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# Land at Officers Meadow, Shenfield: Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Review

Prepared on behalf of Croudace Strategic

March 2019

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<b>Project Ref:</b>	<b>18845/A5/2019</b>
<b>Status:</b>	Final
<b>Issue/ Rev:</b>	V2.1
<b>Date:</b>	March 2019
<b>Prepared by:</b>	CM/ST
<b>Checked by:</b>	CM/GM
<b>Authorised by:</b>	GM

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Ref: 18845/A5/2019  
Date: March 2019  
Status: Final

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Site Appraisal Photographs A - G

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Overview

- 1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) was commissioned by Croudace Strategic to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Review of the Land at Officers Meadow, Shenfield (the 'Site'), in relation to its suitability for residential development and in the context of the ongoing consultation on Brentwood Borough Council's Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Local Plan and the wider draft allocation (R03) that encompasses the Site and surrounding area.
- 1.2 This report details the landscape character, landscape value and visual envelope of the Site, and provides an assessment of the contribution that the Site makes towards the purposes and function of the Green Belt, as set out in Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with reference to the wider draft allocation (R03).
- 1.3 The objectives of this study are to:
  - Assess the landscape characteristics and quality of the Site and its surrounding and function within the landscape;
  - Assess the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of the existing views from the surrounding area;
  - Consider the policy basis for the Green Belt designation that applies to the area;
  - Assess the contribution of the Site in response to its Green Belt function and its potential to be released from the Green Belt; and
  - Identify opportunities and constraints to development on the Site, from a landscape and visual perspective.
- 1.4 Supporting illustrative information is presented in the following plans and photographs:
  - Figure 1: Site Context Plan;
  - Figure 2: Topography Plan;
  - Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan;
  - Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan;
  - Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan;
  - Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan;
  - Site Appraisal Photographs A - G;
  - Site Context Photographs 1 – 9; and
  - Wider Allocation Photographs W1 - W2.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

### Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 2.1 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal has been prepared with reference to the guidelines as set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition, prepared by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.
- 2.2 A desktop review of the study area was undertaken, including for a review of the published landscape character information, landform, landscape features, relevant landscape and visual policy and landscape designations. This information was used as the initial basis against which to appraise the Site. A visit to the Site and surroundings was subsequently undertaken in February 2019 to verify the desk-based review findings and add further information to the landscape and visual context of the Site.
- 2.3 A description of the existing land use of the study area is provided and includes reference to existing areas of settlement, transport routes and vegetation cover, as well as local landscape designations, elements of cultural and heritage value, and local landmarks or tourist destinations. These factors combine to provide an understanding of landscape value and sensitivity and provide an indication of particular key views and viewpoints that are available to visual receptors.
- 2.4 To determine the extent of visual influence, a visual appraisal was undertaken of the Site to consider the nature of existing views from publicly accessible viewpoints including roads, Public Right(s) of Way (PRoW) and public open space. Consideration was given to private views, however access to private properties was not obtained. Views were considered from all directions and from a range of distances. The viewpoints chosen are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to represent the potential views obtained towards the Site in order to identify areas of higher visual sensitivity that may not be best suited for development.
- 2.5 The inherent sensitivity of the Site is considered in terms of the following:
  - Landscape Character: i.e. landform, vegetation cover, land use, scale, state of repair of individual elements, representation of typological character, enclosure pattern, form/line and movement;
  - Landscape Value: i.e. national designations, local designations, sense of tranquillity/remoteness, scenic beauty and cultural associations; and
  - Visual Influence: i.e. landform influences, tree and woodland cover, numbers and types of residents, numbers and types of visitors and scope for mitigating potential for visual impacts.

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

### **Green Belt Review**

Assessment against the purposes of the Green Belt

- 2.7 The Site is assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out in Paragraph 134 of the NPPF, which are:
- ***"To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;***
  - ***To prevent neighbouring towns from merging in to one another;***
  - ***To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and***
  - ***To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns..."***
- 2.8 With respect to the fifth purpose of the Green Belt "***to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land***", should the Site be brought forward for development it would not prejudice derelict or other urban land being brought forward for urban regeneration. The principle of retaining land within the Green Belt holds true for all areas within the Green Belt, therefore the Site is considered to make the same contribution to this purpose of the Green Belt as any other land parcel within the Green Belt. Accordingly, no additional specific assessment is undertaken.
- 2.9 The NPPF endorses the permanence of Green Belts as an essential characteristic and stipulates in Paragraph 136 that "***once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans***".
- 2.10 The NPPF seeks to align Green Belt boundary reviews with sustainable patterns of development, as set out in Paragraph 138, with Local Planning Authorities encouraged to "***consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary***".
- 2.11 In this regard, where a given area of land contributes poorly towards meeting the purposes of the Green Belt and its release would contribute positively to promoting a sustainable development pattern, this may be considered to impart towards 'exceptional circumstances'

and the Green Belt boundary should be reviewed accordingly. The criteria used to assess the contribution made to the first four purposes of the Green Belt is set out in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Purposes of the Green Belt - Assessment Criteria**

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

## Assessment against the characteristics of the Green Belt

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

**Table 2.2: Definitions**

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

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

### 3.0 RELEVANT POLICY

#### National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2019

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was first published in March 2012, was updated and published in July 2018 and most recently revised in February 2019. The NPPF promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, defined as "***meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs***". Development proposals must also be in accordance with the relevant up-to-date Local Plan and policies set out in the NPPF, including those identifying restrictions with regard to designated areas, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Green Belt.
- 3.2 The NPPF states that "***the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development***", with Paragraph 8 going on to state that to achieve this the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. The environmental objective is described as: "***to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy***".
- 3.3 Paragraph 38 relates to decision making and states:
- "Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible."***
- 3.4 Section 11 is concerned with making effective use of land, with Paragraph 117 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..."***
- 3.5 Paragraph 118 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; and*
- 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...”**

3.6 Paragraphs 124-132 focus on achieving well-designed places and promote good design of the built environment. This approach is enshrined in Paragraph 127, 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.”**

3.7 Section 13 is dedicated to Green Belt matters, with Paragraph 133 setting out that **“the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open”** and that **“the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence”**. Paragraph 134 subsequently set out the five purposes of the Green Belt designation:

- a) “To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;**
- b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;**
- c) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;**
- d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and**
- e) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”**

- 3.8 Paragraph 136 notes that "**Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans**", while Paragraph 138 goes on to state that "**when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account**".
- 3.9 Paragraph 139 states that when defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should inter-alia "**not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open**" and "**define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent**".
- 3.10 Section 15 of the NPPF relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, with Paragraph 170 setting out that planning policies and decisions should look to achieve the above by "**protecting and enhancing valued landscapes**" and "**recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside**".

