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs, proposals for which should be approved unless substantial harm would be caused, and support appropriate opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land;*



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- d) *Promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively (for example converting space above shops, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure) 50 ; and*
- e) *Support opportunities to use the airspace above existing residential and commercial premises for new homes. In particular, they should allow upward extensions – including mansard roofs – where the development would be consistent with the prevailing form of neighbouring properties and the overall street scene, is well- designed (including complying with any local design policies and standards), and can maintain safe access and egress for occupiers. A condition of simultaneous development should not be imposed on an application for multiple upward extensions unless there is an exceptional justification.”*

2.2.6 Paragraph 129 states that planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land by taking account of:

- a) *“The identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it;*
- b) *Local market conditions and viability;*
- c) *The availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the scope to promote sustainable travel modes that limit future car use;*
- d) *The desirability of maintaining an area’s prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and*
- e) *The importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places”*

2.2.7 Paragraphs 130 outlines area based character assessments design guides and codes and masterplans can be used to help ensure that land is used efficiently while also creating beautiful and sustainable places. Where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site. In these circumstances:

- a) *“Plans should contain policies to optimise the use of land in their area and meet as much of the identified need for housing as possible. This will be tested robustly at examination and should include the use of minimum density standards for city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport. These standards should seek a significant uplift in the average density of residential development within these areas, unless it can be shown that there are strong reasons why this would be inappropriate;*
- b) *The use of minimum density standards should also be considered for other parts of the plan area. It may be appropriate to set out a*



range of densities that reflect the accessibility and potential of different areas, rather than one broad density range; and

- c) Local planning authorities should refuse applications which they consider fail to make efficient use of land, taking into account the policies in this Framework. In this context, when considering applications for housing, authorities should take a flexible approach in applying policies or guidance relating to daylight and sunlight, where they would otherwise inhibit making efficient use of a site (as long as the resulting scheme would provide acceptable living standards)."*

2.2.8 Paragraphs 131-141 focus on achieving well-designed and beautiful places and promote good design of the built environment. This approach is enshrined in Paragraph 135, which states:

"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b) Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c) Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- e) Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- f) Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience."*

2.2.9 Paragraph 136 states:

"Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users."



2.2.10 Paragraph 139 states:

“Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

- a) *Development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
- b) *Outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings...”*

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

2.2.11 Section 15 relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, with Paragraph 187 setting out that planning policies and decisions should look to achieve the above by:

- a) *“Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) *Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- c) *Maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;*
- d) *Minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs”.*

2.2.12 With regards to designations, Paragraphs 188 and 189 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 Framework⁶⁵; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads⁶⁶. 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.”

Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

2.2.13 Section 16 relates to conservation and enhancement of the historic environment, with a requirement for new development to take into the account the importance of historic features. Paragraph 210 states:

“In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.”*

Planning Practice Guidance (2023)ⁱⁱ

2.2.1 To support the implementation of the policies of the NPPF the Government regularly updates Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) that provides up-to-date advice. Those overarching topics of most relevance to landscape and visual and Green Belt matters include Design - process and tools, Green Belt and Natural Environment.

2.2.2 Under the topic of Design: process and tools and sub-heading of Planning for well-designed places (Paragraph: 001) the PPG states *“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”*. This section of the PPG also introduces the National Design Guide which sets out the 10 characteristics of good design, including:

- “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); and*
- Lifespan (made to last).”*

2.2.3 Under the topic of Natural Environment sub-heading of Green Infrastructure, Paragraph 5 focuses on the natural capital green infrastructure can add to communities including,



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"...enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes...". This approach to achieving biodiverse communities is enshrined in Paragraph 6, which states:

2.2.4 "Green infrastructure can help in:

- *Achieving well-designed places;*
- *Promoting healthy and safe communities;*
- *Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change; and*
- *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment."*

2.2.5 Under the sub-heading of Landscape Paragraph 37 in the PPG supports the use of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to *"demonstrate the likely effects of a Proposed Development on the landscape"*. The PPG also makes reference to Natural England's guidance on undertaking landscape character assessment *"to complement Natural England's National Character Area Profiles"*.

2.3 Local Policy

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy, adopted 2014

2.3.1 The Site lies within the administrative boundary of Gravesham Borough Council, Kent. Those policies of relevance to the immediate context of the Site and landscape, visual and Green Belt matters are set out below.

2.3.2 Policy CS02 'Scale and Distribution of Development' states that:

2.3.3 *"...in the rural area, development will be supported within those rural settlements inset from the Green Belt and defined on the Policies Map. Development outside those settlements, including affordable housing and proposals to maintain and diversify the rural economy, will be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in this plan. The extent of the Green Belt is defined on the Policies Map. A strategic Green Belt boundary review will be undertaken to identify additional land to meet the housing needs up to 2028 and to safeguard areas of land to meet development needs beyond the plan period, while maintaining the national and local planning purposes of the Green Belt..."*

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

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

- *"To maintain the break in development between the eastern edge of Gravesend and the Medway Towns which is one of the few barriers preventing the further eastward sprawl of London and the merging of towns along the southern part of the Thames Estuary;*
- *To assist in safeguarding the countryside by minimising the expansion of the Borough's rural settlements; and*



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- *To assist in concentrating development on underused, derelict and previously developed land in the urban area of Gravesend and Northfleet."*

2.3.5 Paragraph 4.2.8 states that:

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

2.3.6 Policy CS12 'Green Infrastructure' states that:

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

2.3.7 The overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced. The greatest weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and natural beauty of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting. Proposals will take account of the Kent Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan, the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment, and the Cluster Studies where relevant."

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

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

2.3.9 Policy CS14 'Housing Density' states that:

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

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

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

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



Supplementary Planning Documents

Gravesham Strategic Land Availability Assessment, 2012

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

2.3.12 Paragraph 2.1.11 of the SLAA notes however that:

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

Landscape Character Based Analysis of Potential Development Sites, 2011

2.3.13 The Landscape Character Based Analysis of Potential Development Site was prepared by David Hares Landscape Architecture on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council, and comprises a landscape character based analysis and review of a number of potential development sites, outlining their sensitivity to development; however the Site was not included within this study.

Residential Layout Guidelines, 1996

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

Design For Gravesham Design Code, May 2024ⁱⁱⁱ

2.3.15 The Design for Gravesham Design Code was prepared by Gravesham Borough Council "to assist residents, architects, developers, builders and planning agents when designing development proposals". The document sets out mandatory and recommended design principles which developments should comply with. Principles mandatory for the Proposed Development include:

- 6.6 Protecting and enhancing blue and green infrastructure
- 6.7 Open spaces and green corridors
- 6.8 Biodiversity
- 6.10 Planting
- 6.11 Trees

2.4 Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study, 2016

2.4.1 The Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study was prepared by LUC on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council and published in March 2016. The study provides an assessment of the landscape and visual sensitivities within defined assessment parcels around existing defined settlements to help inform judgements regarding the capacity of the landscape to accommodate new built development.



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2.4.2 The Site is identified in Parcel IR5, which is described as follows:

“This parcel is the western slopes of the distinctive dry valley which runs broadly north - south from the Downs (Cobham Valleys system) and forms the edge of Istead Rise. Linear development, forming part of the defined settlement of Istead Rise, runs along Downs Road in the valley bottom (all within Flood Zone 3). This development, generally no more than a single line along the western side of the road, also includes Istead Rise Primary School. The valley topography provides a distinctive setting to Istead Rise when viewed from the settlement, with the arable land framed by woodlands along the crest as at Walnut Wood. Boundaries are formed by the existing road and lane network (Walnut Tree Road, Downs Road, Broad Ditch Road), with the western edge formed by the borough boundary.

2.4.3 This edge coincides with the north east edge of New Barn, which is located on the upper valley crest, generally well screened by existing woodland and extensive tree cover within back gardens.”

2.4.4 Within this assessment criterion, under the heading of ‘settlement form and edge’, the following is noted:

“At Istead Rise the defined settlement extends across Downs Road with generally a single line of development fronting the road, although some residential development extends slightly up the slopes as at Longwalk. Farm buildings and sheds are contained within smaller scale fields along the base of the slope, and Istead Rise Primary school also extends into the valley. Sporadic built development occurs along Walnut Hill Road, outside the defined settlement boundaries, although this is contained within the woodland.”

2.4.5 Under the heading of ‘settlement setting’ the following is noted:

“The parcel plays an important role in defining the setting of Istead Rise illustrating the settlement on the higher land contained by the contours of the dry valley to the west. The sweeping arable farmland provides a rural view out from Istead and creates a link with the wider landscape of the Downs. The valley and associated shaw woodlands on the crest are important in maintaining the gap and separation between Istead Rise and New Barn, which although not intervisible are in close proximity.”

2.4.6 The following key sensitivities to development are provided:

- *“Importance of the dry valley slopes and uncluttered crest as the rural view from and setting of Istead Rise;*
- *Lack of connectivity with the main ridge settlement of Istead Rise – extension here would extend development into a new landscape on the opposite side of the valley, although noting that some encroachment has already occurred;*
- *The ancient woodland and small fields that characterise the upper slopes in the area around Walnut Tree Wood and the role of these in screening New Barn;*
- *The sweeping contours of the dry valley which form a distinctive landscape feature; and*
- *The rural character and separation between Istead Rise and New Barn.”*

2.4.7 The study outlines that Parcel IR5 has a ‘Medium-Low’ capacity for development, albeit noting (with respect to the lower slopes of the valley, within which the Site lies) that **“some limited small scale development could be accommodated in this area without significant adverse landscape and visual impacts providing it is restricted to the lower slopes and does not impinge on the upper slopes or crest...”**. It goes on to note the following ‘key requirements’:

- *“Limit to minor small scale infill on lower slopes;*



- *Maintain views out from Istead Rise to the contours of the upper valley slopes and the clear valley crest; and*
- *Seek opportunities for creating further woodland planting/tree cover, potentially linking into existing areas of woodland.”*

2.5 Gravesham Green Belt Study, April 2018

- 2.5.1 The Gravesham Green Belt Study was published in April 2018 and provides a broad and high-level appraisal/assessment of the Green Belt in Gravesham against the national and local purposes of the Green Belt.
- 2.5.2 The related local purposes of the Green Belt as relevant to the Site are set out as follows:
- To maintain the break in development between the eastern edge of Gravesend and the Medway Towns which is one of the few barriers preventing the further eastward sprawl of London and the merging of towns along the southern part of the Thames Estuary (related to the first two purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF); and
 - To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment by minimising the expansion of the Borough’s rural settlements (related to the third purpose of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF).
- 2.5.3 The Site is identified within Parcel 13 ‘Istead Rise and New Barn Gap’, the contribution of which to the Green Belt is summarised as follows:

“The parcel significantly contributes towards preventing rural settlements from merging and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

There are limited opportunities for development in the parcel without adversely affecting the strategic purposes of the Green Belt. To the south of Istead Rise, Nash Bank, Downs Road and the A227 Wrotham Road would provide a more distinct boundary than the existing boundaries along the curtilages of dwellings and may provide an opportunity for development.”

2.6 Gravesham Stage 2 Green Belt Study Final Report (2020)iv

- 2.6.1 As a result of the Regulation 18 (Stage 1) Consultation in 2018, Gravesham Borough Council commission LUC to prepare a Stage 2 study that provides a more specific spatial assessment of harm to the purposes of the Green Belt focussed on land around the urban area and rural settlements inset from the Green Belt.. The document provides an independent, robust, and transparent assessment of potential harm to the purposes of the Green Belt if land were released for development.
- 2.6.2 The Site is identified within Parcel IR1 and has a ‘Moderate high’ overall score for its contribution to the green belt purposes. The parcel is described as:

“Farmland, paddocks, agricultural buildings and areas of tree cover adjacent to the south eastern edge of Istead Rise, sloping upwards away from the settlement edge towards the settlement of New Barn. The parcel contains no urbanising development to diminish openness. Residential gardens provide minimal distinction from the adjacent settlement edge, however Downs Road along the edge of Istead Rise lies along a valley floor, which marks some distinction between the settlement and wider countryside. Field boundaries define the boundary between the parcel and adjacent Green Belt land. Although there is little distance between Istead Rise and the inset settlement of New Barn, the latter’s strongly wooded edge prevents any sense of urban containment by this settlement.”



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2.6.3 The performance of Parcel IR1 has been assessed in section 9 of the LVIA, with the outdated 2018 Gravesham Green Belt Study superseded.



3 Site Context

3.1 Landscape Setting

3.1.1 The Site covers approximately 4.61 hectares (ha) and is irregular in shape. The land use is predominantly agricultural, with the north-western part of the Site consisting of a series of small paddocks that are subdivided by fencing featuring timber posts and electrified wires. A pylon tower is located within this part of the Site, with the overhead powerline passing through the Site on a broadly north-west to south-east orientation. The built form of 'The Piggery' is located within the south-eastern part of the Site, and comprises a series of buildings of varying materiality, scale, typology and use. A two-storey residential building lies within the northern part of the Site in proximity to the adjoining properties that line Downs Road at the foot of the slope.

3.2 Location and Local Land Use

3.2.1 As demonstrated by **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**, the Site lies adjacent to the rural settlement boundary, directly abutting the residential built form that extends south along Longwalk and the ribbon development that lies to the south of Downs Road. Further to the south-east lies the Istead Rise Primary School.

3.2.2 Istead Rise comprises predominantly post-second-world-war two storey and bungalow residential development. To the south and west of the Site the land use comprises sloping rising agricultural land that separates Istead Rise from New Barn. This farmed landscape is traversed by a line of pylon towers, which also pass through the Site.

3.3 Access and Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

3.3.1 The key transport routes within the vicinity of the Site include:

3.3.2 Downs Road, aligned broadly north-west to south-east, which extends through the settlement of Istead Rise and forms part of the connecting route between Southfleet and Hook Green;

3.3.3 The A227 Wrotham Road, aligned north-south to the east of Istead Rise, which connects Hook Green with the A2 corridor; and

3.3.4 New Barn Road, aligned north-south to the west of the Site, which connects New Barn with Southfleet and the A2 corridor.

3.3.5 The Site is not crossed by any PRoW and overall there are very few PRoW within the vicinity of the Site. However, PRoW DN38 (which turns into NU38 and then DR142) and NU37 lie within the elevated landscape to the south-west of the Site and provide connectivity between New Barn and Southfleet. PRoW NU35 lies to the south-east of the Site and provides connectivity between Istead Rise and Nash Street.

3.3.6 An area of Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act Land lies approximately 490m to the south-east of the Site, between Downs Road and the A227 Wrotham Road.

3.4 Topography and Hydrology

3.4.1 As demonstrated by Figure 2: Topography Plan, the Site comprises gently sloping land, which rises from approximately 40m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the northern part of the Site, to approximately 58m AOD in the south-western part of the Site, thereby forming part of the lower north-facing slope of this dry valley landscape that extends from the valley floor along Downs Road up to New Barn in the south-west to approximately 95m AOD. The settlement of Istead Rise effectively extends over undulating landform, which rises from Downs Road to 65m AOD, before falling to 50m AOD at the eastern side of the settlement pattern.