### Local Policy

Replacement Local Plan, 2005

- 3.11 The Brentwood Replacement Local Plan was formally adopted by the Council on the 25th August 2005 and sets out land use policies and proposals for the Borough. This is the Borough's current development plan until such point that it is replaced by the emerging Local Development Plan.
- 3.12 In August 2008, 28 of the local plan policies were deleted, while the remaining policies were 'saved' under the direction of the Secretary of State. Those 'saved' policies of relevance to the immediate context of the Site and landscape and visual matters are summarised as follows:
- Saved Policy CP1: General Development Criteria - Proposals must not have an unacceptable impact on, and should enhance where practicable, the visual amenity, character or appearance of the wider area; and should be of a high standard of design, with appropriate consideration of size, siting, scale, design and choice of materials;
  - Saved Policy GB1: New Development - Proposals within the Green Belt will not be granted planning permission except in very special circumstances;
  - Saved Policy GB2: Development Criteria - Proposals within the Green Belt must not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt and should not harm the openness of the Green Belt, with account taken of the need to preserve or enhance existing landscape features and respectful siting of built forms;
  - Saved Policy C4: Management of Woodlands - Existing woodlands must be maintained and where possible, enhanced;

- Saved Policy C5: Retention and Provision of Landscaping and Natural Features in Development - Proposals should incorporate and enhance existing trees, hedges, woods, watercourses and other natural features, as well as considering opportunities for additional habitat creation;
- Saved Policy C7: Development Affecting Preserved Trees, Ancient Woodland and Trees in Conservation Areas - Proposals should ensure the protection of trees protected by a TPO;
- Saved Policy C16: Development within the Vicinity of a Listed Building - Proposals in the vicinity of listed buildings will be refused if the proposals would detract from its character or setting; and
- Saved Policy C25: Floodlighting and other forms of Illumination - Lighting within proposals must not be unacceptably intrusive.

Local Plan 2016-2033 (emerging)

- 3.13 Brentwood Borough Council are currently in the process of preparing a new Local Plan, that will supersede the Replacement Local Plan, 2005 once adopted. The Local Plan 2016-2033 is at the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission stage and currently (5<sup>th</sup> February - 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2019) out to public consultation. Policies of relevance to the immediate context of the Site and landscape and visual matters are summarised as follows:
- 3.14 Policy SP01 Sustainable Development states that planning decisions will reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Planning applications that accord with policies in the Local Plan will be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The policy states that Brentwood Borough Council is deemed to be delivering Strategic Objectives where it: preserves and enhances the character and settlement setting; has no unacceptable effect on visual amenity or the character appearance of the surrounding area; delivers good design; and preserves, and where appropriate, enhances heritage assets.
- 3.15 The first part of Policy SP01 is in accordance with Paragraphs 10, 11 and 12 of the NPPF, Paragraph 12 noting that "***the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan***". The second part of the policy does not directly correlate to the Strategic Objectives as set out in Paragraphs 3.15 - 3.19 of the Pre-submission Local Plan.
- "***Preserves and enhances the character and settlement setting***" relates to SO1 "***ensuring that the characteristics and patterns of our different settlements are protected and enhanced to provide strong emphasis on 'sense of place'***". It also aligns with NPPF Section 12, in particular Paragraph 127 and the NPPG subheading Design, Paragraph 007 which states that "***Development should seek to***

*promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development”;*

- *“no effect on visual amenity or the character appearance of the surrounding area”* is onerous and is not justified by reference to any policy;
- *“Delivery of good design”* is implied in SO2 and SO4, and is explicit in NPPF Section 12 (Paragraphs 124 - 132)
- *“enhancement of heritage assets”* - The NPPF (Section 16) notes that heritage assets *“should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations”*, stating that *“plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment”*. The NPPG, subheading *“Conserving and enhancing the historic environment”*, Paragraph 004, further advises that *“In developing their strategy, local planning authorities should identify specific opportunities within their area for the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets. This could include, where appropriate, the delivery of development within their settings that will make a positive contribution to, or better reveal the significance of, the heritage asset”*. Such a strategy is not expressly committed to within Brentwood’s Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) set out in Chapter 12 – Built Heritage, nor is it mentioned in the strategic objectives.

3.16 Policy BE08: Sustainable Drainage states that all developments should incorporate appropriate Sustainable Drainage Systems.

3.17 This is in accordance with Paragraph 163 of the NPPF, although as stated in Paragraph 156 *“Strategic policies should be informed by a strategic flood risk assessment”*, and plans should apply a sequential approach to the location of development (Paragraph 157). Brentwood Borough Council’s Flood Risk Assessment 2018 make recommendations for the Local Development Plan and provides SuDS guidance.

3.18 Policy BE18 Green and Blue Infrastructure states that existing ecological networks, green and open spaces, and green and blue features in the built environment comprise part of the borough’s network of green and blue infrastructure (GBI) and should be protected, planned, enhanced and managed.

3.19 This accords with Strategic Objective SO4 to *“Deliver Beautiful, Biodiverse, Clean and a Functional Natural Environment”*; SO2 to *“Deliver a Healthy and Resilient Built Environment”*; the 6 functions of Green Infrastructure as set out in Brentwood Borough Councils Green Infrastructure Strategy (2015) and also accords with Section 15 of the NPPF Conserving and enhancing the natural environment, Paragraphs 170 and 174 in particular. The policy also supports the national landscape guidelines for the Northern Thames Basins SEO4

to **“manage and expand the significant areas of broadleaf woodland and wood pasture.... for the green infrastructure links and important habitats that they provide...”**.

- 3.20 Policy BE19 Access to Nature commits Brentwood Borough Council to ensuring all new development to provide direct access to nature through building design and orientation, high-quality landscaping, planting, green roofs, green walls, nature-based sustainable drainage and/or non-motorised access to the countryside.
- 3.21 Paragraphs 96 - 101 of the NPPF (Open Space and Recreation) note that **“access to a network of high-quality open spaces... is important for the health and well-being of communities”** and that **“planning policies... should protect and enhance public rights of way”**. Paragraph 127 states that planning policies should ensure that developments **“create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of visual amenity”**. Brentwood Open Space Strategy presents a range of aims for the authority which include **“provision of opportunities to learn about nature and the environment”**. There is however no design guidance setting out **“a clear design vision and expectations”** as required by Paragraph 125 of the NPPF upon which the specifics of this policy are based, such as direct access to nature, green roofs, green walls and non-motorised access to the countryside.
- 3.22 Policy HP13 Creating Successful Places States that proposals that meet high design standards to deliver safe, inclusive, attractive and accessible places will be supported.
- 3.23 Policy HP13 is considered to be sound as it is in accordance with Section 12 of the NPPF Paragraphs 124 - 132, and Section 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities. NPPG, subheading Design, Paragraph 006 also highlights issues to be considered in design of new development including safe, connected and efficient streets, crime prevention, access and inclusion and cohesive and vibrant neighbourhoods. The policy also accords with the Brentwood Borough Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy the vision of which includes **“making Brentwood a Borough where people feel safe, healthy and supported”**.
- 3.24 Policy HP18 Designing Landscape and the Public Realm states that landscape and public realm must be designed as an integral part of new development proposals and relate to the function and character of the spaces and surrounding area. Proposals should retain or enhance existing features including open spaces, trees, natural habitats or other features which make a positive contribution to the character, appearance or significance of the local area.
- 3.25 Policy HP18 is considered to be sound in that it reflects Paragraph 127 of the NPPF and NPPG, subheading Design, Paragraph 007. It also supports the Strategic Environmental objectives of

the national landscape guidelines for the Northern Thames Basins and the local guidelines for the Heybridge Wooded Farmland landscape character area.

- 3.26 Policy HP19: Conservation and Enhancement of Historic Environment states that proposals that affect heritage assets and their settings should conserve, sustain and enhance designated and non-designated heritage assets.
- 3.27 This policy reflects NPPF Section 16, Paragraphs 184 - 202, although the assessment of significance of any heritage assets is stressed in the NPPF, to be taken into account when considering the impact of a proposal. NPPG subheading Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, Paragraph 004 states that "***In line with the National Planning Policy Framework, local authorities should set out their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment....planning authorities should identify specific opportunities within their area for the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets***". The national landscape guidelines for the Northern Thames Basins include SEO 3 to "***protect and appropriately manage the historic environment for its contribution to local character and sense of identity***". The local guidelines for Heybridge Wooded Farmland included "***ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character***". Brentwood's Infrastructure Delivery Plan includes a chapter on Heritage which quantifies the heritage assets but does not set out a positive strategy for conservation or enhancement.
- 3.28 Policy NE01: Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment requires that the Council will support proposals that proactively conserve and enhance the quality of the natural environment.
- 3.29 This accords with Strategic Objective SO4: "***Deliver Beautiful, Biodiverse, Clean and a Functional Natural Environment***" and SO2 to "***Deliver a Healthy and Resilient Built Environment***" and also accords with Section 15 of the NPPF Conserving and enhancing the natural environment, Paragraphs 170 and 174 in particular. The NPPG Natural Environment Paragraph 007 states that there is a requirement "***to seek to minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity***".
- 3.30 Policy NE03 Trees, Woodlands, Hedgerows states that development will not be permitted where it would have a detrimental effect on, or result in the loss of, significant landscape heritage or a feature of ecological importance, including trees, woodlands or hedgerows. Where loss, threat or damage cannot be fully addressed through minimisation and/ or mitigation measures proposals may be supported if reinstatement of features, additional landscaping, habitat creation or tree planting, will compensate for the harm.

- 3.31 The wording of Policy NE03 is considered to be unsound as the first sentence precludes any development which would have a detrimental effect upon the features listed. Although the second sentence refers to minimisation and mitigation it should be accepted that an assessment of effects would be made and that a strategy for avoidance, minimisation and mitigation employed in relation to the features listed as set out in NPPF Paragraph 180 and as in the EIA Regulations.
- 3.32 Policy NE08: Floodlighting and Illumination - Should be appropriate for the intended use and appropriately designed to limit inappropriate light direction and intensity.
- 3.33 Policy NE08 is considered to be sound on the basis that Paragraph 180 of the NPPF requires that new development is appropriate for its location and "***limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation***".
- 3.34 Policy NE9: Green Belt – The Metropolitan Green Belt will be preserved from inappropriate development so that it continues to maintain its openness and serve its key functions as well as not harm its visual amenities.
- 3.35 Policy NE10: New Development, Extension and Replacement of Buildings in the Green Belt - The construction of new buildings or structures is considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 3.36 Policy NE13: Site Allocations in the Green Belt - Sites allocated to meet housing needs in the Green Belt will be expected to provide significant community benefits and provide new defensible boundaries to protect the open countryside for future generations. Site boundaries to form the new Green Belt boundaries are set out on relevant sites in Appendix 2 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan 2016-2033.
- 3.37 Policy R03: Land North of Shenfield – the development principles include reflecting the sites' location as a key gateway in terms of design quality particularly near to Junction 12; diversion of Alexander Lane to create a quiet pedestrian/cycle route; enhancement of links with Shenfield station and local services; provision of multi-functional green infrastructure; maintenance and enhancement of Public Rights of Way within the site and to the wider area; protection and enhancement of Arnold's Wood Local Wildlife Site; and provision of appropriate landscaping and buffers along sensitive boundaries adjoining the A12 and railway line.
- 3.38 Paragraph 9.99 highlights the importance of consideration of how the site will develop holistically given that parcels could be brought forward at different times, stating: "***This is particularly important in ensuring that collective requirements for infrastructure provision are considered and delivered appropriately***".

- 3.39 Paragraph 9.105 notes that the development will be required to provide appropriate habitat mitigation and creation, and appropriate buffers to the Local Wildlife Site (Arnold's Wood). It is also noted that as the site is located within a Critical Drainage Area, early consultation with the Lead Local Flood Authority (Essex County Council) will be required to determine appropriate mitigation which should be incorporated into the overall design of the scheme.

### **Evidence Base**

Green Belt Study Part II: Green Belt Parcel Definition and Review (Reg 19 Pre-Submission), November 2018

- 3.40 The study provides an assessment of potential housing sites within the Green Belt, considered in the SHLAA, for their relative contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt designation. The Site lies within parcel 43: North of Shenfield.
- 3.41 The parcel is classified as **"Abuts large built up area / 'Urban' extension"** in terms of its relationship with the existing settlement. The landscape is described as **"medium"** scale with **"Quite Enclosed - Partial Enclosure"**. Intervisibility between the parcel and adjacent parcels is considered as having:

***"Limited views within the parcel due to mature field boundary hedgerows with trees. Views to adjacent parcels limited by built development in places and road corridors with tree belts along embankments."***

- 3.42 With regards to purpose 1 of Green Belt, **"to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas"** the Site is judged to be **"partly contained"** overall with **"strong/Definite"** boundaries where land is **"contained by Shenfield and surrounding infrastructure (rail and main road)"**.
- 3.43 The Assessment considers the Site's contribution to purpose 2: **"to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another"**. It judges the interlying physical barriers to be **"substantial / strong" – "moderate"** with **"some / distant"** views between towns. The parcel is judged to comprise a **"Minor Countryside Gap"** where there would be a **"Minor physical narrowing of gap"**, noting that the **"A12 is major intervening barrier to northwest"**.
- 3.44 With regards to purpose 3: **"to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment"** the assessment judges the parcel to comprise **"functional Countryside"** with **"Typical 'Countryside' uses"** where land is **"Predominantly rural land use – but heavy influence by local infrastructure"**

- 3.45 Purpose 4: ***"to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns"*** is considered. The parcel is judged to have ***"No / Limited physical and/or visual relationship with Historic Town"***.
- 3.46 Purpose 5 of the Green Belt is not considered. The overall assessment of the parcel's contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt is considered ***"moderate"***.

## 4.0 SITE CONTEXT

### Landscape Setting

- 4.1 As shown in **Figure 1**, the Site lies to the north of Shenfield, which is north-east of Brentwood, Essex; it is in the district of Brentwood Borough Council.
- 4.2 The Site's setting is partly defined by the settlement of Shenfield to the south, however, its edge of settlement location means that it is also partly defined by the agricultural landscape to the north. Transport corridors are also notable features of the landscape setting, including the A12 to the north and Great Eastern Main Line railway to the south and east of the Site.