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- 3.4.2 There are no notable hydrological features within the vicinity of the Site or the settlement of Istead Rise.

3.5 Vegetation

- 3.5.1 With reference to Figure 1: Site Context Plan, the Site is contained by a substantial tree belt along its eastern boundary, while more sporadic vegetation cover lies within the southern part of the Site in proximity to the built form of 'The Piggery' and in the northern part of the Site in the vicinity of the residential property. The western and southern boundaries of the Site are defined by hedgerows that feature the occasional hedgerow tree.
- 3.5.2 Within Istead Rise itself, ornamental and structural planting is commonplace, with the streetscene generally featuring mature trees within the curtilage of residential dwellings and lining the roads (particularly along Downs Road).
- 3.5.3 Beyond Istead Rise there are wide strips of woodland and areas of chalk grassland, particularly located within the steep slopes of the landscape. Field boundaries in the area are generally defined by hedgerows, which tend to feature the occasional mature hedgerow tree. To the south of the Site, Walnut Wood; Pigstiles Wood; and Thirty Acre Shaw, are all defined as ancient woodland and form part of the heavily vegetated edge of New Barn.

3.6 Designations

- 3.6.1 The Site is not covered by any national, regional or local landscape designations. However, the Site and surrounding landscape does lie within the designated Green Belt, with the exception of the main built-up area of Istead Rise (which is inset from the Green Belt).
- 3.6.2 The nearest nationally designated landscape, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies approximately 3.5km to the east of the Site at its nearest point.
- 3.6.3 There are no national or local nature reserves in the vicinity of the Site.
- 3.6.4 The nearest Registered Park and Garden to the Site is the Grade II* Gravesend Cemetery approximately 3.3km to the north, while the Grade II* Cobham Hall Registered Park and Garden lies approximately 4km to the east.
- 3.6.5 There are few designated heritage assets within the vicinity of the Site. The nearest is the Grade II listed Downs Hall, which lies approximately 30m to the north of the Site. The nearest scheduled monument is the deserted medieval manorial settlement of Cossington, located approximately 1.4km to the south-east of the Site.



4 Landscape Character

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

4.2 National Landscape Character

4.2.1 As part of Natural England's responsibilities in delivering the Natural Environment White Paper, Biodiversity 2020 and the European Landscape Convention, Natural England has developed a series of National Character Area (NCA) profiles. These NCA profiles provide a broad range of information including an outline of the key characteristics of a given area; a description of the ecosystem services provided and how these relate to people, wildlife and the economy; and an array of opportunities for positive environmental change. Majority of the Site lies within the southern fringe of NCA 113: North Kent Plain^v with small south-eastern portion of the Site lying in NCA 119: North Downs^{vi}.

4.2.2 NCA 113: North Kent Plain sets out four Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) as well as identifying the key characteristics of the area. SEO's relevant to landscape and visual matters include:

- *SEO 2: Plan for and manage the effects of coastal change, by allowing the operation of natural coastal processes and improving the sustainability of current management practices, to maintain and enhance the local landscape character and the area's biodiversity assets. This can lead to habitat creation, flood-risk reduction to built-up areas, and opportunities for recreational activity.*
- *SEO 3: Protect the distinct wooded areas of the landscape, particularly through the management of nationally important, ancient semi-natural woodlands, increasing the area of broadleaved woodland where appropriate, while increasing the connectivity of the mosaic of associated habitats notably wooded heath and semi-improved grassland while enhancing the recreational resource.*
- *SEO 4: Protect and enhance the strong character and heritage of the urban areas. Plan for the creation of significant new areas of green space and green corridors to provide a framework for new and existing development in urban areas and along major transport routes.*

4.2.3 The key characteristics of this NCA Profile of relevance to the Site are surrounding area are outlined as follows:

- *"An open, low and gently undulating landscape, characterised by high-quality, fertile, loamy soils dominated by agricultural land uses...;*
- *Large arable/horticultural fields with regular patterns and rectangular shapes predominating, and a sparse hedgerow pattern;*



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- *Orchards and horticultural crops characterise central and eastern areas, and are often enclosed by poplar or alder shelterbelts and scattered small woodlands...; and*
- *Large settlements and urban infrastructure (including lines of pylons) are often visually dominant in the landscape, with significant development around Greater London and the Medway Towns, as well as around towns further east...".*

4.2.4 NCA 119: North Downs sets out four Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) as well as identifying the key characteristics of the area. SEO's relevant to landscape and visual matters include:

- *SEO 1: Manage, conserve and enhance the distinctive rural character and historic environment of the North Downs, including the long-established settlement pattern, ancient routeways and traditional buildings. Protect the tranquillity of the landscape and sensitively manage, promote and celebrate the area's rich cultural and natural heritage, famous landmarks and views for future generations.*
- *SEO 3: Manage and enhance the productive mixed farming landscape of the North Downs and the mosaic of semi-natural habitats including the internationally important chalk grassland. Promote sustainable agricultural practices to benefit soils, water resources, climate regulation, biodiversity, geodiversity and landscape character while maintaining food provision.*
- *SEO 4: Plan to deliver integrated, well-managed multi-functional green space in existing and developing urban areas, providing social, economic and environmental benefits and reinforcing landscape character and local distinctiveness, particularly on or alongside the boundaries of the designated landscapes within the North Downs.*

4.2.5 The key characteristics of this NCA Profile of relevance to the Site are surrounding area are outlined as follows:

- *The footslope of the escarpment supports arable cropping, the dominant land use within the NCA. In the east, the richer, loamy soils of the lower dip slope support large tracts of mixed arable and horticultural production.*
- *Woodland is found primarily on the steeper slopes of the scarp, valley sides and areas of the dip slope capped with clay-with-flints. Well-wooded hedgerows and shaws are an important component of the field boundaries, contributing to a strongly wooded character. Much of the woodland is ancient.*
- *Small, nucleated villages and scattered farmsteads including oasts and barns form the settlement pattern, with local flint, chalk and Wealden brick the vernacular materials.*

4.2.6 The key characteristics and SEOs provide useful background to the character of the wider area and the overarching aims for management of the landscape. However, due to the extensive area of the NCAs in relation to the Site, and the wide range of landscape characteristics found within it, it is considered highly unlikely that the Proposed Development has the potential to result in appreciable effects on the character of the NCA as a whole and have therefore been scoped out of the assessment.



4.3 County Landscape Character

4.3.1 The Landscape Assessment of Kent was prepared by Jacobs Babbie on behalf of Kent County Council and was published in October 2004. The Landscape Assessment of Kent identifies a number of different Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) across Kent and provides a description of and vision for each LCA.

4.3.2 The landscape encompassing the existing settled area of Istead Rise and covering the Site and surrounding area is identified as the Southfleet Arable Lands LCA. The LCA is described as *"a mix of flat and undulating landform which is sloping generally towards the Thames estuary at Gravesend...Landscape is more open with a mix of remnant orchard"*.

4.3.3 Characteristic features of the LCA include:

- *"Good quality soils developed on the Tertiary Beds overlying the chalk. A generally open arable landscape;*
- *Open landscape allowing transport routes, pylons and settlement to dominate many areas;*
- *Remnant unkept hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodland copses giving a scruffy and unmanaged feel; and*
- *Long views to the busy A2 (T) and Kent Thames-side beyond."*

4.3.4 The condition of the Southfleet Arable Lands LCA is identified as 'Very Poor', noting that there are *"many visual detractors which dominate the view, such as transmission pylons"* and that *"the 20th century development of historic village edges give a high negative impact on the view"*.

4.3.5 The sensitivity of the Southfleet Arable Lands LCA is identified as 'Moderate', stating:

"The undulating landform is apparent in the open views over the landscape area. Visibility is therefore high. The main inherent characteristics which make up the landscape pattern have become indistinct. The historic features of hedgerow enclosure and the more recent shelterbelts are now indistinct elements of the landscape. Building forms on the edge of settlements do not contribute to local distinctiveness and there is very little time-depth to the landscape's current dominant features..."

4.4 Local Landscape Character

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

- *"Gently undulating topography with open arable fields;*
- *Fields divided by tracks, roads and occasional hedgerows;*
- *Orchards to the east;*
- *Minor native woodland clumps;*
- *Few roads, which are open in character;*
- *Istead Rise modern housing development;*
- *Clusters of properties and farmsteads; and*
- *Large pylons."*

4.4.2 It is noted that the condition of the LCA is 'Poor' and that " electricity pylons dominate the area and although there are few other detractors, the scale and frequency of the large pylons is a significant visual detractor ", while the sensitivity of the LCA is assessed as 'Moderate', stating:



"Distinct landscape elements comprise isolated buildings and farmsteads that contribute towards local distinctiveness through their traditional style and use of materials. Enclosure provided by ditch lines and remaining hedgerows provides historic features. However, many features and elements of the landscape are indistinct and recent, and overall there is a weak sense of place. The open character of the landscape and consequential high visibility across the character area provide a moderate level of sensitivity overall."

4.5 Published Landscape Guidelines

National Landscape Guidelines

4.5.1 With respect to NCA 113: North Kent Plain, the following landscape opportunities of relevance to the Site are identified:

- *"Conserving and enhancing tranquillity within the National Character Area (NCA) and, where appropriate, planting broadleaved woodland to screen development while simultaneously linking habitats, improving ecological connectivity and resilience, and providing a source of local community green space.*
- *Restoring hedgerow boundaries... This will aid improvements in water quality, as well as restoring the character of native hedgerows and traditional field patterns – especially where lost in peri-urban areas.*
- *Considering small-scale woodland creation where appropriate, for example where it buffers existing woodlands and/or contributes to habitat networks. Seeking to optimise the multiple benefits (social, economic and environmental) that woodlands and trees can provide as part of green infrastructure in urban areas.*
- *Protect the open character of the gently undulating landscape and the remaining areas of tranquillity...;*
- *Manage and significantly enhance the area's existing broadleaved woodland cover...creating robust wildlife networks better adapted to climate change whilst also enhancing landscape character...;*
and
- *Plan for the creation of significant new landscape that provide a framework to new and existing development...to provide a screening function and significantly benefit landscape as well as biodiversity.*
- *Creating or safeguarding extensive areas of multi-functional green space– within and surrounding both towns and identified new development areas. These areas should include attractive new wetlands that form part of sustainable urban drainage systems and link into the heart of urban areas as part of green infrastructure planning.*
- *Targeted planting of areas of broadleaved woodland, building the urban and peri-urban green infrastructure around towns where appropriate– particularly Dartford, Gravesend and Medway... These woodlands may provide a screening function...In addition, conserving the existing urban treescape and seeking opportunities for urban tree planting, helping to regulate climate change."*

4.5.2 With respect to NCA 119: North Downs, the following landscape opportunities of relevance to the Site are identified:

- *"Seeking opportunities to minimise the impact of new developments, including visual intrusion, disturbance and noise, on the tranquillity and beauty of the countryside. Green infrastructure*



planning should be maximised for its multiple benefits and best practice should be shared locally.

- *Restoring and strengthening the mosaic of connecting landscape and habitat features including the patchwork of smaller downland banks, hedgerows, unimproved hay meadows, pockets of heath and acid grassland, flower-rich roadside verges and uncultivated field corners, field margins and woodlands.*
- *Restoring and planting new hedgerows to reinforce historic field boundary patterns... follow parish boundaries or long-established rights of way (especially historic drove ways) or otherwise support the distinctive character of the landscape; and provide a link between isolated habitats.*
- *Creating wide grassland buffer strips across steeper slopes and alongside hedgerows, rivers and other watercourses, particularly in areas of arable farmland, to help to prevent soil erosion and nutrient run-off and to enhance the habitat network.*
- *Conserving and enhancing traditional orchards of the National Character Area (NCA), seeking new markets for their products and exploring potential for community orchards.*
- *Creating high-quality, well-managed accessible natural green space within and surrounding urban areas as part of comprehensive green infrastructure planning, providing significant local recreational opportunities that meet the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) while...increasing the permeability of the urban landscape to biodiversity and building on existing networks.*
- *Maintaining the existing downland character as a setting for new development (where allocated and approved), ensuring that this does not impact adversely on the special qualities of the designated landscapes, conserving the tranquillity...through planning and sympathetic design, in particular minimising light spill and traffic noise to retain the 'undisturbed' feel of parts of the NCA and enhancing local landscape character.*
- *Promoting the use of sustainable and locally sourced materials, vernacular building techniques and styles, and existing landscape character to inform design and ensure integration with the surrounding landscape.*
- *Targeted planting of woodland and trees surrounding existing and new development and major transport corridors where appropriate within the existing context... landscape character and biodiversity benefits.*
- *Developing a strategic approach to green infrastructure across the NCA and its boundaries to take account of the existing urban areas and proximity of the NCA to areas of growth, planning a network of green spaces in the urban and urban fringe areas and adjacent countryside".*

County Landscape Guidelines

4.5.3 It is noted that the Southfleet Arable Lands LCA is a large-scale landscape that is "denuded of characteristic features". The following landscape actions are provided:

- *"Create a simplified pattern within the landscape using large blocks of woodland, large areas of arable fields;*
- *Create an edge to the urban area – restore some enclosure, using characteristic rural features;*
- *Create functional agricultural features;*
- *Create ecologically rich corridors;*
- *Restore the positive impact of historic highway features; and*



- *Restore open and controlled views across open farmland."*

4.6 Local Landscape Guidelines

4.6.1 The following guidelines of relevance to the Site are provided for the Istead Arable Farmlands LCA:

- *"Restore traditional field structure and enclosure with native hedgerows and boundary planting;*
- *Restore the landscape through the removal of detracting features...;*
- *Create design standards in keeping with local character for new developments within the area...; and*
- *Create a positive edge to the urban area...*

Published Landscape Character Receptors

4.6.2 On the basis of a comprehensive review of published landscape character assessments and analysis of the landscape character of the Site and its context, the following LCAs have been identified against which effects resulting from the Proposed Development have been assessed.

4.6.3 An assessment of the receptor's value, susceptibility and resultant sensitivity to development of the type proposed has also been set out below. There are often subtle differences between and within individual LCAs that result in variations in both actual and perceived quality, condition, value and susceptibility to change. In addition to this, boundaries between LCAs do not always follow recognised landscape features such as rivers, settlement edges, roads or field boundaries. In these cases, the boundaries between LCAs are transitional, where a gradual change in character is experienced, as is often the case, with landscapes at the national, regional and district level.

Southfleet Arable Lands LCA

4.6.4 The Site covers a small portion of the LCA in the vicinity of the south-eastern edge of the LCA. Characteristic features of the LCA include "*generally open arable landscapes*" with transport infrastructure, pylons and settlements dominating the LCA. Hedgerows and woodland copses tend to be unmanaged with a mix of remnant orchard. The Site itself varies in nature with the southern and south-western edge being open in nature while the northern edge and Fields 2,3 and 5 in particular being enclosed in nature by existing unmanaged structural vegetation, hedgerows, trees and remnant orchard. Field 5 is designated as a traditional orchard although it has disintegrated over time with the eastern edge of the orchard defined by unmanaged scrub rather than trees. The landscape character assessment species the landscape condition as 'Very Poor' which is representative of the Site due to the presence of pylons within the Site, the remnant orchard and unmanaged structural boundary vegetation. The Site is not publicly accessible and so does not possess any recreational value. The Site is not subject to any heritage or landscape designation and so does not possess any cultural, heritage or functional value. The Site does not contain any rare or distinctive features or any designated features that make little positive contribution to the landscape character at borough and county level resulting in a **Low** value.