### Site Location and Land Use

- 4.3 To the south and east of the site, the Great Eastern Main Line railway separates the Site from the 20<sup>th</sup> century residential estate that follows Woodland Avenue. To the east of the housing estate is the Hutton Industrial Estate. The village of Hutton lies to the south of the residential and industrial estates.
- 4.4 To the south-west of the Site is a further 20<sup>th</sup> century housing estate. The closest street to the Site is Oliver Road, which lies adjacent to the R03 Draft Allocation Boundary. The Site is separated from the residential area by Shenfield High School and associated playing fields (the latter are within the R03 allocation boundary).
- 4.5 To the west and north, the Site is bounded by Chelmsford Road (A1023), which runs south-west to Shenfield and north-east to Mountnessing. Part of the Site lies adjacent to Chelmsford Road, however, much of the northern boundary is separated from the highway by a single line of dwellings. The dwellings front onto Chelmsford Road, so the Site is partly adjacent to rear garden boundaries to the north. Further to the north of the site, the A12 separates the site from the wider agricultural landscape; a narrow strip of agricultural land separates Chelmsford Road from the A12. The Site lies adjacent to arable land and the railway line to the north-east.

### Vegetation

- 4.6 The study area is lightly wooded, with vegetation typically limited to following transport corridors such as the A12 and Great Eastern Main Line. However, blocks of ancient woodland are distributed across the study area. Woodland is typically regular in shape, including Park and Home Woods to the north of the A12 and Hall Wood to the south.
- 4.7 Field patterns are generally medium-to-large with occasional canopy trees and/or gappy/low hedgerows.

4.8 The Site lies within a strong landscape framework. To the north and east is a narrow strip of ancient woodland, called Arnold's Wood, which extends beyond the Great Eastern Main Line railway to the south. To the south, the Site boundary follows the line of a block of wood pasture, which includes drains and a pond. Vegetation follows the line of the Great Eastern railway, including the northern railway embankment near to the Site's southern boundary. The playing fields associated with Shenfield High School retain what would have been field boundaries and comprise hedgerow and canopy trees. Hedgerows run through the Site, creating an irregular network of field boundaries.

#### Access and Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

4.9 Various PRoWs run across the landscape to the north of the A12, connecting settlements such as Pilgrims Hatch, Doddinghurst and Mountnessing. Three PRoWs cross the A12, including 272\_24, 272\_103 and 272\_88; the latter lies near to the Site's northern boundary. To the south-west of the Site, a short PRoW links Chelmsford Road with Hall Lane, which crosses the A12.

4.10 A single PRoW traverses the Site. PRoW 272\_86 runs alongside the northern railway embankment to the south of the Site before turning northwards through the Site, to the west of Arnold's Wood and terminating at Chelmsford Road.

#### Topography and Hydrology

4.11 With reference to **Figure 2: Topography Plan**, the Site lies within an area of gently undulating low-lying land associated with the River Wid valley landscape, situated at approximately 60m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), opening out towards the lowland marsh landscape to the east of the Site. The landform broadly rises to the south-east of the Site as a continuation of the lower reaches of a ridgeline that extends from the elevated settled area of Brentwood towards the lower-lying valley landscape.

4.12 The main developed area of Shenfield, which lies to the south of the Site, straddles two of the ridgelines that descend from Brentwood towards the River Wid, between approximately 80-105m AOD. To the north-west of the Site beyond the Canterbury Tye Spring that feeds the River Wid, the landscape (comprising undulating agricultural land and scattered farmsteads) gently rises towards Doddinghurst to an elevation of approximately 90m AOD. The settled area of Mountnessing lies to the north-east of the Site beyond the River Wid, between approximately 65-75m AOD.

4.13 The residential properties bordering the northern edge of the Site lie at the same elevation as the most elevated part of the Site, in the north, and are at a similar elevation to Alexander

Lane, bordering the southern edge of the Site. To the south-east, within the settlement of Shenfield/Hutton, the landform rises to approximately 70m AOD.

#### Designations

- 4.14 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 Shenfield (which is inset from the Green Belt).
- 4.15 As previously noted Arnold's Wood, within the eastern part of the Site, is defined as an area of ancient woodland and as a local wildlife site.
- 4.16 The Site is not within a conservation area, nor contains any scheduled monuments. There are a number of listed features within the vicinity of the Site. Those in closest proximity to the Site include:
- the Grade II listed milestone adjacent to the A1023 approximately 80m to the northwest;
  - the Grade II listed Barn at Wynbarns Farm and The Rose Inn, approximately 330m and 420m to the south-west respectively;
  - the Grade II listed Elm Cottage and Elm House, approximately 560m to the south-west;
  - the Grade II listed Poplars Hall approximately 550m to the south;
  - the cluster of Grade II listed buildings at Arnold's Farm, approximately 1km to the north-east;
  - the Grade II listed Fitzwalters approximately 800m to the north; and
  - the cluster of listed features within Mountnessing, approximately 1.2km to the north, including the Grade II\* listed Mountnessing Windmill slightly further afield.
- 4.17 There are no Registered Park and Gardens within the immediate vicinity of the Site. The Grade II listed Weald Park lies approximately 4km to the west, and the Grade II\* listed Thorndon Hall lies approximately 3km to the south, both of which lie beyond the settled areas of Brentwood and have no intervisibility with the Site.

#### **Published Landscape Character**

- 4.18 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.

4.19 The description of each landscape is used as a basis for evaluation in order to make judgements to guide, for example, development or landscape management. The extent of published landscape character areas are illustrated on **Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan**.

#### National Landscape Character

4.20 As part of Natural England's responsibilities in delivering the Natural Environment White Paper, Biodiversity 2020 and the European Landscape Convention, Natural England has developed a series of National Character Area (NCA) profiles. These NCA profiles provide a broad range of information including an outline of the key characteristics of a given area; a description of the ecosystem services provided and how these relate to people, wildlife and the economy; and an array of opportunities for positive environmental change.

4.21 At a national level the Site is identified within the Northern Thames Basin National Character Area (NCA) Profile 111, which forms the rising land above the low-lying marshy landscape that adjoins the coast and estuaries to the north, east and south-east. The landform is varied and is traversed by a series of both broad and steep valleys. The pattern of woodlands is varied across the NCA and includes considerable areas of ancient woodland. Areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are commonplace. The field pattern is varied, with informal patterns reflective of the medieval colonisation of the heaths. Mixed farming is characteristic of the NCA, as is the prevalence of large urban areas surrounded by farmland and woodland. Market towns have expanded over time, as have the London suburbs and commuter settlements, including the creation of new settlements such as Welwyn and Basildon.