4.6.5 The Site makes up a small part (less than 1%) of the south-eastern edge of LCA and so will result in a very limited direct change to the overall nature of LCA. The Proposed Development has the capacity to retain and reinforce existing structural vegetation such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees and trees. Furthermore, the northern Site boundary abuts existing residential development off Downs Road which contributes to visual and noise pollution thus having an urbanising influence and detracting from a sense of rurality particularly in the southern part of the Site. Furthermore, the Site contains two pylons in Fields 1 and 7 which also as specified as a Key Characteristic in the LCA assessment. It is considered that the LCA has scope to



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accommodate the type of development proposed with little consequence on the overall integrity of the LCT and so is considered to have a **Low** susceptibility. It is considered that the sensitivity to the type of development proposed is Low and is not characteristic of the landscape character.

Istead Arable Farmlands LCA

- 4.6.6 The LCA is described as a “*gently undulating topography with open arable fields* divided by occasional hedgerows, orchards, minor native woodland lumps and large pylons all of which are representative of the Site. The LCA is described as being in ‘Poor’ condition in the LCA assessment with pylons dominating the area and being a visual detractor. The Site contains mature vegetation although unmanaged and overgrown with the traditional hedgerow being lost in part. Internal field boundaries are defined by post and wire fencing for the most part with overgrown hedgerows and hedgerow trees defining the Site’s boundaries. The Site is not publicly accessible and so does not possess any recreational value. The Site is not subject to any heritage or landscape designation and so does not possess any cultural, heritage or functional value. The Site does not contain any rare or distinctive features or any designated features that make little positive contribution to the landscape character at borough and county level resulting in a **Low** value.
- 4.6.7 The Site makes up a small part (approximately 1%) of the south-western edge of LCA and so will result in a very limited direct change to the overall nature of LCA. The Proposed Development has the capacity to retain and reinforce existing structural vegetation such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees and trees. Furthermore, the northern Site boundary abuts existing residential development off Downs Road which contributes to visual and noise pollution thus having an urbanising influence and detracting from a sense of rurality particularly in the southern part of the Site. Furthermore, the Site contains two pylons in Fields 1 and 7 which are recognised in the LCA assessment as being a “significant visual detractor”. The southern edge has an open character and so is visually sensitive to some degree whereas the northern part of the Site is for the most part enclosed by hedgerows, hedgerow trees and the rear edges of dwellings off Downs Road. It is considered that the LCA has some scope to accommodate the type of development proposed with some consequence on the overall integrity of the LCA and so is considered to have a **Medium** susceptibility. It is considered that the sensitivity to the type of development proposed is **Medium/Low** and is not characteristic of the landscape character.

Table 1: Summary of Sensitivity of Published Landscape Receptors

Receptor	Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity
Southfleet Arable Farmlands LCA	Low	Low	Low
Istead Arable Farmlands LCA	Low	Medium	Medium/Low



5 Site Appraisal

- 5.1.1 A landscape appraisal has been undertaken to ascertain the existing character of the Site. This is achieved through recording and analysing the existing landscape features and characteristics, the way the landscape is experienced, and the value or importance of the landscape and visual resources in the vicinity of the Site. This includes assessing elements of the landscape that contribute to landscape character including built and natural form, patterns of features, detailing, scale, planting, land use and human perception. In this regard, landscape character is derived as a result of the perception of, and action and interaction of, natural and human factors.
- 5.1.2 The character and physical features of the Site are described below with reference to **Site Appraisal Photographs (SAPs) A-O**, included in **Appendix A.2 Site Appraisal Photographs**. The locations of photographic viewpoints are illustrated on **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**. The photographs were taken in October 2025. Cloud cover varied however visibility was good and deciduous vegetation had moderate leaf cover.
- 5.1.3 The Site consists of 7 small to medium sized parcels used for agriculture. The northern Site boundary abuts residential dwellings of Downs Road and is defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees; see SAPs A, M and N. The eastern most parcel of the Site, Field 1 is used for pastoral farming and contains an electricity pylon to the north with a mature tree situated in the southern part of the Field. The northern boundary of the Site, defined by the limits of the curtilage of private dwellings, consists of various boundary treatments and is in varying states of repair. Some mature vegetation within the rear gardens of these properties' limits intervisibility with the rising landform of the opposing valley slope of Istead Rise. The built form of 'The Piggery', visible to the right of SAP D, appears unkept and cluttered. As illustrated in SAPs D and E and M to O however, there is clearly a visual relationship between the Site and the existing settled area of Istead Rise that occupies the rising land of the opposing valley slope. This relationship is amplified as the Site is perceived to be subservient to this built-up area, in part due to its lower-lying position in the landscape and the way in which built elements of the settled area already protrude into this landscape to the south of Downs Road.
- 5.1.4 The northern edge of the Site also contains a minor road which the Site is accessed and leads to Field 2. Fields 2 and 3 are defined by paddocks that are defined by timber post and wiring. These paddocks are grazed by horses, with the periphery of the paddocks bordered and defined by hedgerow and a number of mature trees and a number of farmsteads; see SAPs A to C and F to I. The built form of 'The Piggery' is present to the Site albeit views of this built form are partially filtered by the intervening vegetation; see SAPs D and E. The paddocks gently rise in elevation to the south, with a large pylon tower located on the higher ground that is a visual detractor; see SAP E. The western and south-western Site boundary are defined by hedgerows with few hedgerow trees interspersed across the boundary; see SAPs E and J. Some mature trees lie within the upper reaches of the rising landform and punctuate and otherwise open skyline.
- 5.1.5 As evidenced in SAPs D to F and I to J, Fields 1 to 3 are grazed by cattle and adjoins the nearby residential properties nestled at the foot of the slope and valley associated with the course of Downs Road. There is a lack of a visual connection with the wider landscape to the south from Field 3 due to the way in which the landform rises, in combination with the sporadic mature vegetation cover curtailing visibility and providing both visual and physical separation. Fields 3 and 4 are separated by a small group of trees outwith the Site boundary. Field 4 is defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees and is used by arable farming; see SAPs K and M. Field 5 is defined by a traditional orchard although, trees have been lost over time along the western boundary of the field. Field 6 is also used for arable farming and is devoid of internal structural vegetation. The western edge of the Site is defined by hedgerows and groups of mature trees concentrated in the south-western and north-western corners; see SAP O.
- 5.1.6 The remainder of the southern edge of the Site, defined as Field 7 is devoid of boundary vegetation and contains an electricity pylon; see SAP L. This perception of being within a very different landscape to that further south is also exemplified in SAP L, which again



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demonstrates that the Site is distinct from this wider farmed area (and consequently there is no visual relationship).

5.1.7 The Site is considered to be of low landscape value as:

- The Site is generally not of noteworthy scenic beauty, insofar that it largely comprises a series of sloping paddocks, contained by hedgerow vegetation;
- The Site is not remote, given its proximity to (and perceptual relationship with) the existing built development and the highway network, and consequently does not have an air of tranquillity;
- The Site does not form part of the historic landscape setting to a noted heritage asset;
- The Site does not currently afford the opportunity for public recreation; and
- The Site is not covered by any landscape designations.

Landscape Receptors

Fields

5.1.8 The site comprises a series irregular medium to small scale fields used for pastoral farming. Majority of the fields are open in nature and with the Site's boundaries largely defined by overgrown hedgerows and occasional mature canopy trees. The nature of fields varies across the Site where Fields 2 and 3 are enclosed in nature due to the presence of mature canopy trees, post and wire fences, paddocks and sheds whereas the remaining fields are open with mature overgrown vegetation along internal field boundaries. Fields 1 and 7 contain electricity pylons which detract from the rural parts of the Site and reduces the perceptual tranquillity, wildness and scenic value. Field 5 contains a Traditional Orchard which is a common feature of the landscape character although, it is degraded in condition and so possess little value in distinctiveness. The Site is not publicly accessible, so the fields do not possess recreational value. The Site has been rationalised into smaller field parcels for agricultural purposes, where the nature of fields in the late 19th century were large and open in nature with Elmlands Shaw and the small woodland at the entrance of the Site present^{vii}. Overall, the southern parts of the Fields contribute to the open and rural character which make some positive contribution to the landscape character although the presence of the electricity pylons detracts from this. It is considered that the fields are **Low** in value and have little wider recognition.

5.1.9 Due to the intrinsic nature of open fields, they are naturally vulnerable to the type of development proposed. This means that the receptor has little capacity to accommodate change without undue alteration to the overall integrity and character of the landscape feature. Agricultural fields will fundamentally be replaced in part with built form and associated infrastructure as well as public open space and landscape planting. Overall, it is considered that Fields have a **High** susceptibility and overall **Medium** sensitivity.

Hedgerows

5.1.10 Unkept hedgerows are a common feature of in Kent landscape character assessment. The Site's boundaries are defined by overgrown, unmanaged hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees. Internal field boundaries are devoid of hedgerows and defined by post and wire fences or tree belts. Furthermore, hedgerows are not a common or key characteristic field of the local landscape character. They are do not possess wider recognition of value and are not designated. The feature does not have any other associations or recreational value but have some functional value that they provide habitat connectivity within the Site and in its immediate context. Based on the following information hedgerows are considered to have **Low** value. Hedgerows have the ability to be retained with the potential for enhancement, 'gap up' and re-established to mitigate hedgerow loss. On balance, it is considered that the landscape receptor has **Low** susceptibility and overall **Low** sensitivity.



Hedgerow Trees

- 5.1.11 There are few mature native hedgerow trees along field boundaries across the Site which are in good condition. Hedgerow trees are not a common or key characteristic field of the local landscape character. They do not possess any distinctive or rare qualities, associations or have any recreational value although they may have some functional value that they provide habitat connectivity within the Site and in its immediate context. The feature contributes to the perception of wildness/rurality to some degree. It is considered that the feature has a **Low** value. Hedgerow trees have the potential to be retained as part of the Proposed Development. A small number may be lost to accommodate access and connectivity across the Proposed Development, but it will not affect the overall integrity of the landscape feature. This results in a **Medium** susceptibility and an overall **Medium** sensitivity.

Canopy Trees

- 5.1.12 Canopy trees are common features, particularly in the eastern part of the Site which contribute to the character of the Site and immediate context although they are recognised features of the county or local landscape character. The landscape feature itself does not possess any distinctive or rare qualities, associations or have any recreational value although they may have some functional value that they provide habitat connectivity within the Site and in its immediate context. The feature contributes to the perception of wildness/rurality to some degree. The north-western part of the Site contains two designated Veteran Trees which have the potential to be retained and proposed as part of the Proposed Development. Overall, it is considered that the feature has a **Medium** value. Although, canopy trees take time to establish if removed, the Proposed Development has the potential to retain majority of the landscape feature and so the overall integrity of the feature will not be lost. This results in a **Medium** susceptibility and an overall **Medium** sensitivity.

Orchard

- 5.1.13 Field 5 in the Site contains a designated Traditional Orchard. Orchards are a common feature of the local landscape character and make a positive contribution to the landscape character and so has some natural and cultural heritage value. However, the orchard is unmanaged and overgrown in parts whereas other parts of the orchard particularly along the eastern and northern edge of Field 5 have been removed and has become a remnant orchard which is also recognised within the Kent landscape character assessment; see SAP N. As the landscape feature is a common feature of the landscape character and is recommended in NCA guidelines to conserve and enhance orchards, they are distinctive landscape features and possess functional ecological value and contribute towards perceptual wild qualities in the Site although in poor condition. Overall, it is considered the landscape feature makes some positive contribution to the landscape character and are of **Medium** value.
- 5.1.14 Although trees take time to establish, if removed, the Proposed Development has the potential to accommodate and establish orchards across the Site and so the overall integrity of the feature will not be lost. This results in a **High** susceptibility and an overall **High** sensitivity.

Landscape Value, Susceptibility and Sensitivity

Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations

- 5.1.15 Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 02/21: Assessing landscape value outside national designations^{viii} provides guidance on assessing landscape value and 'valued landscapes' that is intended to be supplementary to GLVIA Box 5.1 (as set out at Paragraph 2.4.4 of the TGN). It should be noted, as stated in TGN 02/21, that it broadly presents the same factors as Box 5.1 from GLVIA3 (and the 2002 Landscape Character Assessment Guidance), with the following changes:
- 'Conservation interests' is separated into natural heritage and cultural heritage factors (reflecting the approach in NatureScot's guidance on local landscape designations and



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Natural England's that Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England);

- The term 'landscape condition' is used in place of 'landscape quality (condition)';
- 'Rarity' and 'representativeness' are combined into a newly named factor 'distinctiveness'; and
- A new factor, 'function' is included which addresses the value attached to landscapes.

5.1.16 TGN 02/21 sets out the following at Table 1: Range of factors that can be considered in identifying landscape value:

- Natural heritage: Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape.
- Cultural heritage: Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape.
- Landscape condition: Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure.
- Associations: Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts.
- Distinctiveness: Landscape that has a strong sense of identity.
- Recreational: Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important.
- Perceptual (Scenic): Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense.
- Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity): Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies.
- Functional: Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape.

The Site and its Immediate Context

5.1.17 **Natural Heritage:** The Site contains a Traditional Orchard which is also a Priority Habitat^{ix}. The Site does not contain any other ecological designations. Walnut Wood Ancient Woodland is situated 60m south-east of the Site. There are no Tree Preservation Orders although there are two Veteran Trees situated in the eastern edge of Field 2. Overall, the Site and its Immediate Context has some natural heritage and is considered to be of **Medium** value.

5.1.18 **Cultural Heritage:** Grade II Downs Hall Listed Building is situated 30m north of the Site. There are no conservation areas in the immediate context of the Site. There may be some intervisibility between Downs Hall and the Site. Fields within the Site have been rationalised with post and wire fencing over time for agricultural purposes consisting of paddocks and built form associated with 'The Piggery' and so is considered to be of **Low** value.

5.1.19 **Landscape Quality (Condition):** The Kent and Gravesham landscape character assessment both identify the landscape condition of Southfleet Arable Lands LCA is considered to be in 'Very poor' condition and Istead Arable Farmlands LCA is considered to be in 'Poor' condition. The Site comprises unremarkable pastoral fields with internal canopy tree planting and post and wire fencing defining internal field parcel boundaries. Existing vegetation within the Site and along its boundaries is mature and unmanaged inclusive of the dilapidated orchard within Field 5. The nature across the Site varies from field to field where some fields (Fields 1, 4 and



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7) are open in nature whereas others have a sense of enclosure due to the presence of overgrown and unmanaged structural vegetation and farmstead (Fields 2, 3 and 7).

- 5.1.20 Whilst the Site contains features such as canopy trees, hedgerows and an orchard it also includes electricity pylons which detract from the rural and open character of the Site. Although the Site contains a Traditional Orchards designation, the orchard itself is unmanaged and degraded. Overall, it is considered that the Site has little to no wider recognition or value and is **Low** value.
- 5.1.21 **Perceptual (Scenic):** The Site possesses little perceptual scenic value as it consists of unremarkable fields used for pastoral farming defined by post and wire fencing or unmanaged mature vegetation. The southern part of the Site has an open and rural nature compared to the northern part of the Site although it is not publicly accessible and contains two electricity pylons. It is considered that the Site has little to no wider recognition or value and is **Low** value.
- 5.1.22 **Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquility):** The Site has a peri-urban character with the northern Site boundary abutting residential dwellings along Downs Road which has an urbanising influence due to the proximity of the settlement edge of Istead Rise. Although the Site is set back from Downs Road, the settlement edge of Istead Rise contributes to noise pollution and visual clutter of existing built form through gaps in existing trees along the northern Site boundary thus detracting from the rural sense of the Site and the immediate context. The southern edge of the Site has an open and rural nature although the presence of electricity pylons detracts from a sense of tranquillity and wildness in the immediate setting of the Site and beyond. Furthermore, the Site is currently used for agricultural purposes and is not publicly accessible and so contributes little to wildness and tranquil perceptual qualities resulting in a **Low** value.
- 5.1.23 **Distinctiveness:** The Site presents Key and Common Characteristics of the county and local landscape character including orchards, open nature of fields to some degree fields defined by post-and-wire fencing and the presence of electricity pylons. Although the Site contains an orchard it is unmanaged and overgrown in parts and has become a remnant orchard. As a result, the Site is considered to have **Low** value in distinctiveness.
- 5.1.24 **Recreational Aspects:** The Site is not publicly accessible and so has a **Low** value.
- 5.1.25 **Associations:** the Site exhibits no identifiable associations related to particular people or events in history, nor to that which contribute to the perception of the natural beauty of the area and so is considered to be of **Low** Value.
- 5.1.26 With regard to 'function', the TGN 02/21 defines this as a 'landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape features'. In terms of indicators of landscape value, TCN 02/21 goes on to note that these include:
- *"Landscapes and landscape elements that contribute to the healthy functioning of the landscape, e.g. natural hydrological systems/ floodplains, areas of undisturbed and healthy soils, areas that form carbon sinks such as peat bogs, woodlands and oceans, areas of diverse landcover (benefits pest regulation), pollinator-rich habitats such as wildflower meadows*
 - *Areas that form an important part of a multifunctional Green Infrastructure network*
 - *Landscapes and landscape elements that have strong physical or functional links with an adjacent national landscape designation, or are important to the appreciation of the designated landscape and its special qualities"*



- 5.1.27 With regard to 'function', the TGN 02/21 also notes that "*landscape function can influence value, but the presence of a spatial designation (e.g. Green Belt or Green Gap) is not in itself an indicator of high landscape value*", such that the assessment of value should be based on the criteria based assessment. Therefore, no further attributes have been identified that would raise the value of the Site to that above that assessed in the LVIA, that is of **Low** value.
- 5.1.28 In terms of 'Conservation Interests', which is separated into historic and cultural heritage aspects in TGN 02/21, the Site does not contain any historic landmarks or designed landscapes; nor does it contribute to an historic park or garden; and nor does it contribute to a significant heritage asset, so this does not change the findings of the LVIA in this respect.

Valued Landscapes

- 5.1.29 The TGN 02/21 then goes on to provide a definition of a 'valued landscape', as distinct from landscape value. A 'valued landscape' is defined in the TGN 02/21 as:

"an area identified as having sufficient landscape qualities to elevate it above other more everyday landscapes."

- 5.1.30 The TGN 02/21 goes on to note the following key points at Paragraph A4. 2.12:

- *"It is not possible to set a definitive threshold in this TGN above which a landscape is considered to be a 'valued landscape'. It is a judgment that must be made on a case-by-case basis, based on the evidence. There should be a weight of evidence that supports the recognition of a landscape as valued above more everyday landscapes."*
- *"The character and quality of landscapes across England are variable and what may be defined as reaching the 'valued landscape' threshold/criteria in one part of the Country may be considered to be an 'everyday landscape' in another."*
- *It would be expected that a 'valued landscape' would demonstrate the presence of a number of indicators of landscape value, as set out in Table 1, although it is possible for one indicator to be of such importance (e.g. rarity, association or perceptual aspects) that the landscape is judged to be a 'valued landscape' even if other indicators are not present."*
- *"The identification of landscape value needs to be applied proportionately ensuring that identification of 'valued landscape' is not over used."*
- *"In line with the European Landscape Convention's approach, landscapes that are not judged to be 'valued landscapes' may still have value, and NPPF paragraph 170 b)* (*Updated to paragraph 187 b) of the NPPF February 2025) .requires planning policies and decisions to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. It is well-established that a landscape does not have to be a 'valued landscape' to be afforded protection from inappropriate development"*

- 5.1.31 TGN 02/21 also notes at Paragraph 2.4.5, with regard to coming to a judgement on landscape value, that when considering the attributes set out in Table 1, the following factors may be relevant:

- *"When assessing landscape value of a site as part of a planning application or appeal it is important to consider not only the site itself and its features/elements/characteristics/qualities, but also their relationship with, and the role they play within, the site's context."*



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Value is best appreciated at the scale at which a landscape is perceived – rarely is this on a field-by-field basis.

- 5.1.32 In terms of reviewing the attributes that contribute to value and whether the combination of these attributes, or one single attribute, elevate the Site and its Immediate Context to a 'valued landscape'. The Site possesses limited some perceptual scenic, wild and tranquil properties, which have little recognition of value beyond the local community. The Site does not contain distinctive components and is not recognised nationally for scenic beauty. Some of the Site's landscape features are in good condition such as the canopy trees although majority of the existing landscape features are overgrown and unmanaged. Existing landscape features within the Site albeit unmanaged provide some ecological functional value for habitat connectivity and contribute toward the wider green infrastructure network particularly along the Site's boundaries.
- 5.1.33 Existing urban development associated with Istead Rise in the immediate context of the Site to the north detracts from Perceptual Wild, Scenic or Tranquil qualities of the northern part of the Site as well as existing barns, post and wire fencing and electricity pylons within the Site. The Site itself possess little in natural or cultural heritage, it does contain a Traditional Orchard albeit the eastern edge of the orchard has disintegrated, and the remaining orchard is unmanaged.
- 5.1.34 There are no significant associations, there is no one attribute, or combination of attributes that could be considered to contribute to a more than everyday landscape, and therefore the Site is not considered to be a 'valued landscape'.
- 5.1.35 As recognised by TGN 02/21, that does not mean that there are not attributes of value associated with the Site. In line with good practice, the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside (para 187b) of the NPPF) have been identified from the outset, with landscape input for the early stages to inform how proposed development could come forward on the Site. In particular, this has resulted in the retention of the nature of the landform and majority of existing vegetation particularly along the Site's boundaries.
- 5.1.36 As part of the landscape strategy, a minimum 20m landscape buffer is proposed along the southern edge of the Site in order to retain an open character. Additional tree, hedgerow, wetland and orchard planting in line with the existing landscape character is proposed as well as wildflower meadows, amenity grassland, formal and informal footpaths. Detailed consideration of the potential visibility of Proposed Development has been undertaken, to ensure that visual effects are minimised, and predominantly restricted to the Site and its immediate context.
- 5.1.37 Finally, in respect of landscape value, the Gravesham Green Belt Study (2018), does not identify any attributes so significant that it would preclude development coming forward on the Site.

Susceptibility and Sensitivity

- 5.1.38 The Site lies on the settlement edge of Istead Rise which influences the intrinsic character of the Site and its immediate context and provides the opportunity for introducing development in line with the existing character of the Site. The Site is enclosed by some structural vegetation such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees and canopy trees. Although, a majority of the northern and eastern Site boundaries abuts rear dwellings off Downs Road and Long Walk. The presence of mature, structural planting encloses the northern and eastern Site boundaries to some degree although there is some visual permeability of existing residential dwellings.
- 5.1.39 The existing nature of the Site, its location adjacent to the existing settlement edge of Istead Rise, sense of enclosure contrasts with the southern part of the Site being open and somewhat rural in nature. Through sensitive placement of built form in less visually sensitive areas of the Site along with an additional landscape planting integrated with the existing green infrastructure network, the Site has some capacity to accommodate the type of



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development proposed in a sensitive and sympathetic manner. The susceptibility of the character of the Site and its immediate setting to the type of development proposed is considered to be **Medium** which will result in an overall **Medium** sensitivity.

Table 2: Summary of Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors

Receptor	Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity
Fields	Low	High	Medium
Hedgerows	Low	Low	Low
Hedgerow Trees	Low	Medium	Medium
Canopy Trees	Medium	Medium	Medium
Orchards	Medium	High	High
The Site and its Immediate Context	Low	Medium	Medium



6 Visual Appraisal

- 6.1.1 A visual appraisal has been undertaken to determine the relationship of the Site with its surroundings and its approximate extent of visibility within the wider landscape from publicly accessible locations. The potential visibility of the Site is largely determined by the intervening landform, as topographic features such as ridgelines and subtle undulations may block or curtail views towards the Site. In addition, land cover has an important role in determining potential visibility as woodland, treebelts or built forms may contribute to additional blocking, filtering or curtailing of views. The effectiveness of vegetation as a screen depends to a considerable extent on its scale.
- 6.1.2 As part of the iterative assessment process, the design of the Proposed Development has been informed by the nature of identified landscape and visual receptors. On the basis of the ZTV and field surveys, a series of representative views (Site Context Photographs 1-9) have been selected to support the assessment of the potential visual effects arising from the Proposed Development. The ZTV models the effect of large blocks of vegetation, built form and landform on the potential visibility of the Proposed Development. It should be noted that the ZTV does not take into account the screening effect of smaller areas of vegetation including hedgerows and is therefore only an indication of potential visibility. The findings of the ZTV were confirmed by field surveys in order to robustly and accurately assess the visual effects of the Proposed Development in accordance with GLVIA3.
- 6.1.3 The ZTV is presented on **Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan**, with the location of the Site Context Photographs (SCPs) presented in **Appendix C: Site Context Photographs**, with a description of the baseline visual characteristics of the Site set out below. Site Context Photographs 1 to 14 demonstrate that views of the interior of the Site are limited to the localised area of residential development to the north of the Site. However, even from those locations in proximity to the Site, the Site's visibility is restricted due to the extent of containment provided by the vegetation and built form that encloses the Site (in combination with built form in the Sites' wider setting). An indication of the existing visual envelope of the Site is provided in **Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan**, which also shows where the Site Context Photographs were taken from.

Immediate Context (adjacent to Site Boundary)

- 6.1.4 Views of the Site from Long Walk, off the north-western Site boundary are for the most part screen and filtered by fences and trees although there are views into the Site through gaps in the fence; see SCP 5.
- 6.1.5 Views from Downs Road off the access track into the Site demonstrate some intervisibility of the Site although fencing and residential premises restrict majority of the views into the Site, with only partial views of structure vegetation associated with the eastern part of the Site visible. Nonetheless, from the windows of these properties there are likely to be more extensive views across the Site; see SCP 9.
- 6.1.6 As demonstrated in Site Context Photograph 14 the built form that sits alongside the southern side of Downs Road curtails visibility with the Site, while vegetation in the rear gardens of these properties forms the backdrop to the views obtained, preventing any views further afield.

Mid Distance Views

- 6.1.7 Views from the elevated, residential landscape to the east of the Site demonstrated in SCPs 3, 6 to 8 and 13 illustrate that there are views of the more elevated parts of the Site in the middle ground of the view and seen as part of a much broader swathe of agricultural land. However, even the uppermost southern parts of the Site appear distinct from this wider farmed and elevated landscape due to the sloping nature of the Site meaning that it is more readily associated with the valley landscape coinciding with Downs Road. Consequently, it is the more level, plateau-like, rapeseed field that provides a separation function between Istead



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Rise and the settlement of New Barn that is visible in the distance (sitting at a higher elevation).

- 6.1.8 Views from further to the west on Downs Road outside the settlement edge of Istead Rise, demonstrate some intervisibility with the Site in the conjunction with the intervening built forms associated with Willerby Farm. The pylon towers, which extend across the landscape, are prominent features in the view and erode the visual amenity experience; see SCP4.

Long Distance Views

- 6.1.9 The Site is not discernible from the elevated landscape to the east, south or south-west, due to a combination of both its orientation and its siting in the lower reaches of the valley landscape; see SCP 1,2 and 10 to 12. Nonetheless, the pylon tower that sits within the western part of the Site is a discernible feature. In the latter two photographs the settlement of Istead Rise is seen to straddle an elevated landscape in the context of a series of prominent pylon towers; see SCP 12.

Summary

- 6.1.10 Overall, the Site is considered to be of low/medium sensitivity as it is of low landscape value and it has a localised visual envelope due to the orientation and nature of the landform within and adjoining the Site (given its siting within the lower reaches of the sloping valley landscape). Nonetheless, the uppermost part of the Site is considered to be of medium sensitivity as it has a more wide-reaching visual envelope and has some association with the wider farmed landscape. This wider farmed landscape is distinct to the valley landscape and environment of Istead Rise (within which the majority of the Site is perceived to fall within).

6.2 Visual Receptors

- 6.2.1 On the basis of the visual appraisal, a series of visual receptors have been selected against which the effects of the Proposed Development on visual amenity will be assessed. Visual receptors, together with their susceptibility, value of views, and resultant overall sensitivity of receptor to development of the type proposed are set out below.

Receptors travelling along Downs Road (SCPs 4, 9 and 14)

- 6.2.2 Views are from an undesignated road with minimal cultural or historical associations and so is considered to have a **Low** value. Receptors comprise people driving, cycling and potentially pedestrians along parts of the road who will have some appreciation of their surroundings, which are within an urban setting as development aligns both sides of the road. It is therefore considered to have a **Medium** susceptibility. Overall, their sensitivity is judged to be **Low/Medium** to the type of development proposed.

Residents in Properties along Downs Road and Long Walk (SCP 5)

- 6.2.3 Views are from a location that is not designated and has minimal to no cultural associations, resulting in a **Low** value. Receptors are people from their properties, where the views from property and gardens are possible as they lie within the vicinity of the Site and so is considered to have **High** susceptibility, resulting in an overall **Medium** sensitivity to the type of development proposed.

Receptors travelling along Upper Avenue (SCP 3), Fairview Road (SCP 6), Crockenhall Way (SCP 7), Flowerhill Way (SCP 8), Lyndhurst Way (SCP 13)

- 6.2.4 Views are from an undesignated road with minimal cultural or historical associations and so is considered to have a **Low** value. Receptors comprise people driving, cycling and potentially pedestrians along parts of the road who will have some appreciation of their surroundings, which are within an urban setting as development aligns both sides of the road. It is therefore



considered to have a **Medium** susceptibility. Overall, their sensitivity is judged to be **Low/Medium** to the type of development proposed.