#### Local Landscape Character

4.22 At a local level the Site lies within a fringe part of the Heybridge Wooded Farmland (F10) Landscape Character Area (LCA), as identified in the Mid Essex Landscape Character Assessment (2006). This LCA is characterised by its medium to large scale arable fields that are delineated by treebelts, interspersed with wooded areas. The area is somewhat suburban in character as a result of the urbanising influence of Brentwood and other settled areas. The published key characteristics of the Heybridge Wooded Farmland (F10) LCA are identified as follows:

- ***"Mature, undulating wooded farmland lining the B1002 road and railway corridor;***
- ***Mixture of medium to large-scale predominantly arable fields with mature treed field boundaries;***
- ***Single mature trees and vegetation-lined ditches;***
- ***Strong linear settlement pattern though [sic] the centre of the area, becoming more scattered at distance from the road/railway corridor;***
- ***Landmark halls and churches; and***
- ***Narrow, often tree-lined rural lanes".***

4.23 The following visual characteristics are identified:

- ***"Open views to urban edges of Brentwood, Mountnessing and Ingatestone;***
- ***Open views into the valley of the River Wid from fields within the northern half of the area;***
- ***Views to wooded horizons both within the area and within adjacent Landscape Character Areas; and***
- ***Framed views to landmark church towers and halls (such as Ingatestone Hall) and also to Mountnessing windmill".***

### **Published Landscape Guidelines**

#### National Guidelines

4.24 The following Statements of Environmental Opportunity for NCA Profile 111: Northern Thames Basin, of relevance to the Site are provided:

- ***"SEO 1: Manage rivers and river valleys to protect and improve water quality and help to alleviate flooding in the downstream urban areas, while also helping to improve aquifer recharge and provide a sufficient store of water to meet future need, especially with predicted climatic changes. Conserve the riparian landscapes and habitats, for their recreational and educational amenity for their internationally significant ecological value...;***
- ***SEO 3: Protect and appropriately manage the historic environment for its contribution to local character and sense of identity and as a framework for habitat restoration and sustainable development, ensuring high design standards (particularly in the London Green Belt) which respect the open and built character of the Thames Basin. Enhance and increase access between rural and urban areas through good green infrastructure links to allow local communities recreational, health and wellbeing benefits; and***
- ***SEO4: Manage and expand the significant areas of broadleaf woodland and wood pasture, and increase tree cover within urban areas, for the green infrastructure links and important habitats that they provide, for the sense of tranquillity they bring, their ability to screen urban influences and their role in reducing heat island effect and sequestering and storing carbon."***

#### Local Guidelines

4.25 The following landscape planning guidelines for the Heybridge Wooded Farmland (F10) LCA are provided:

- ***"Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;***
- ***Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are***

*appropriate to local landscape character. Such development should be well integrated with the surrounding landscape;*

- *Maintain views to landmark churches and halls and also to wooded horizons;*
- *Maintain open views into the Wid valley from the northern part of the character area;*
- *Ensure that new farm buildings are sensitively designed and located within the landscape in accordance with existing landscape character; and*
- *Seek measures to screen visually intrusive urban edges around Brentwood, Mountnessing and Ingatestone”.*

4.26 The following land management guidelines are provided:

- *“Conserve and enhance mature hedgerow trees;*
- *Conserve and manage areas of woodland (consider the use of traditional methods, such as coppicing and pollarding, in keeping with local landscape character;*
- *Conserve and enhance areas of semi-natural and ancient woodland as important heritage, nature conservation and landscape features;*
- *Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges; and*
- *Introduce arable field margins as a means of ensuring that mature trees within hedgerows are not disturbed by ploughing”.*

## 5.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL SITE APPRAISAL

### Overview

- 5.1 The Site and the surrounding environment was visited in February 2019, with **Site Appraisal Photographs A - G** illustrating the existing character of the Site. The locations from which the Site Appraisal Photographs were taken are shown on **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**. The visual context of the Site is illustrated by **Site Context Photographs 1 - 9**, the locations of which are illustrated on **Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan**.

### Landscape Appraisal

- 5.2 A landscape appraisal has been undertaken to ascertain the existing character of the Site. This is accomplished through recording and analysing the existing landscape features and characteristics, the way the landscape is experienced, and the value or importance of the landscape and visual resources in the vicinity of the Site. The elements of the landscape that contribute to landscape character include the built and natural form, the pattern of features, detailing, scale, planting, land use and human perception. In this regard, landscape character is derived as a result of the perception of, and action and interaction of, natural and human factors.
- 5.3 The Site is approximately 21.91 hectares (ha) in size and broadly consists of 6 parcels of land, predominantly comprising rough grassland/scrubland as illustrated in **Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan**. The landform across the Site forms a localised valley; falling from the southern edge with Alexander Lane at approximately 65m AOD to the permissive access way at approximately 57m AOD; before rising to the northern edge of the Site at approximately 64m AOD.
- 5.4 The southern part of the Site, adjacent to Alexander Lane, consists of a single field which is enclosed by mature field boundaries. The central part of the Site, which includes the permissive access way consists of a broadly rectangular field divided by a small drain connecting with the Canterbury Tye Spring the other side of the A12 that feeds the River Wid; although this watercourse was not overtly visible within the Site. There is also a small copse on the western edge of the central part of the Site, adjacent to Chelmsford Road. The northern part of the Site consists of an open large scale field with a tract of ancient woodland on the eastern edge. This ancient woodland is part of Arnold's Wood, which extends to the east of the Site, either side of the Great Eastern Main Line railway. Also within the northern part of the Site are two linear belts of mature trees, which in combination with the ancient woodland enclose the eastern edge of the Site.

- 5.5 PRoW 272\_86 traverses the eastern part of the Site and lies adjacent to the ancient woodland, connecting the residential properties lining the A1023 Chelmsford Road with the main developed area of Shenfield.
- 5.6 **Site Appraisal Photographs A – G** demonstrate that there is limited intervisibility with the wider area. Notably, the dense woodland within and adjoining the east of the Site provides substantial containment, as does the mature vegetation within the rear gardens of the ribbon development along the A1023. Vegetation cover is more sporadic along the western and southern boundaries of the Site, thereby providing a visual link to Shenfield High School, its associated playing fields, and passing traffic along the A1023.
- 5.7 Despite its predominant agricultural land use, the Site does not display the typical characteristics of the surrounding countryside due to the urban influences including audible intrusion from the surrounding land uses which include:
- residential properties, outbuildings and boundary treatments associated with the ribbon development along the A1023;
  - the overhead line equipment and mast associated with the railway line;
  - the lighting columns and signage associated with the A1023; and
  - the built forms associated with Shenfield High School.

### **Visual Appraisal**

- 5.8 A visual appraisal has been undertaken to determine the relationship of the Site with its surroundings and its approximate extent of visibility within the wider landscape from publicly accessible locations.
- 5.9 The potential visibility of the Site is largely determined by the intervening landform, as topographic features such as ridgelines and subtle undulations may block or curtail views towards the Site. In addition, land cover has an important role in determining potential visibility as woodland, treebelts or built forms may contribute to additional blocking, filtering or curtailing of views.
- 5.10 The effectiveness of vegetation as a screen depends to a considerable extent on its scale. A large mature feature will form a substantial screen throughout the year, but a hedgerow or intermittent treebelt may only be effective during the summer months. Whilst small features, such as hedgerows and individual trees can be very important, particularly when their combined effect is taken into account, they cannot be considered to be substantial or wholly effective screening features or visual barriers due to the seasonal nature of their effect.