Receptors travelling along New Barn Road (SCP 1)

- 6.2.5 Views are from a location that is not designated and has minimal to no cultural associations, resulting in a **Low** value. Receptors comprise people driving, cycling and potentially pedestrians along parts of the road who will have some appreciation of their surroundings which comprise predominantly of views of agricultural fields in the immediate context and long distance views of development associated with Istead Rise. It is therefore considered to have a **Medium** susceptibility. Overall, their sensitivity is judged to be **Low/Medium** to the type of development proposed.

Receptors travelling along PRowS DR142, NU38, NU37 and DN38 (SCP 2, 12)

- 6.2.6 Views are from a designated public footpath that is likely to be of some local importance and/or cultural associations, resulting in a **Medium** value. Receptors are people using a public footpath whose attention is focused on the landscape surroundings thus having a **High** susceptibility to development of the type proposed, resulting in a **Medium/High** overall sensitivity.

Receptors travelling along PRow NU31 (SCP 10), NU35 (SCP 11)

- 6.2.7 Views are from a designated public footpath that is likely to be of some local importance and/or cultural associations, resulting in a **Medium** value. Receptors are people using a public footpath whose attention is focused on the landscape surroundings thus having a **High** susceptibility to development of the type proposed, resulting in a **Medium/High** overall sensitivity.

Table 3: Summary of Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Receptor	Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity
Receptors travelling along Downs Road (SCPs 4, 9 and 14)	Low	Medium	Low/Medium
Residents in Properties along Downs Road and Long Walk (SCP 5)	Low	High	Medium
Receptors travelling along Upper Avenue (SCP 3), Fairview Road (SCP 6), Crockenhall Way (SCP 7), Flowerhill Way (SCP 8), Lyndhurst Way (SCP 13)	Low	Medium	Low/Medium
Residents in Properties along Upper Avenue (SCP 3), Fairview Road (SCP 6), Crockenhall Way (SCP 7), Flowerhill Way (SCP 8), Lyndhurst Way (SCP 13)	Low	High	Medium
Receptors travelling along New Barn Road (SCP1)	Low	Medium	Low/Medium
Receptors travelling along PRowS DR142, NU38, NU37, DN38 (SCP 2 and 12)	Medium	High	Medium/High
Receptors travelling along PRow NU31 (SCP 10) and NU35 (SCP 11)	Medium	High	Medium/High



7 Development Proposals and Landscape Principles

- 7.1.1 The Proposed Development comprises up to 160 dwellings with associated infrastructure and landscape planting. The design of the Proposed Development has evolved as part of an iterative process and has been informed by the findings of landscape character and visual amenity assessment. Consideration of the above baseline conditions has informed the proposed layout within the Site, including the siting, scale and massing of introduced built elements, and appropriate ground levels.

7.2 Site Opportunities and Constraints

Opportunities for development within the Site are that:

- The Site is not covered by any landscape designations;
- There are no Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) enforced within the Site although there are two veteran trees which have the capacity to be retained;
- There is an existing vegetation framework that in part borders and encloses the Site, which in combination with the sloping nature of the Site and its orientation (sited within the lower-reaches of the valley formation), results in a localised visual envelope;
- The Site does not exhibit any rare landscape features; and
- The Site is not crossed by any PRoW and is not publicly accessible, and therefore is of no recreational value.

Constraints to development within the Site include:

- Development should be offset from the existing boundary vegetation structure in response to Root Protection Areas (the extent of which should be determined by an arboricultural survey); and
- Development in the southern part of the Site would be visible from the elevated landscape to the north due to the orientation of the landform and its elevated nature, and accordingly it is recommended that this part of the Site is kept free of built form.

Response to Landscape Character

- 7.2.1 The development proposals could respond positively to the environment and landscape opportunities identified for the North Kent Plain NCA through the protection and enhancement of green corridors/ecological networks (including the vegetation bordering the Site) and the creation of new landscape features and areas of green space, providing a robust landscape framework.
- 7.2.2 In relation to the Southfleet Arable Lands LCA and the Istead Arable Farmlands LCA the development proposals will create a softened positive edge to the urban area through the provision of additional boundary planting along the southern edge of the Site that reinforces a sense of enclosure, while new planting within the Site will restore historic boundaries through the provision of native hedgerows.
- 7.2.3 As recommended in the Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study, views out from Istead Rise to the wider agricultural landscape and valley crest could be retained by ensuring that introduced built form is limited to the lower-slopes, i.e. below the 55m AOD contour line, while additional woodland cover could be provided in areas to the south to provide a green backdrop in views out, and a green edge in views towards Istead Rise.



Response to Planning Policy

- 7.2.4 The development proposals within the Site could respond positively to the identified policies within the NPPF and the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy, in addition to the principles set out within the Kent Design Guide. As part of the development, the existing vegetation both within and enclosing the Site could be retained and enhanced and will be supplemented through the provision of additional areas of planting (utilising locally distinctive species) to create green infrastructure linkages through the Site while fragmenting and softening the overall perceived scale, mass and extent of introduced built forms.
- 7.2.5 The siting, density, layout and materials of introduced built forms will contribute positively to the character of Istead Rise, while the existing visual amenity of receptors to the north will be enhanced by creating an enclosed edge to Istead Rise while maintaining open views of the rising agricultural land further afield that separates Istead Rise from New Barn and reinforcing the separate identity of these settlements.

Design Strategy

- 7.2.6 A series of design considerations have been identified as a result of the landscape and visual appraisal, as illustrated on **Figure 6: Opportunities and Constraints Plan**, and include:
- Ensure that the introduced built forms contribute positively to the sense of place and local distinctiveness by using materials that reflect or complement the local vernacular and exhibit a high quality of design as advocated in the Kent Design Guide;
 - Soften the appearance of the introduced built form by ensuring that the built form is set within robust structural planting framework;
 - Ensure that the roofscape of the introduced built form does not overtly obscure views of the agricultural land to the south of the Site in views from the elevated landscape to the north, so as to ensure that the built development relates to the existing settled valley corridor and that any perception of encroachment is minimised;
 - Ensure that the southernmost part of the Site remains free from built forms so as to not adversely impact upon the visual amenity of nearby surrounding receptors and to retain the distinction between the settled valley and upper crest and slope landscape that separates Istead Rise from New Barn;
 - Retain and enhance the existing vegetation within and bordering the Site and establish green infrastructure linkages;
 - Provide new areas of planting, with appropriate locally distinctive species, to soften and fragment the perceived mass of the introduced built forms in views from the north; and
 - Ensure that any built forms are offset in relation to the root protection areas of existing vegetation to be retained within and bordering the Site.



8 Assessment of Effects

- 8.1.1 This section sets out the anticipated landscape and visual effects resulting from the Proposed Development at Year 1 and Year 15 after completion, the latter taking into account the substantive establishment of the planting proposals. Woodland planting is anticipated to grow at a rate of approximately 1m every 3 years, whilst it is assumed that reinforced and proposed hedgerows around the Site will have reached full maturity and a height of 2 - 3m.
- 8.1.2 It is acknowledged that the construction phase will also result in a number of alterations to landscape character and visual amenity through the addition of plant, machinery and construction traffic movements in the landscape together with groundworks and construction of the facility and landscape implementation operations. In this regard the effects that will occur during construction will typically be adverse in nature and fluctuating in intensity due to the different operations occurring on the Site. However, due to the limited duration of the construction programme these effects will only be experienced for a brief period, thereby reducing their significance.

8.2 Effects on Landscape Character

County LCA: Southfleet Arable Lands LCA

Year 1

- 8.2.1 The Proposed Development will result in changes to a very small part of the LCA (less than 1%). The main change to the character will be the loss of pastoral field parcels, which are a common feature of the LCA although the mature boundary vegetation that defines the Site's boundaries will be retained for the most part. Additional planting such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees, canopy trees, orchards are proposed in combination with ponds which will make some positive contribution towards the landscape character. Structural planting will not have established to a mature height by this point in time and so will contribute little towards strengthening landscape character at Year 1. Furthermore, the nature of Proposed Development is not uncharacteristic as the northern and eastern Site boundaries abuts existing residential development off Downs Road and Long Walk. The Site will appear as a natural extension of the settlement edge of Istead Rise, making a change to a very small proportion on the character of the overall LCA. On balance, it is considered that the Proposed Development will result a magnitude of effect of **None** with a **Neutral** significance of effect.

Year 15

- 8.2.2 Following maturity, the proposed structural planting will soften the built form within an established green infrastructure network. The Proposed Development will provide a sympathetic edge through the implementation of green buffers along sensitive edges of the Site particularly along the southern boundary which will retain an open character; see **Figure 7 Illustrative Landscape Masterplan**. It is considered that the nature of change will remain with a magnitude of effect of **None** and a significance of effect of **Neutral**.

Local LCA: Istead Arable Farmlands LCA

Year 1

- 8.2.3 The Proposed Development will result in changes to a very small part of the LCA (approximately 1%). As a result of the Proposed Development pastoral field parcels will be partly replaced with newly built form, landscape planting and associated infrastructure will result in direct changes to a small part of the overall LCA. As well as the change in land use from pastoral to residential and public open space, a common feature of the LCA, the remnant Traditional Orchard will be lost and replaced with built form. However, two new



publicly accessible orchards are proposed one of which will promote ecology, and the second will be used by the local community; see **Figure 7 Illustrative Landscape Masterplan**. Majority of the existing structural planting within the Site will be retained although a small proportion may be lost to accommodate connectivity and access into the Site. Furthermore, additional planting such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees, canopy trees, orchards are proposed in combination with ponds which will make some positive contribution towards the landscape character. Structural planting will not have established to a mature height by this point in time and so will contribute little towards strengthening landscape character at Year 1. Furthermore, the nature of Proposed Development is not uncharacteristic as the northern and eastern Site boundaries abuts existing residential development off Downs Road and Long Walk. The Site will appear as a natural extension of the settlement edge of Istead Rise, making a change to a very small proportion on the character of the overall LCA. On balance, it is considered that the Proposed Development will result a magnitude of effect of **Very Small** with a **Negligible Adverse** significance of effect.

Year 15

- 8.2.4 Following maturity of the proposed structural planting including the proposed orchards which will complement the local landscape character. Establishment of landscape planting will also soften the built form within an established green infrastructure network. The Proposed Development will provide a sympathetic edge through the implementation of green buffers along sensitive edges of the Site particularly along the southern Site boundary which will retain an open character; see **Figure 7 Illustrative Landscape Masterplan**. It is considered that the nature of change will remain with a magnitude of effect of **None** and a significance of effect of **Neutral**.

8.3 Effects on Landscape Features

Fields

Year 1

- 8.3.1 The majority of the fields in the Site will be lost as a result of the Proposed Development. The agricultural nature of fields will have been replaced with residential built form, public open space and associated infrastructure such as roads. However, as part of the landscape strategy, proposed built form will be set on lower laying landform and within a high quality residential estate that is situated within areas of existing and proposed landscape planting with access to public open space, orchards, wildflower meadows, wetland areas and play spaces. Furthermore, the southern edge of the Site will retain its open character to some degree and be public open space devoid of built form. It is considered on balance that the Proposed Development will lead to a pronounced change to the receptor therefore it is considered there will be a **Large** magnitude of effect with a **Major Adverse** significance of effect.

Year 15

- 8.3.2 The proposed planting as part of the landscape strategy will have established to provide a strengthened green infrastructure network leading to tangible benefits. There will be notable green buffers and open space along the southern edges of the Site. Although, landscape features across the Site will be retained and strengthened there will be a partial deterioration of fields. The agricultural use of the Site will be replaced into residential, and amenity use with landscape and ecological benefits. As a result, it is considered that the magnitude of effect will remain at **Large** with a **Major Adverse** significance of effect.



Hedgerows

Year 1

- 8.3.3 The Proposed Development includes retaining the majority of the existing hedgerows although a small proportion may be lost to accommodate connectivity and access into the Site. As part of the landscape strategy existing hedgerows will be gapped up and reinforced with new lengths of native species rich hedgerow and hedgerow trees proposed across the Site. This will in turn strengthen the existing green infrastructure network and provide additional habitat enhancement. However, at Year 1, hedgerows will be subject to a very slight improvement as they will not have fully established. Therefore, on balance the nature of change will result in a magnitude of effect of **None** and a **Neutral** significance of effect.

Year 15

- 8.3.4 Proposed planting will have fully established by this point in time improving the overall structure and cohesiveness of the hedgerow network as a whole. This will also provide ecological benefits as the hedgerows will be species rich, thus improving their condition as well as increasing habitat value. On this basis, hedgerows will be subject to a very slight improvement. The nature of change will result in a magnitude of effect of **Very Small** and the significance of effect will be **Negligible Beneficial**.

Hedgerow Trees

Year 1

- 8.3.5 As part of the Proposed Development existing hedgerow trees will be retained and protected for the most part. New hedgerow tree planting is proposed which will reinforce and strengthen this landscape feature across the Site as well as providing habitat enhancements. However, at Year 1 the new planting will not have fully established and so will provide little in the form of landscape mitigation; only a very slight improvement at Year 1. Therefore, the nature of change would be limited with the magnitude of effect of **Very Small** and a significance of effect of **Negligible Beneficial**.

Year 15

- 8.3.6 By this point in time, hedgerow trees will have fully established improving the overall structure and cohesiveness of the receptor as a whole. On this basis, the receptor will be subject to a limited improvement. Therefore, the nature of change will remain at **Small** magnitude of effect with a **Minor Beneficial** significance of effect.

Canopy Trees

Year 1

- 8.3.7 As part of the landscape strategy majority of the existing canopy trees will be retained with a small proportion of tree, particularly Cat U trees as identified in the Tree Constraints Plan in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment TCP/RF23434/12-05-25. Furthermore a number of native canopy trees are proposed as part of the Proposed Development. This will in turn reinforce and strengthen the integrity of the landscape feature as a whole as well as provide additional habitat enhancement. As such, the Proposed Development will increase the extent of this feature on the Site further reinforcing the existing character. Veteran trees and their settings have also been retained as part of the landscape strategy. As the canopy trees will not have established to mature height at Year 1, the receptor will be subject to only a very slight improvement. As a result, the nature of change will be **None** for magnitude of effect with a **Neutral** significance of effect.

Year 15



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- 8.3.8 By this point in time, the landscape feature will have fully established improving the overall structure and cohesiveness of the receptor as a whole as well as providing ecological benefits. On this basis, the receptor will be subject to a limited improvement; see **Figure 7 Illustrative Landscape Masterplan**. Therefore, the nature of change would result in a **Very Small** magnitude of effect resulting in a **Negligible Beneficial** significance of effect.

Orchards

Year 1

- 8.3.9 The existing remnant orchard will be removed as part of the Proposed Development due to being in poor condition and will be replaced with two proposed orchards across the Site. One proposed orchard will provide landscape and ecological value in proximity to the proposed wetlands in Field 4 whilst the second orchard will be a community asset situated in the south-western part of the Site. The community orchard will contain fruit trees and ornamental trees for the local community to enjoy. As the proposed trees in the orchards will not have established at Year 1 it is considered that the magnitude of effect will be **Small** with a **Minor Adverse** significance of effect.

Year 15

- 8.3.10 By this point in time, the proposed trees will have established and strengthened the integrity of the feature as a whole as well as the local landscape character. The proposed orchards will play a role in strengthening the landscape feature as well as provide ecological value across the Site and the local green infrastructure network. Overall, it is considered that the magnitude of effect will be **Small** with a **Minor beneficial** significance of effect.

The Site and its Immediate Context

Year 1

- 8.3.11 The Proposed Development has been designed to provide a high quality landscape setting that includes areas of public open space (approximately XX% based on Figure 1 Parameter Plan Land Use) within and around proposed built form. Built form has been sensitively located and designed to reflect the local character with the southern edge of the Site providing a sympathetic green edge. The proposed POS will provide an open and rural character to provide a sympathetic and transitional landscape to the immediate context of the Site. A series of green corridors pass through the Site within which characteristic landscape features such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees, canopy trees and woodland will be retained and strengthened through additional planting, that will aid in integrating the proposed built form within the Site and the immediate setting. Although, there will be a change in land use and character, it is important to note that the Site contains detracting urban features such as pylons and overhead wires which have an urbanising influence along with existing built form adjacent to the northern Site boundary.
- 8.3.12 As part of the landscape strategy, the majority of existing structural vegetation such as mature native hedgerows, hedgerow trees and canopy will be retained with a small number of Cat U trees removed. Proposed Development will considerably increase the extent of structural vegetation such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees, canopy trees and orchards which will strengthen landscape character and cultural heritage of the Site as well as reducing the visual presence and perception of the overall scheme.
- 8.3.13 The Site has been designed to complement the existing character with a range of spaces to include wetlands, wildflower meadows, play spaces and orchards with formal and informal access. Overall, the comprehensive green and blue framework will provide a number of benefits to include increased recreational uses, public open space, a greater variety of habitat and enhanced biodiversity across the Site, albeit at Year 1 this will be limited. Overall, it is considered that the nature of change would result in a **Medium** magnitude of effect and the significance of effect will be **Moderate Adverse**.



Year 15

- 8.3.14 By Year 15, the landscape scheme for the Proposed Development will have matured to provide an enhanced landscape setting that compliments the local landscape and settlement edge. Whilst the built edge would be extended, built development would be located within an increasingly robust extensive naturalistic parkland/mosaic landscape with increased access to green space which overall improves the settlement edge. The green and blue infrastructure network will further soften the southern edge of the Site and integrate with the built form to provide differing character areas within the Site to provide its own identity. Increased accessibility and connectivity to the established landscape and open space areas will provide greater recreational benefits as well as a number of habitats supporting a wide variety of wildlife.
- 8.3.15 The location of the Site being situated along the edge of Istead Rise and urbanising influence of local development to the north of the Site demonstrates that the Site has some capacity to accommodate the Proposed Development with a limited deterioration to the existing landscape. Agricultural field use will be lost however the southern edge of the Site will remain open in nature and used as public open space with XX% of the Site being built upon (based on Figure 1 Parameter Plan Land Use). On balance the nature of change would result in a **Medium** magnitude of effect and the significance of effect will be **Moderate / Minor Adverse** at worst.

8.4 Effects on Visual Receptors

Receptors travelling along Downs Road

Year 1

- 8.4.1 Users travelling along Downs Road will experience transient partial / filtered views of the Proposed Development through gaps in existing housing and canopy trees. The Site is accessed and set behind the rear gardens of residential dwellings along Downs Road, with proposed built form set back approximately 40m from the road. There will be transient and partial views into the Site from the access point into the Site as SCP 14. The landscape strategy proposes structural vegetation such as canopy trees along the northern edge of the Site which will contribute towards further filtering and softening views of built form associated with the Proposed Development. Furthermore, built form has been sympathetically placed and restricted in height to the Site Boundaries – X storeys (upto Xm height) with built form in the northern half of the Site limited to up to XXdph; based on Parameter Plan 03 - Storey Heights and Parameter Plan 04 – Density. Overall, there will be a limited change in the nature of views in the immediate context of the Site, which constitutes a 520m stretch along the road; total length approximately 1.4km.
- 8.4.2 Additionally, views of proposed built form are not uncharacteristic in nature due to the presence of existing residential dwellings along Downs Road and will be barely perceptible. At Year 1, proposed structural planting will provide very limited visual mitigation as newly planted trees and hedgerows which will not have established to a mature height. On balance, it is considered that there will be limited deterioration in the nature of views along Craythorne Road resulting in a **Very Small** magnitude of effect and a **Negligible Adverse** significance of effect, at most.

Year 15

- 8.4.3 By this point in time, the establishment of the proposed landscape planting will help mitigate visual effects. The landscape strategy includes a comprehensive green infrastructure network particularly along the edges of the Site. A combination of existing structural vegetation with proposed canopy trees, hedgerows and hedgerow trees will soften and filter close range and immediate transient views of the proposed built form. It is considered that the combination of sensitive placement of built form in terms of height and density and the establishment of a



comprehensive green and blue infrastructure network, will result in the magnitude of effect reducing to a magnitude of effect **None** and a **Neutral** significance of effect.

Residents in Properties along Downs Road and Long Walk

Year 1

- 8.4.4 Residents will experience filtered / partial filtered views of the Proposed Development from rear gardens and the first floor of their properties through existing structural planting and proposed canopy trees along the northern Site boundary. As proposed structural planting will not have established by Year 1, there will be some filtered views of the Site, predominantly from the first floor of residential dwellings along Downs Road and Long Walk. On balance, it is considered that the magnitude of effect will be **Very Small** with a **Negligible Adverse** significance of effect.

Year 15

- 8.4.5 By Year 15, proposed planting along the edges of the Site will have established to strengthen structural planting and further screen views into the Site. It is considered that the magnitude of effect will be **Very Small to None** with a significance of effect of **Negligible Adverse to Neutral**.

Receptors travelling along Upper Avenue, Fairview Road, Crockenhall Way, Flowerhill Way, Lyndhurst Way

Year 1

- 8.4.6 Users of the minor roads in the local context of the Site will experience a varying degree of visibility of the Proposed Development from no views to transient, filtered and partial views due to the nature of the valley landform, presence of mature structural vegetation along the roads and existing intervening residential development. Receptors travelling along Upper Avenue, Fairview Road and Crockenhall Way in the direction of the Site will experience partial and transient views of the western part of the Site in particular including the electricity pylon within Field 1 set behind intervening residential dwellings in the forefront of the view. Receptors travelling along Flowerhill Way and Lyndhurst Way will experience limited, partial and transient views through existing structural vegetation and built form.
- 8.4.7 As part of the landscape strategy structural planting such as canopy trees are proposed along the northern Site boundary as well as throughout the scheme along with small woodland and orchards which will play a role in breaking up the massing of built form and will play a role in softening the built up edge and filtering views into the Site. Furthermore, built form is concentrate in the northern half of Field 1 and part of Field 3 retaining the south-western part of the Site as public open space with landscape planting which will also soften views of the built edge of the Site. Heights of proposed built form will vary across the Site depending on the nature of the topography and visual sensitivity with lower density and 2 storey housing situated along the edges of the western parcel; see Building Heights Parameter Plan and Density Parameter Plan. As the Site lies on the settlement edge of Istead Rise and residential dwellings are situated on most of the minor roads, views of built form associated with the western parcel are not uncharacteristic in nature. Overall, it is considered that there will be a **Very Small to Small** magnitude of effect and a **Negligible to Minor Adverse** significance of effect, at most.

Year 15

- 8.4.8 By this point in time, the establishment of the proposed landscape strategy planting will help mitigate visual effects. The landscape strategy includes a comprehensive green infrastructure network particularly along the edges of the Site. A combination of existing structural vegetation with proposed canopy trees, orchards and woodland will help further soften and partially filter, transient views of the proposed built form. It is considered that the



combination of sensitive placement of built form in terms of height and the establishment of structural landscape planting will result a magnitude of effect will reduce to **Very Small** with a **Negligible Adverse** significance of effect.

Receptors travelling along New Barn Road

Year 1

- 8.4.9 Users of New Barn Road will experience very limited of the southern edge of the Proposed Development. The majority of the road is defined by mature, native hedgerows which screen views of the Site for the most part with very few intermittent and transient views through gaps in the hedgerow and gateways. Any views of the Site will be barely perceptible due to existing residential development in Istead Rise. Where there are views, the Proposed will appear as a natural continuation of existing built form / settlement edge. As part of the landscape strategy canopy trees and orchard and woodlands are proposed across the Site, particularly Field 7 which will remain devoid of built form. Although structural planting will not have established to a mature height, it will provide little in the form of visual mitigation. Nonetheless, built form associated with the Site will be seen as a natural continuation of existing built form in Istead Rise and so it is considered that this will result in a very slight deterioration in views at most. Overall, the magnitude of effect will be **Very Small** with a **Negligible Adverse** significance of effect.

Year 15

- 8.4.10 By this point in time, proposed structural planting will have established to further filter and soften views of built form in the Site. The Proposed Development will not be visible in the view and therefore the magnitude of effect is **None** and a **Neutral** significance of effect.

Receptors travelling along PRoWs DR142, NU38, NU37 and PRoW DN38

Year 1

The Proposed Development will not be visible from the receptor due to the nature of the intervening landform. The settlement edge of Istead Rise is visible from the public footpaths of which the Site will appear and as a natural continuation and will not be discernible for existing residential development. As part of the landscape strategy canopy trees and orchard and woodlands are proposed across the Site particularly Field 7 which will remain devoid of built form. Although structural planting will not have established to a mature height, it will provide little in the form of visual mitigation. Overall, it is considered that the magnitude of effect will be **Very Small** with a **Negligible Adverse** significance of effect, at most.

Year 15

- 8.4.11 The establishment of the proposed landscape strategy planting will help mitigate identified effects at Year 1. Planting of orchards, woodland and canopy trees within the green infrastructure framework will provide filtered views of built form as well as strengthen the local landscape character. On balance the magnitude of effects will reduce to **None** with a **Neutral** significance of effect.

Receptors travelling along PRoW NU31 and NU35

Year 1 and 15

- 8.4.12 The Proposed Development will not be visible in the view and therefore the magnitude of effect is **None** and a **Neutral** significance of effect for both Years 1 and 15.



9 Green Belt Assessment

9.1 Gravesham Green Belt Study (August 2020)*

9.1.1 The Gravesham Stage 2 Green Belt Study provides a detailed, independent assessment of the potential harm to Green Belt purposes if land is released for development, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. Building on a high-level Stage 1 review from 2018, this study focuses on specific areas identified in the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation. The Study assessed 122 parcels of land within the borough. These parcels were defined based on physical features and boundaries to evaluate how well each area meets the Green Belt purposes. Parcel IR1 covers the majority of the Site with the exception of the residential driveway off Downs Road, from which access is proposed and the northern edge of the wider arable field that forms the south western part of the Site

9.1.2 Parcel IR1 was given the following scores to their contribution to the NPPF Green Belt purposes:

- Purpose 1 Contribution - Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas Preventing towns and settlements from merging: **Limited / No contribution**
- Purpose 2 Contribution - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another: **Limited / No contribution**
- Purpose 3 Contribution - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment: **Relatively significant**
- Purpose 4 Contribution - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns: **Limited / No contribution**
- Purpose 5 Contribution - Assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land: **Equal contribution**
- The Study also provides an assessment score for the 'Impact of release on the contribution of adjacent land to the Green Belt purposes' for which IR1 scored as **Moderate**. It also states that:

"Releasing this land would have minor impacts in terms of the increased containment of adjacent land to the north and creation of a new inset settlement boundary further up the slope on the south eastern edge of Istead Rise, where land is increasingly distinct from the settlement, with no strong boundary feature".

9.1.3 In terms of whether the Site is released from the Green Belt, 'overall harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land' is considered to be **Moderate High** for Parcel IR1. It also states that:

"Release of the parcel would constitute a relatively significant encroachment on the countryside and would constitute a moderate weakening of the integrity of adjacent Green Belt land. The harm to the Green Belt purposes of releasing this parcel would be moderate high."

9.1.4 Given the findings of the landscape and visual appraisal and the recommendation that the southern part of the Site is kept free of built development, this Green Belt Review has assessed the contribution of the remaining part of the Site to the first four purposes of the Green Belt, i.e. omitting the area defined as 'Medium Landscape and Visual Constraints' on **Figure 6: Opportunities and Constraints Plan** from the area assessed. The Green Belt Review undertaken is set out in Table 4 below.



Table 4: Contribution of the Site to the Purposes of the Green Belt

Purpose	Critique	Contribution
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	The Site does not lie adjacent to a large built-up area (in accordance with the Gravesham Green Belt Study, the nearest large built-up area is considered to be Gravesend). Any development of the Site would likely not represent an incongruous pattern of development.	Weak
To prevent nearby towns from merging into one another	Istead Rise does not constitute a town and the Site does not lie in a gap between neighbouring towns. Accordingly, the Site does not contribute to this purpose.	None
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	The Site lies beyond the settlement limit and in spatial planning terms is defined as countryside, albeit it is not an extensive tract of land. Although there is some built form present within the Site, its overriding land use (consisting of farmland) ensures that there is an air of rurality over the Site such that it is perceived as forming part of the countryside, albeit in the context of the nearby settled area.	Moderate
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Istead Rise and the land in its setting (including the Site) does not contribute to nor form the setting or special character of a historic town.	None
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All areas of Green Belt fulfil this purpose equally.	n/a

- 9.1.5 It is apparent that for the most part the Site does not fulfil the purposes of the Green Belt. However, it does patently contribute to purpose (c), primarily on account of its open nature and majority farmland use. Redevelopment of the Site with residential forms of the scale proposed is likely to result in definitional, spatial and perceptual harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
- 9.1.6 Given the location of the Site there is potential for additional harm to arise on landscape character in the immediate vicinity, as well as harm on the amenity of nearby visual receptors at their places of residence and using the local transport network including the Public Right(s) of Way.

Does the Site comprise the ‘Grey Belt’?

- 9.1.7 As per the new PPG on Green Belt guidance, if a parcel of land does not strongly contribute to purposes a, b and d (Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 64-003-20250225)^{xi}, it is considered to be grey belt land; as demonstrated in **Table 4** above. The Site is situated on the southern edge of Istead Rise, a village in the borough of Gravesham, Kent, and is partially enclosed between existing development along northern and eastern Site boundaries and as a result would not result in an incongruous pattern of development. The nature of the landform provides a natural enclosure where the landform to the south rises to approximately 65m AOD already perceptually forming part of the settlement of Istead Rise. It is therefore considered that the proposed development makes a ‘limited’ contribution to purpose A.