- 5.11 **Site Context Photograph 1** is taken from PRoW 272\_86, approximately 70m to the south-east of the Site. The southernmost part of the Site is visible in the background of the view beyond a gently sloping pastoral field, and is heavily filtered by the treebelt vegetation that forms the eastern boundary of this part of the Site. Dense vegetation to the right of the view curtails visibility of the central and northernmost parts of the Site. The Site is seen in the context of existing built elements including residential properties off Alexander Lane to the left of the view; an agricultural outbuilding in the centre of the view; and railings associated with the Anglian Water flood detention basin to the right of the view.
- 5.12 **Site Context Photograph 2** provides a view from Shenfield High School playing fields, approximately 110m south of the Site and adjacent to the rear gardens of Oliver Road. To the right of the view the residential properties on Alexander Lane rise above the hedgerow and intermittent canopy trees. The houses are partly screened by evergreen trees in winter views. The Site, at the centre of the view, is generally well screened by vegetation on Alexander Lane. However, the hedge to the north of Alexander Lane is gappy in places, allowing small, albeit heavily filtered, glimpses of the Site's south field. To the left of the view, the buildings of Shenfield High School are clearly visible, as are PV panels on single storey pitched roofs. The school sports pitch has column floodlights that extend above the hedgerow in some instances. The hedgerow that runs east of the sports pitch affords lightly filtered views of the school buildings in winter views. Intermittent hedgerow trees provide some higher-level filtering of views.
- 5.13 **Site Context Photograph 3** is taken from the playing fields that adjoin the Site to the southwest, approximately 70m from the Site. To the right of the view the dense vegetation that bounds the playing fields curtails views of the southern part of the Site. However, in the centre of the view the vegetation at the far side of the playing fields is noticeably gappy and allows for filtered views across the western and northern parts of the Site. In the background of this part of the view the landform rises towards the residential properties that adjoin the Site to the north, which are seen against a wooded backdrop. To the left of the view passing vehicles and lighting columns associated with the A1023 are visible and also seen against a wooded backdrop.
- 5.14 **Site Context Photograph 4** is taken from the A1023 to the immediate west of the Site. The road corridor, which is lined by hedgerow trees, extends from the foreground into the background of the view, parallel to the viewer. Intermittent gaps in the hedgerow trees that line the road afford glimpses of the Site, with the woodland associated with the railway on embankment forming the backdrop to the view. Built development is visible in the background of the view, both to the left and right, and is associated with the ribbon development that adjoins the Site to the north, and the urban edge of Shenfield respectively.

- 5.15 **Site Context Photograph 5** illustrates the views obtained from the residential area to the east of the Site, approximately 240m from the Site beyond the railway corridor. However, a combination of built forms, vegetation and landform curtail visibility of the Site from this direction.
- 5.16 **Site Context Photograph 6** is taken from the Hall Lane overbridge, approximately 480m from the Site. The A12 road corridor lies below the viewer to the left of the view, and extends into the distance. In the centre of the view, to the right of the A12, a series of undulating pastoral fields extend towards the built development that is visible in the background of the view. The built forms, including residential development on the A1023 and Shenfield High School, are partially filtered by the hedgerow vegetation that bounds the intervening pastoral fields. To the left of the built forms visible in the distance, lighting columns associated with the A1023 are discernible, beyond which the Site is visible, albeit heavily filtered by vegetation and seen against a wooded backdrop.
- 5.17 **Site Context Photograph 7** illustrates the views obtained from the elevated landscape to the north-west of the Site and is taken from PRoW 827\_87, approximately 640m from the Site. A gently sloping arable fields extends from the foreground into the background of the view towards a dense tree belt associated with the A12, screening views further afield and curtailing visibility of the Site. A similar viewing experience is obtained by those people travelling along this PRoW further to the east, approximately 510m to the north of the Site as shown in **Site Context Photograph 8**.
- 5.18 **Site Context Photograph 9** illustrates the nature of the views obtained from the landscape to the north-east of the Site, with Arnold's Wood featuring prominently in the views obtained and obstructing any visibility of the Site.

### **Summary**

- 5.19 Overall the Site is considered to be of low 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-lying landscape that is largely well contained by a combination of vegetation cover and built form), coupled with the surrounding land uses, lends itself to residential development.

## 6.0 SCOPE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Site is considered to provide the opportunity for residential development from a landscape and visual perspective due to the extent of enclosure provided by the existing vegetation framework bordering the Site; the proximity to and influence of the existing built form; and as any introduced built form will form part of a logical extension that is in keeping with the settlement morphology pattern, tying together the ribbon development between Chelmsford Road and the settlement edge of Alexander Lane.
- 6.2 Nonetheless, it is crucial that any development within the Site ensures that the boundary vegetation is retained and enhanced to sensitively and sympathetically integrate the built form into its setting. Furthermore, it is recommended that new structural planting is introduced through the Site to break-up the perceived scale and extent of the introduced built form, while simultaneously providing a tiering and layered approach to the vegetation that will coalesce in the views and provide a screening and softening function.

### Site Opportunities and Constraints

#### Opportunities

- 6.3 Opportunities for development within the Site are that:
- The Site is not covered by any landscape designations;
  - There is an existing vegetation framework bordering and enclosing the Site, which in combination with the sloping nature of the Site and its orientation, results in a limited visual envelope;
  - The Site does not exhibit any rare landscape features; and
  - Development of the Site offers the potential to consolidate the settlement pattern.

#### Constraints

- 6.4 Constraints to development within the Site include:
- Development should be offset from the existing boundary vegetation structure in response to Root Protection Areas (the extent of which should be determined by an arboricultural survey), including the Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) that are enforced within the Site;
  - An area of ancient woodland is within the Site, as well as an area of Flood Zone, meaning that these areas are not suitable for development, albeit there is the potential to incorporate areas of publicly accessible open space;

- A ProW runs through the Site, which although limiting the developable area provides the opportunity to introduce ecological corridors, open space and green infrastructure linkages, as well as enhancing the recreational resource and connectivity value of the Site; and
- Development in the more elevated parts of the Site would potentially break the wooded skyline, and accordingly it is recommended that layers of structural planting are introduced to aid the screening and softening of views, while overall building heights are limited in these areas.

### **Design Strategy**

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

- Ensure that the introduced built forms contribute positively to the sense of place and local distinctiveness by using materials that reflect or complement the local vernacular and exhibit a high quality of design;
- The height and siting of built forms within the Site requires careful consideration, in particular, the use of higher ground for development. Development should be planned so as to avoid roofscapes from breaking the wooded skyline, thereby maintaining views of wooded horizons;
- Provide a green corridor along the existing alignment of the PRow, responding positively to the visual amenity interests of users of this PRow and breaking up the perceived scale and extent of the introduced built forms;
- Retain and enhance the existing vegetation within the Site, including the area of ancient woodland at Arnold's Wood in the eastern part of the Site;
- Provide cycle and pedestrian links to connect with the wider PRow network and areas of settlement;
- Provide green infrastructure links through the Site to break up the perceived scale and extent of built form to more readily assimilate the introduced built forms into the landscape, reflecting the historic field pattern and responding to the underlying landform;
- Soften the edge of the development by providing a dense vegetation buffer along the A1023 Chelmsford Road in order to provide a robust, defensible and soft development edge; and
- Potential to incorporate SuDS within the lower-lying part of the Site, resulting in publicly accessible open green space and habitat creation.