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- 9.1.8 With regards to Purpose B, Istead Rise is defined as a 'Second Tier Settlement' and is classified as a village. The closest settlement of New Barns is situated approximately 580m to the south which again is classified as a village rather than a town. Although the Proposed Development will reduce the gap between the two villages by approximately 190m it will not result in the merging of towns or the loss of visual separation of towns and therefore results in a 'limited' contribution to Purpose B.
- 9.1.9 Istead Rise is not considered a historic town and does not possess any physical, visual or character connection historic towns and therefore results in a 'none' contribution towards purpose D. Further, development of the Site would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan.
- 9.1.10 In terms of spatial openness, the Site currently contains barns in Fields 2 and 3 of the Site. Built form in combination with the presence of structural vegetation such as canopy trees, the remnant orchard and existing woodland outwith the Site between Fields 2 and 4 results in the Site having an enclosed nature in the northern half of the Site. The southern edge of field boundaries are bound by overgrown hedgerow which also enclose the Site to some degree however the southern edge of the Site is devoid with structural vegetation and is open in character which is more representative of the landscape beyond the Site to the south.
- 9.1.11 As part of the landscape strategy the southern edge of the Site will be retained as public open space to retain the open character along the southern edge of the Site and its relationship with the wider landscape to the south. As a result, the perceptual loss of openness would be limited and reduce the perception of unrestricted sprawl. In addition to this any potential development of the Site would provide a wide range of benefits to the landscape and visual amenity of the Site and the immediate setting which would also include a number of social and economic benefits.
- 9.1.12 In conclusion, the Site does not contribute strongly to Purposes (a), (b) and (d), and therefore can be defined as Grey Belt.
- 9.1.13 As the Site qualifies as Grey Belt, the assessment of the effect of development on the Site with regard to Purpose (c), that is encroachment into countryside, is discounted, as is the effect on the openness of the Site.
- 9.1.14 Furthermore, in accordance with Paragraph 155, development of homes in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where the development would utilise Grey Belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area.
- 9.1.15 With regard to the ability of the remaining Green Belt across the area of Gravesham, beyond the Site, development of the Site would not limit the ability of the surrounding remaining Green Belt land to maintain the purposes of the Green Belt, nor affect the fundamental character, that is the openness and permanence, of the Green Belt, across the wider plan area.
- 9.1.16 Furthermore, development would be set within a robust landscape framework, with the provision of substantial new planting and Green Infrastructure. The development of the Site would contribute to the provision of new existing green spaces, accessible to the public, and new residents would have access to good quality green spaces within a short walk of their homes; and the development would contribute positively to the landscape setting of the development and meet local standards for Green Space provision. The development of the Site would therefore be in accordance with Paragraph 156 and 159 of the NPPF.
- 9.1.17 Should the northern part of the Site be released from the Green Belt and subsequently be developed as the openness of the remaining designated area would remain intact given the exceptionally limited visual envelope of the Site and that it is already perceived as forming part of the existing settlement pattern of Istead Rise. On this basis, development of this area would not compromise the purposes and function of the remaining Green Belt.



Should the development not be regarded as inappropriate?

- 9.1.18 To satisfy NPPF Paragraph 155 for the Proposed Development to not be regarded as inappropriate, it will be necessary to demonstrate that the Site is (i) Grey Belt land and that its redevelopment would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the Green Belt across the area of the plan, (ii) there is demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed, (iii) the Site constitutes a 'sustainable location', and (iv) the 'Golden Rules' can be met where applicable.
- 9.1.19 Concerning (i), the Site is in the Grey Belt (under the assumption that footnote 7 exclusions do not apply) and the containment of the Site within the valley floor and lower reaches of the north-facing slopes, in conjunction with the localised and small-scale nature of the Site, ensures that the Proposed Development cannot undermine the function of the Green Belt across the area of the plan. With respect to (ii) and (iii) these aspects fall beyond the scope of this assessment. Concerning (iv), the type of development proposed can support affordable housing and the provision of new, or improvements to existing, good quality accessible green space.



10 Conclusion

- 10.1.1 An assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development has been undertaken in accordance with the GLVIA3. Review and analysis of national, county and district level published landscape character assessments have been carried out. The Site itself is generally not of noteworthy scenic beauty, insofar that it largely comprises a series of sloping paddocks, contained by post and wire fencing and hedgerows. Notably, the Site is perceived as forming part of the settled area of Istead Rise due to both its proximity to this built-up area and its orientation and siting within the lower reaches of the valley landscape coinciding with the course of Downs Road. The agricultural landscape continues to rise consistently to the south of the Site, before levelling out and extending towards the settled area of New Barn, ensuring that the Site is neither physically nor visually related to this wider landscape.
- 10.1.2 In landscape terms, the Site comprises unremarkable pastoral fields bound by post and wire fencing and canopy trees. Existing structural vegetation such as canopy trees throughout the Site and the nature of the landform provide a level of physical and visual enclosure and character to the Site in the immediate context. Existing residential development off Downs Road and Long Walk have an urbanising influence on the Site reducing the sense of tranquillity, wildness and scenic quality of the northern part of the Site and the immediate setting to the north. As such it is considered that the Site has the capacity to accommodate sensitively designed high quality residential development in the northern part of the Site where built form is concentrated. In visual terms, the Site is very well contained from the wider landscape to the east, south and west due to the extent of enclosure afforded by the underlying landform, being located on the north facing lower-slopes of the valley, and accordingly visibility of the interior of the Site is generally restricted to very localised areas to the north of the Site from properties that overlook this area.
- 10.1.3 The Landscape Strategy has considered local planning policy in the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy including Policy CS12 'Green Infrastructure' and CS19 'Development and Design Principles' as well as guidance on Trees and Planting within the Gravesham Design Guide. Overall, it is considered that in landscape and visual terms there is potential for a sensitive and sympathetic development response to the Site and its context, that would provide a more appropriate domestic scaled development edge than that which currently exists; would minimise harm to landscape character and views; and would provide potential for extensive locally characteristic and important multi-functional GI and public open space that can be used by the local community as well as increased biodiversity enhancement.
- 10.1.4 While the Proposed Development would result in some loss of Green Belt land, the Site's 'Grey Belt' status and its limited contributions to key Green Belt purposes make it suitable for development. The containment provided by the nature of existing landform and proposed tree and woodland vegetation will minimise the visual and spatial impact. With appropriate planning and mitigation strategies as advised above, the Site can support the form of development proposed in line with national and local policy considerations.
- 10.1.5 An assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development has been undertaken during the construction phase and at Years 1 and 15 of the operational phases. At Year 1 of operation, two receptors have been identified as being likely to experience significant effects, the loss of agricultural fields will result in a **Major Adverse** effect and the Site and its immediate Context will result in a **Moderate Adverse** effect. Through establishment of landscape planting and ongoing management, it is considered that the significance of effect on Fields will remain at **Major Adverse** and for the Site and its immediate Context at Year 15 will reduce to **Moderate/Minor Adverse** effect.
- 10.1.6 The landscape strategy for the Site has considered the existing constraints and opportunities, with the key focus being on the retention and enhancement of the existing mature vegetation network, within which development would be located. In line with the local landscape character orchards have been proposed across the Site to reinforce the landscape character within the Site and on a local scale as well as wildflower meadows, shrub planting, trees,



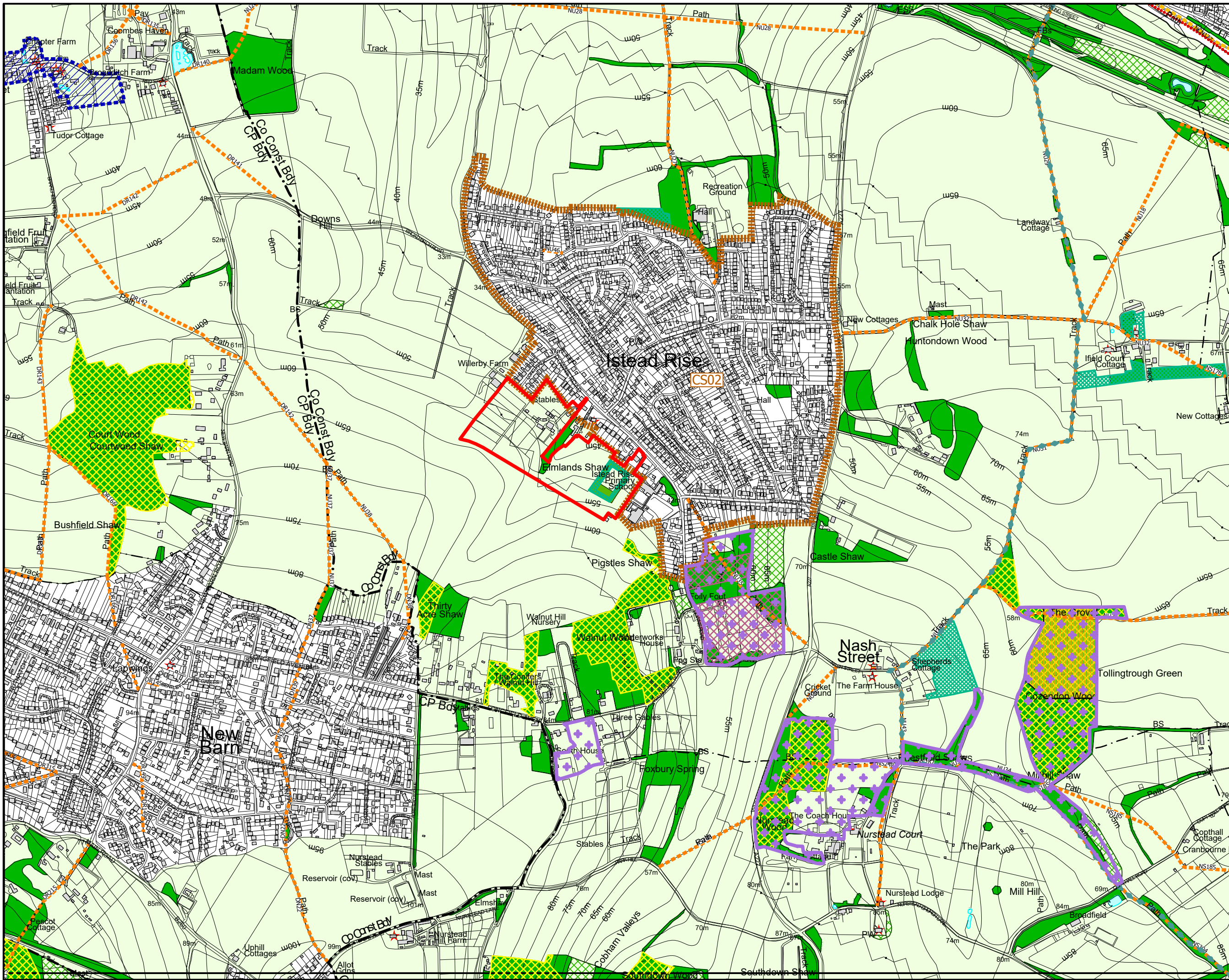
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hedgerows and wetland areas. The approach will establish more diverse habitats that would enhance the ecological and biodiversity value of the Site. This approach would assist in mitigating any prospective negative landscape impacts. In addition, the strengthening of the southern and western boundaries alongside the existing and emerging development would provide robust Green Belt boundaries as well as forming sensitive and sympathetic landscape buffers between the development edge and the wider landscape.





- 10.1.7 Whilst the Proposed Development will result in adverse effects on a limited number of landscape and visual receptors, these effects are restricted by the combination of the existing landform alongside the existing and proposed vegetation framework and inherent characteristics of the type of development in general. Furthermore, through the iterative LVIA process, the layout of the built form, height and density of built form in combination with a comprehensive landscape mitigation strategy have been guided by a robust understanding and analysis of the Site and its landscape and visual context, with the aim of reducing or where possible avoiding significant or unacceptable adverse landscape and visual effects.
- 10.1.8 As a result, the majority of residual adverse effects can be reduced to a level that is not significant. Where there is still a significant effect, this is due to the loss of the fields to development. However, the scheme provides tangible and beneficial effects on the landscape character of the Site in the long term. In landscape terms, the Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with national and local policy, as well as guidance set out in published landscape character assessments. Furthermore, the Site is considered to have the capacity to accommodate the nature of Proposed Development without undue or unacceptable effects on landscape character and visual amenity, and with the potential for considerable improvements to the landscape structure of the Site itself, which will in the long term provide a beneficial effect.



Figure 1: Site Context Plan



LEGEND

-  Site Boundary
-  Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^
-  Existing Scrub ^
-  Existing Water Courses and Features ^
-  Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
-  Public Rights of Way *
-  Long Distance Walks ^
-  Countryside Rights of Way Access Areas #
-  Sustrans Cycle Route +
-  Cycle Route ++
-  Listed Buildings ~
-  Conservation Area ~
-  Scheduled Monument ~
-  Green Belt ^^
-  Ancient Woodland #
-  Traditional Orchards #
-  Gravesham Local Plan ##
-  Rural Settlements Inset From Green Belt (CS02)
-  Local Wildlife Sites (CS12)

Sources:
 ^ OS Mapping
 # Natural England GIS Data Set
 * Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set
 + Kent County Council GIS Data Set
 ++ Sustrans National Cycle Network GIS Data
 ~ Department of Transport Cycle Network Model
 ~ Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data
 ## Gravesham District Council Core Strategy Proposals Map Adopted 2014