## 7.0 GREEN BELT REVIEW

7.1 An assessment of the contribution of the Site to the first four purposes of the Green Belt, as set out in Paragraph 134 of the NPPF, has been undertaken in Table 7.1 below.

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

Purpose	Critique	Contribution
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>The western extent of the Site is defined by the tree lined A1023 that extends from the settlement of Shenfield towards Mountnessing, and features a stretch of ribbon development that defines the northern extent of the Site. The eastern extent of the Site is defined by a railway line on embankment, beyond which the settlement of Shenfield/Hutton extends in a northeasterly direction towards the River Wid. The southern extent of the Site is defined by a school playing field and Alexander Lane, beyond which lies the main developed area of Shenfield. Therefore, the Site is contained by existing development and infrastructure within the settlement of Shenfield.</p> <p>While the Site provides a technical physical separation between Shenfield High School and residential dwellings adjacent to Chelmsford Road and Alexander Lane, and the ribbon development to the north of the Site, on the A1023; the very short distance between these two areas (approximately 270m), and existing inter-visibility, results in no distinctive sense of place or perceived separation.</p> <p>Therefore, the Site has the ability to accommodate residential development without contributing to an increase in the extent of unrestricted sprawl of Shenfield's settlement pattern; and due to the Site's position between existing residential properties, development of the Site would not constitute a disorganised nor unattractive extension of Shenfield.</p> <p>The vegetated framework within the Site and along the eastern edge, in combination with the residential built form and road infrastructure would form a permanent edge to development within the Site and form a legible boundary to the Green Belt.</p> <p>Development within the Site would extend no further north, east, south or west than the existing built-up area.</p>	Limited
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	<p>While development of the Site would technically reduce the distance between residential dwellings adjacent to Chelmsford Road and Alexander Lane and the ribbon development along the A1023; the perception of separation is already eroded due to the intervisibility, and these dwellings effectively form part of the same settlement.</p> <p>Development of the Site would not alter the distance between Shenfield and Mountnessing as development would not extend any further north-east than the existing ribbon development on the A1023. Similarly, the separation distance between Shenfield and Doddinghurst</p>	None

Purpose	Critique	Contribution
	<p>would be maintained as development would not extend further north-west.</p> <p>Given the extent of existing settlement to the east and south of the Site, the Site does not contribute to the prevention of the merging of Shenfield, Brentwood and Billericay.</p>	
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>While there would be a technical reduction in the extent of countryside as a result of development within the Site, this would be very localised and very minor in extent given that it is not contiguous with the wider countryside as a result of the containment provided by the surrounding built elements.</p> <p>Additionally, the Site is not perceived as being within a countryside setting due to the urbanising influences of the ribbon development to the north, passing traffic to the west, the railway line to the east, and built elements to the south (including the prominent Shenfield High School), thereby effectively contained by the existing developed area of Shenfield.</p> <p>Furthermore, the audible and visual intrusion of passing motorists along the A1023 and trains on the railway line influence the Site and reduce its perceived rurality, whilst the vegetation and built forms that enclose the Site limit a visual connection with the wider landscape.</p> <p>There is scope within the well-defined boundaries of the Site to make a clear distinction between such open countryside areas outside the Site and the urban edge.</p>	Limited
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	The Site does not have a physical, visual or character connection with the historic part of any town.	None

7.2 The NPPF states that the key characteristics of the Green Belt are "***their openness and their permanence***". As demonstrated in Table 7.1, the Site is considered to be inherently open due to its agricultural land use albeit also exceptionally well contained, exhibiting well-defined boundaries to the north, east and west. As previously highlighted, Paragraph 139 clearly stipulates that Green Belt boundaries should be defined clearly "***using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent***".

7.3 A landscape-led approach to development within the Site would seek to ensure that any development creates well planned neighbourhoods utilising and enhancing the existing tree belts that demarcate the field pattern. Development within the Site would be well contained by the existing robust and defensible boundaries of the railway line and the A1023, and would not constitute unrestricted and disorganised sprawl, while aligning with the aforementioned principle of unitising physical features as a boundary to the Green Belt.

7.4 While there would be a technical reduction in the extent of countryside as a result of development within the Site, this would be very localised and very minor in extent. Additionally,

the Site is not perceived as being within a countryside setting due to the urbanising influences of the ribbon development to the north, passing traffic to the west, the railway line to the east, and built elements to the south (including the prominent Shenfield High School).

- 7.5 Development of the Site would not alter the distance between Shenfield and Mountnessing as development would not extend further north-east than the existing ribbon development on the A1023. Similarly, the separation distance between Shenfield and Doddinghurst would be maintained as development would not extend further north-west. Given the extent of existing settlement to the east and south of the Site, the Green Belt in this location does not contribute to the separation of Shenfield from Brentwood or Billericay.
- 7.6 In light of the above findings it is apparent that it is wholly unnecessary to keep the land permanent open as the Site makes overall makes a minimal contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt and accordingly is suitable for release, offering the potential to contribute to a suitable pattern of development for Shenfield. In this regard, there are clearly exceptional circumstances that justify an alteration to the Green Belt boundary so as to ensure that the Site is not covered by a Green Belt designation.

## 8.0 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

- 8.1 The review of the Local Plan provides an opportunity to provide a long-term strategy for growth across the Borough. The NPPF endorses the permanence of Green Belts as an essential characteristic and stipulates in Paragraph 136 that "***once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans***".
- 8.2 The NPPF, as set out in Paragraph 138, seeks to align Green Belt boundary reviews with sustainable patterns of development. Paragraph 139 of the NPPF notes that when defining boundaries to the Green Belt the Local Planning Authority should take into account meeting the identified requirements for sustainable development and not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open. In this regard, a review of the Green Belt boundary in the vicinity of the Site provides the opportunity to shape future sustainable development in order to meet the longer-term needs of the Borough in a coherent and logical manner.
- 8.3 It is recommended that in accordance with Paragraph 139, the Local Planning Authority seek to maximise the potential of a revised Green Belt boundary in the vicinity of the Site for land that could be brought forward and contribute positively to the local area and promote sustainable development in line with the NPPF Core Principles.
- 8.4 A review of the wider area has strategically identified that the A12 Ingatestone By-Pass further to the north of the Site forms a logical, robust and defensible boundary that is legible, consistent and coherent on the ground and likely to be of permanence, while the continuance of the railway line to the north-east to meet this highway infrastructure is another effective boundary.
- 8.5 Consequently, there is the opportunity to release this area of land from the Green Belt to promote a sustainable pattern of development that would not alter the openness of the Green Belt in the wider area, while also helping to consolidate the existing ribbon development on Chelmsford Road into part of the fabric of Shenfield. **Wider Draft Allocation Photographs W1-W2** illustrate the appearance of this additional area of land north of the Site. These findings are consistent with the established boundary of Draft Allocation R03 and it is therefore recommended that the Green Belt boundary be revised accordingly.