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

FIGURE 1

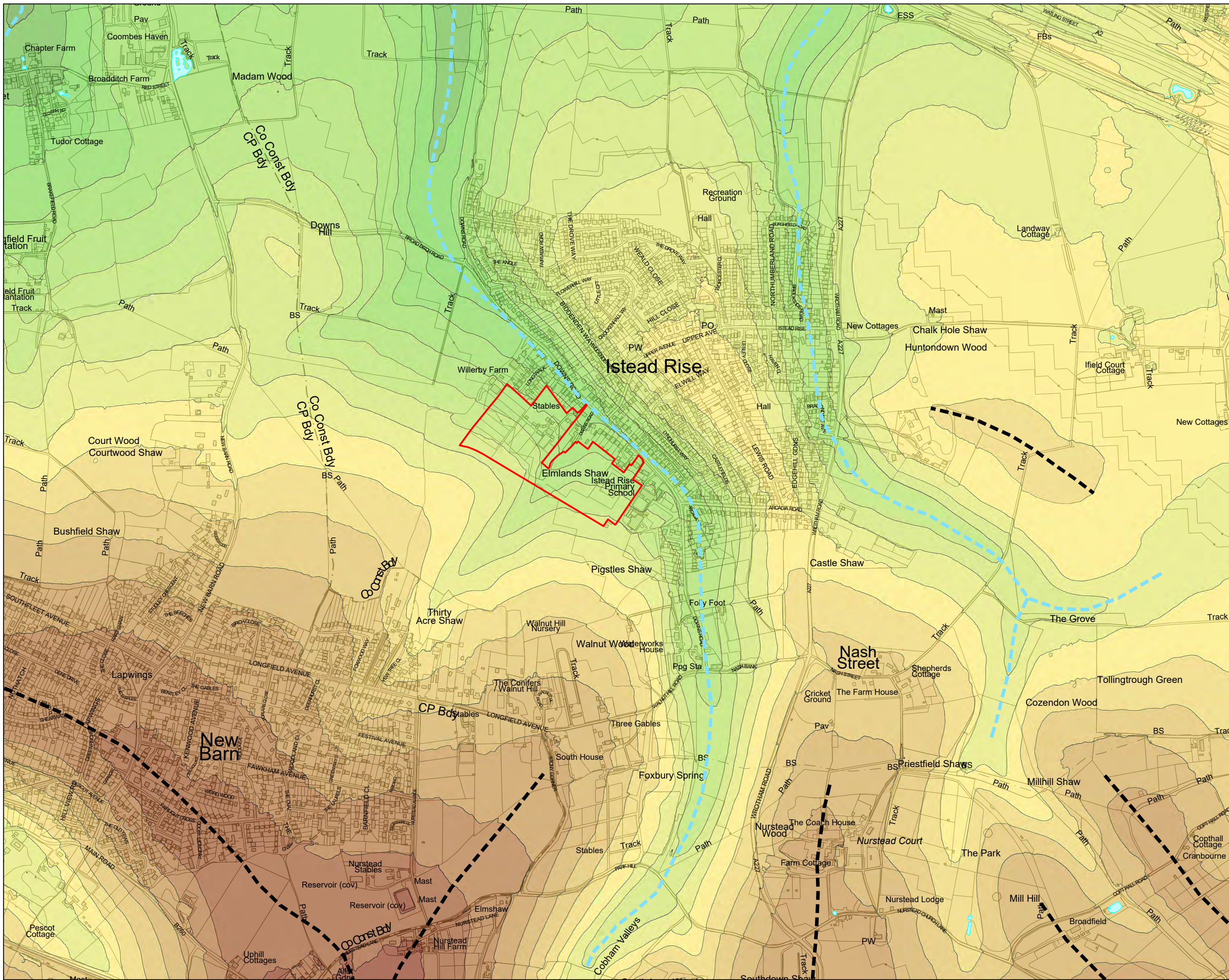
Project
Land at Rose Farm, Istead Rise
 Drawing Title
Site Context Plan

Date	Scale	Drawn by	Check by
03.03.2025	1:5,000 @A1 1:10,000 @A3	ML/OF	AC
Project No	Drawing No	Revision	
333102059	LN-LP-01	-	








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Figure 2 Topography Plan



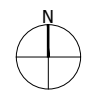
LEGEND

-  Site Boundary
 -  Existing Water Courses and Features ^
 -  Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) #
 -  Ridgeline
 -  Valley
- Elevation (m AOD) #
- | |
|------------|
| 100 to 105 |
| 95 to 100 |
| 90 to 95 |
| 85 to 90 |
| 80 to 85 |
| 75 to 80 |
| 70 to 75 |
| 65 to 70 |
| 60 to 65 |
| 55 to 60 |
| 50 to 55 |
| 45 to 50 |
| 40 to 45 |
| 35 to 40 |
| 30 to 35 |
| 25 to 30 |
| 20 to 25 |

Sources:
 ^ OS Mapping
 # Environment Agency Lidar Data

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FIGURE 2
 Project
 Land at Rose Farm, Istead Rise
 Drawing Title
 Topography Plan

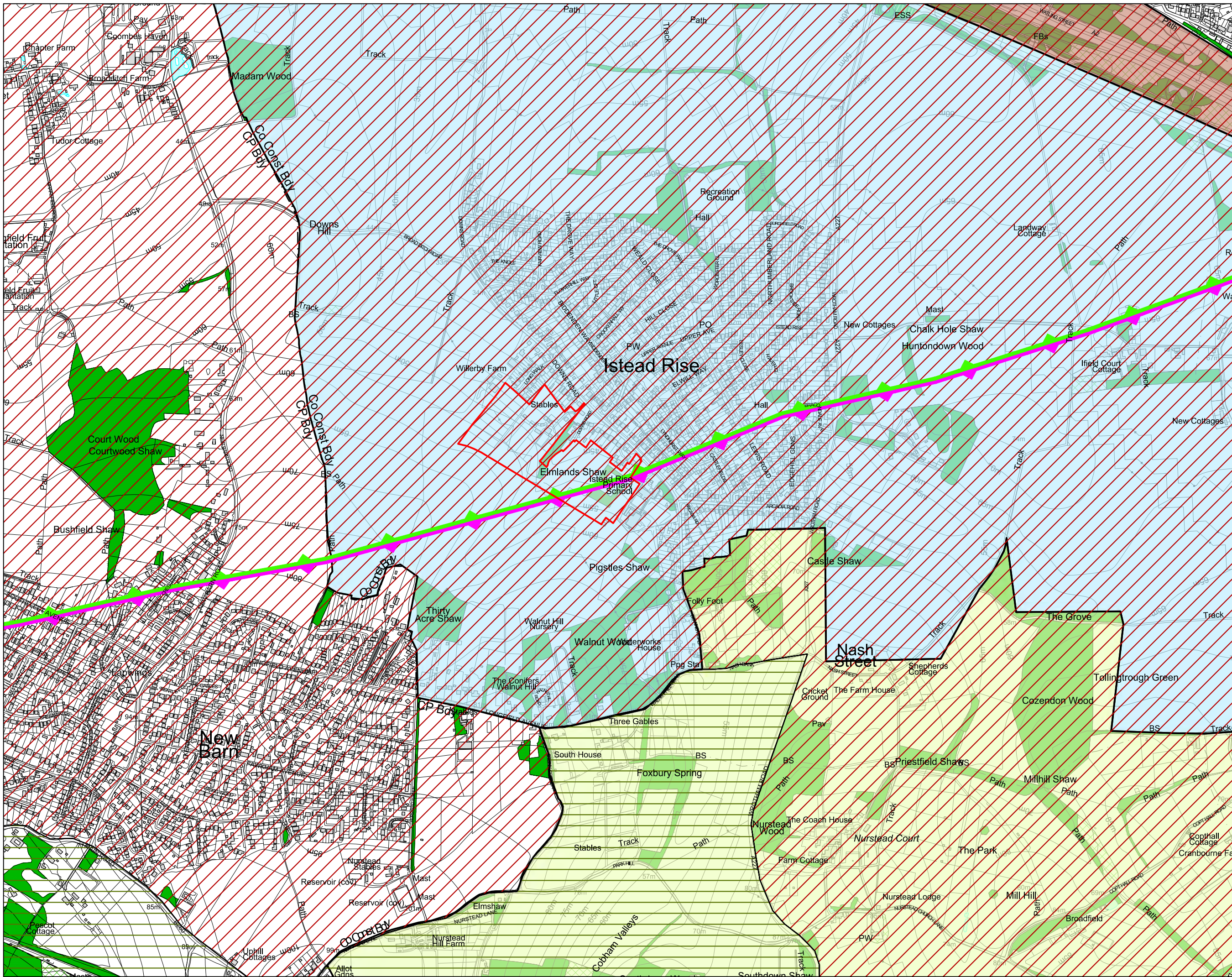


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Project No 333102059	Drawing No LN-LP-02	Revision -	















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Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan



LEGEND

-  Site Boundary
-  Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^
-  Existing Scrub ^
-  Existing Water Courses and Features ^
-  Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
- National Character Area (NCA) Profiles #**
-  113, North Kent Plain
-  119, North Downs
- Kent Landscape Character Areas***
-  Southfleet Arable Lands
-  Ash Downs
- Gravesham Landscape Character Areas****
-  Istead Arable Farmlands
-  Gravesham Southern Fringe
-  Meopham Downs

Sources:
 ^ OS Mapping
 # Natural England GIS Data Set
 * Kent County Council — Landscape Assessment of Kent 2004
 ** Gravesham Borough Council — Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment 2009

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

FIGURE 3

Project
Land at Rose Farm, Istead Rise
 Drawing Title
Landscape Character Plan

Date	Scale	Drawn by	Check by
03.03.2025	1:5,000 @A1 1:10,000 @A3	ML	AC
Project No	Drawing No	Revision	
333102059	LN-LP-03	-	



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Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan



The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured

Revision	Date	Drn	Ckd
-	-	-	-

LEGEND

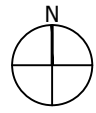
- Site Boundary
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
- Downs Hall Grade II Listed ~
- Green Belt ^^
- Traditional Orchards #
- Number of Fields
- Gravesham Local Plan ##
- Rural Settlements Inset From Green Belt (CS02)
- Location of Photographic Viewpoints (Site Appraisal Photographs: A-O)

Sources:
 ^ OS Mapping
 # Natural England GIS Data Set
 ~ Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set
 ^^ Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data
 ## Gravesham District Council Core Strategy Proposals Map Adopted 2014

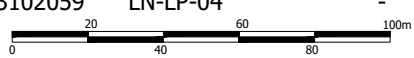
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FIGURE 4
 Project
 Land at Rose Farm,
 Istead Rise
 Drawing Title
 Site Appraisal Plan

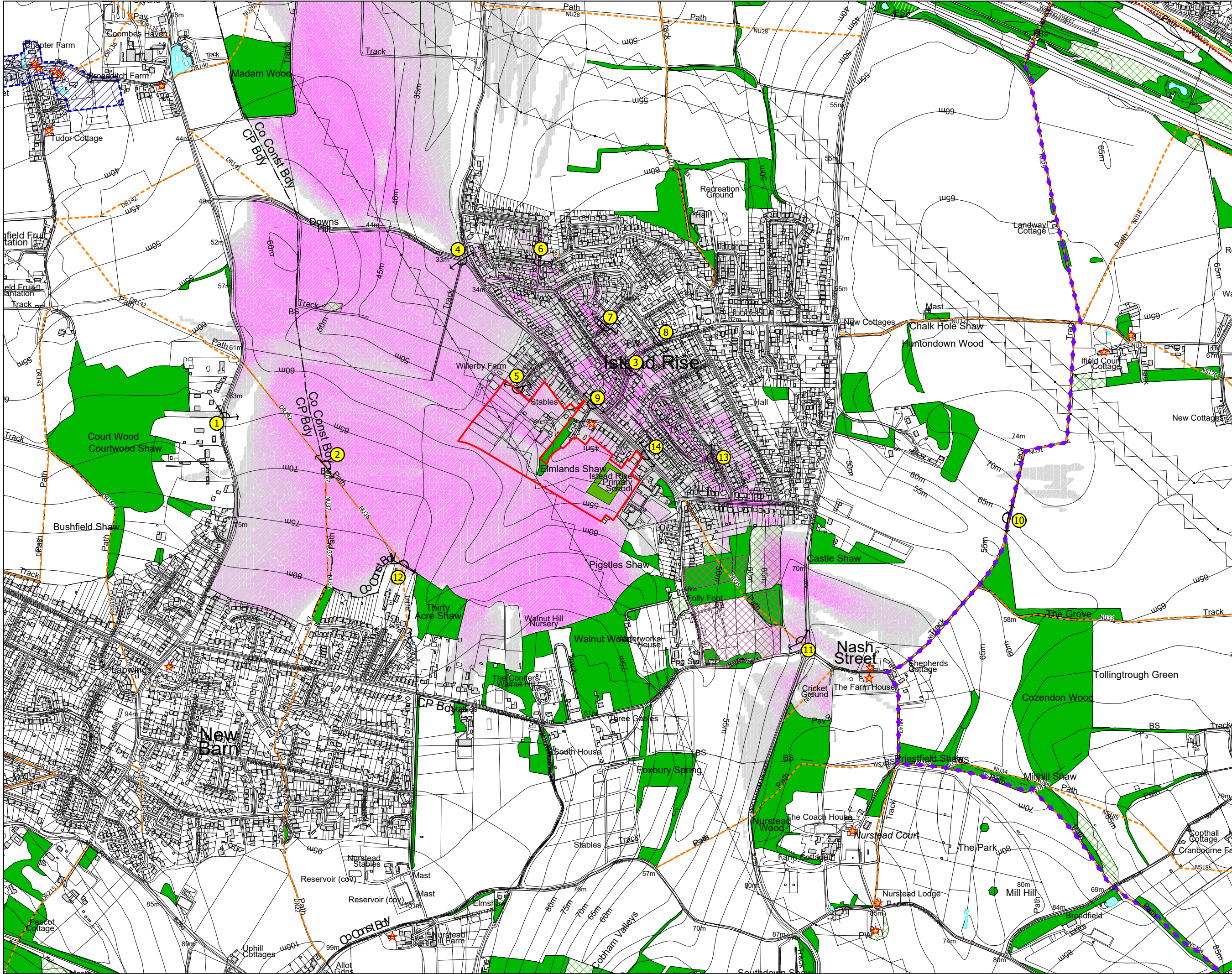


Date	Scale	Drawn by	Check by
22.10.2025	1:2000 @A3	ML/OF	AC
Project No	Drawing No	Revision	
333102059	LN-LP-04	-	
















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Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan





LEGEND

-  Site Boundary
-  Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^
-  Existing Scrub ^
-  Existing Water Courses and Features ^
-  Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
-  Public Rights of Way *
-  Long Distance Walks ^
-  Countryside Rights of Way Access Areas #
-  Sustrans Cycle Route +
-  Cycle Route ++
-  Listed Buildings ~
-  Conservation Area ~
-  Location of Photographic Viewpoints (Site Context Photographs: 1-14)

Sources:
 ^ OS Mapping
 # Natural England GIS Data Set
 ~ Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set
 * Kent County Council GIS Data Set
 + Sustrans National Cycle Network GIS Data
 ++ Department of Transport Cycle Network Model
 ^^ Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data

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Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

-  Most Visible
-  Least Visible

Notes:
 The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) provides an approximate portrayal of the greatest possible extent of visibility of the Proposed Development, on the basis of a digital ground model (DTM). The extent and nature of specific views towards the Proposed Development is to be verified through fieldwork to take account of other visual barriers, such as existing buildings, woodland, trees and infrastructure.
 • The ZTV is produced using the specialised software package Key-Terra Firma which is an AutoCAD based application.
 • The ZTV is produced by calculating the 'line of sight' from target points to analysis eyes.

Parameters:
 • The study area for the ZTV is 2.8 km x 3.6 km; (1:5,000 @A1)
 • The ZTV accounts for ground topography on the basis of a model made from Environment Agency 1m Lidar data in the form of 3D points data on a 1m grid, re-interpolated to a 5m grid;
 • The ZTV accounts for existing features, including infrastructure, woodland, trees and hedgerows, and built forms, using a Digital Surface Model (DSM) derived from Environment Agency 1m Lidar data;
 • The ZTV is based on 66 targets on a regular grid across the site and following the boundary at 50m intervals, at a height of 11m above existing ground level;
 • The ZTV assumes an observer height of 1.7m above ground level; and
 • The ZTV portrays the extent of visibility of the Proposed Development on the basis of a target point is visible within a given 10m grid square.

FIGURE 5

Project
Land at Rose Farm, Istead Rise
 Drawing Title
Visual Appraisal Plan

Date	Scale	Drawn by	Check by
12.03.2025	1:5,000 @A1 1:10,000 @A3	ML/OF/CK	AC
Project No	Drawing No	Revision	
333102059	LN-LP-05	-	



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Figure 6: Opportunities and Constraints Plan