It is therefore apparent that exceptional circumstances exist and that the Green Belt boundary should be altered to coincide with the established boundary of Draft Allocation R03, as fully evidenced and justified in this report and the Green Belt Study Part II: Green Belt Parcel Definition and Review.

## 9.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The Site lies to the north of Shenfield, which lies to the north-east of Brentwood in Essex; it is in the district of Brentwood Borough Council.

9.2 The study area is lightly wooded, with vegetation typically limited to following transport corridors such as the A12 and Great Eastern Main Line. However, blocks of ancient woodland are distributed across the study area. The Site itself lies within a strong landscape framework.

9.3 A single PRoW traverses the Site. PRoW 272\_86 runs alongside the northern railway embankment to the south of the Site before turning northwards through the Site, to the west of the Arnold's Wood and terminating at Chelmsford Road.

9.4 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 Shenfield (which is inset from the Green Belt).

9.5 In terms of landscape character, key distinctive characteristics are identified in published assessments at a national, county and borough level, these include:

- Varied pattern of woodlands, including ancient woodland;
- Mature, undulating mixed wooded farmland;
- Medium to large scale arable fields;
- Single mature trees and vegetation-lined ditches;
- Open views to urban edges and wooded horizons;
- Framed views to landmark church towers and halls;
- Market town settlements; and
- Strong linear settlement patterns and road/railway corridors

9.6 Character guidance includes:

- River management and protection;
- Management of the historic environment for its contribution to local character and sense of identity;
- Increasing access between rural and urban areas through green infrastructure links;
- Managing existing woodland, whilst increasing tree cover within urban areas;
- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area
- Ensure new development responds to historic settlement patterns and that materials are appropriate to local landscape character; and
- Maintain views to landmark churches and halls and to wooded horizons

- 9.7 With regards to land management, guidelines set out that conservation and enhancement of the following would improve the landscape:
- Mature hedgerow trees;
  - Woodland and areas of semi-natural and ancient woodland; and
  - Historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges; as well as introducing arable field margins
- 9.8 Relevant planning policy focuses on good design, visual amenity and character as well as maintaining the Green Belt, managing woodlands and provision of landscaping and natural features in development. Policies for floodlighting and conservation and enhancement of the historic environment are also set out, as are SuDS and Green and Blue Infrastructure. The Site is not covered by any landscape designations.
- 9.9 The Site is approximately 21.91ha in size and broadly consists of 6 parcels of land, predominantly comprising rough grassland/scrubland. The southern part of the Site, adjacent to Alexander Lane, consists of a single field which is enclosed by mature field boundaries. The central part of the Site, which includes the permissive access way, consists of a broadly rectangular field divided by a small drain connecting with the Canterbury Tye Spring. The northern part of the Site consists of an open, large-scale, field with a tract of ancient woodland on the eastern edge.
- 9.10 The character of the Site is influenced by its proximity to urban form and influences, including audible intrusion from the surrounding land uses, which include:
- Residential properties, outbuildings and boundary treatments associated with the ribbon development along the A1023;
  - Overhead line equipment and mast associated with the railway line;
  - Lighting columns and signage associated with the A1023; and
  - Built forms associated with Shenfield High School.
- 9.11 In terms of visibility, the Site has a largely localised visual envelope. Orientation, nature of the landform within and adjoining the Site as well as its siting within the lower-lying landscape ensures that it is largely well contained by a combination of vegetation cover and built form. These features typically restrict long-distance views. However, glimpses of the Site are visible from elevated views from the west.
- 9.12 The Site is considered to provide the opportunity for residential development from a landscape and visual perspective due to the extent of enclosure provided by the existing vegetation framework bordering the Site; the proximity to, and influence of, the existing built form; and as any introduced built form will form part of a logical extension that is in keeping with the

settlement morphology pattern. The latter will better tie together the ribbon development between Chelmsford Road and the settlement edge of Alexander Lane.

9.13 Successful development of the Site depends on the retention of boundary vegetation to sensitively and sympathetically integrate the new built form into its setting. In addition, it is recommended that new structural planting is introduced through the Site to break-up the perceived scale and introduced built form.

9.14 Notwithstanding these opportunities the Site presents some constraints / design considerations:

- Development should be offset from the existing boundary vegetation structure in response to Root Protection Areas, including the Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs);
- An area of ancient woodland is within the Site, as is an area of Flood Zone, meaning that these areas are not suitable for development, albeit there is the potential to incorporate areas of publicly accessible open space;
- A ProW runs through the Site, which although limiting the developable area provides the opportunity to introduce ecological corridors, open space and green infrastructure linkages, as well as enhancing the recreational resource and connectivity value of the Site;
- Provide cycle and pedestrian links to connect with the wider PRow network and areas of settlement;
- Development in the more elevated parts of the Site would potentially break the wooded skyline and, accordingly, it is recommended that layers of structural planting are introduced to aid in screening and softening of views, while overall building heights are limited in these areas.
- Ensure that 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;
- Retain and enhance the existing vegetation within the Site, including the area of ancient woodland at Arnold's Wood in the eastern part of the Site;
- Provide green infrastructure links through the Site to break up the perceived scale and extent of built form to more readily assimilate the introduced built forms into the landscape;
- Soften the edge of the development by providing a dense vegetation buffer along the A1023 Chelmsford Road;
- Consider the potential to incorporate SuDS within the lower-lying part of the Site, resulting in publicly accessible open green space and habitat creation.

- 9.15 An assessment of the contribution of the Site to the first four purposes of the Green Belt, as set out in Paragraph 134 of the NPPF, was carried out and concluded that it is wholly unnecessary to keep the land permanently open as the Site overall makes a minimal contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt and accordingly is suitable for release, offering the potential to contribute to a suitable pattern of development for Shenfield.
- 9.16 It is recommended that in accordance with Paragraph 139, the Local Planning Authority seek to maximise the potential of a revised Green Belt boundary in the vicinity of the Site for land that could be brought forward and contribute positively to the local area and promote sustainable development in line with the NPPF Core Principles.
- 9.17 A review of the wider area has strategically identified that the A12 Ingatestone By-Pass further to the north of the Site forms a logical, robust and defensible boundary that is legible, consistent and coherent on the ground and likely to be of permanence, while the continuance of the railway line to the north-east to meet this highway infrastructure is another effective boundary.
- 9.18 Consequently, there is the opportunity to release this area of land from the Green Belt to promote a sustainable pattern of development that would not alter the openness of the Green Belt in the wider area, while also helping to consolidate the existing ribbon development on Chelmsford Road into part of the fabric of Shenfield.
- 9.19 For those reasons set out above, the Site is considered appropriate for residential development on landscape and visual and Green Belt grounds and there are exceptional circumstances present to justify an alteration to the Green Belt boundary, coinciding with the established boundary to Draft Allocation R03.