



# **Land West of Ashgrove Road Sevenoaks Kent**

## **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 LVIA Project details

This document has been produced as a standalone Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for the site Land West of Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks, Kent. The application (22/02645/OUT) is an *Outline application for the development of 50 dwellings with all matters reserved except access. Land South Of Larches Ashgrove Road Sevenoaks Kent.*

The LVIA considers the effects of the potential development upon:

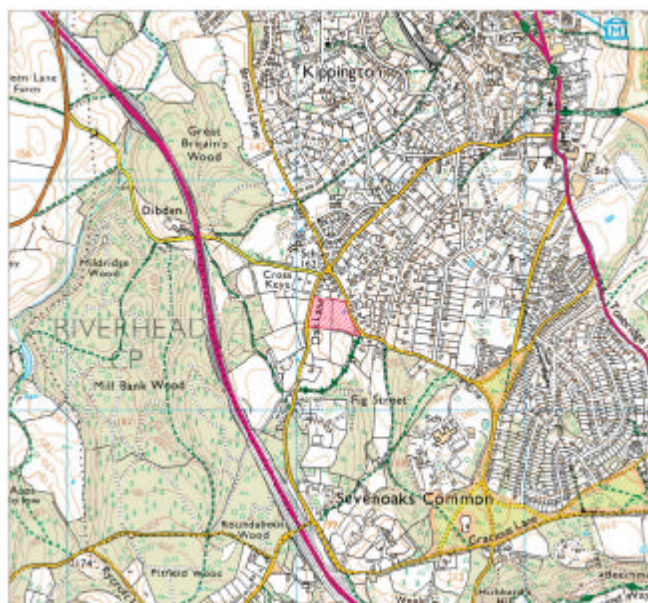
- Individual landscape features and elements;
- Landscape character;
- Visual amenity and the people who view the landscape.

The objectives of the LVIA are:

- To identify, evaluate and describe the current landscape character of the site and its surroundings and any notable individual landscape features;
- To determine the sensitivity of the landscape to the type of current development;
- To identify potential visual receptors (i.e. people that would be able to see the development), and evaluate their sensitivity to the type of changes proposed;
- To identify and describe any effects of the development in so far as they affect the landscape and/or views of it and evaluate the magnitude of change due to these;
- To identify and describe measures those have been or could be adopted to avoid, reduce and compensate for landscape and visual effects;
- To evaluate the significance of residual landscape and visual effects.

### 1.2 The Existing site and Location

The site location and its general context within the landscape setting are shown on Figure 1: below.



**Figure 1: Site Location Plan – red hatch shows site area.**



The application site is approximately 2.3ha and is on undeveloped agricultural land, located in between Oak Lane and Ashgrove Road in West Heath, south of Sevenoaks. The site drops by 10m between Oak Lane and Ashgrove Road, from 175m to 165m above sea level. To the south of the site boundary, the land undulates, sloping steeply towards Byway SU26. It was noted that when walking along the Byway, at times it was so waterlogged that it was not possible to walk certain stretches.

The site is bounded by mature trees and hedgerows; the site boundary is often steeply banked. The hedgerow appeared to have been thinned at one point on Ashgrove Road (Photo 1) and it is understood that the site owner attempted to create an access point several years ago and removed a few metres of mature hedgerow. It is then understood that the site owner replanted the hedgerow; at this point, it appears to be about 8 years old and is gradually becoming well established again. It is understood that developer proposes to clear the hedgerow again and create a site entrance at this point.



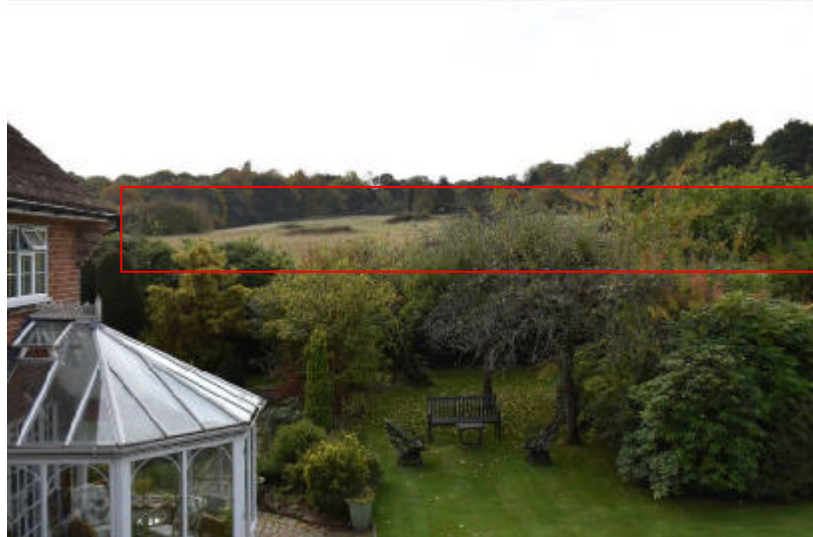
***Photo 1: View west into the site, from the proposed entrance off Ashgrove Road***

There is no public right of way across the site, the closest accessible routes being Ashgrove Road, Oak Lane and Byway SU36. Photos were therefore taken towards the site from these points.



***Photo 2: View north along Ashgrove Road, just south of the site entrance (proposed approximately to the left of the car and shown in red in Photo 2).***

Photo 2 clearly shows the steep banks and sunken roads associated with the Study Area, formed through the historic hedgerow network, now grown into mature trees, the roots of which help to stabilise the banks of the road. Visibility was often poor along this stretch of Ashgrove Road, since the mature trees and sunken lane overshadow the road and there are several blind bends. Walking this stretch of the road was therefore challenging and at times dangerous.



***Photo 3: View of the site looking southwards from the neighbouring property, Larches, off Ashgrove Road. The extent of the site (beyond the garden boundary) in the photo is shown in red.***



***Photo 4: View of the site looking southwards from the neighbouring property, Winfield, off Oak Lane. The extent of the site (beyond the fence) in the photo is shown in red. The 10m level change is apparent.***





**Photo 5: View of Oak Lane, looking south, as it passes to the west of the application site.**

The mature tree and hedgerow network, which are strong landscape characteristics within the Study Area, and which make up the western boundary of the site, are clearly visible on the left of Photograph 5. Vehicles travel at high speeds along Oak Lane and it was challenging and at times dangerous to walk this stretch.



**Photo 6: View west towards the site from the nearby property, Woodside, next to Byway SU36. The approximate extent of the site development is shown in red.**

Photograph 6 shows the extent of the proposed site development, which is indicated in red, at the top of the slope, and stretches to the mature native tree line on the left of the photo.

### 1.3 Planning Policy

The Core Strategy, along with the Allocations and Development Management Plan, is part of the Local Plan for the Sevenoaks District and was adopted in February 2011. It draws together the objectives of ‘a wide range of plans, programmes and strategies and provides the overarching principles that will deliver the essential development needs of the District up to 2026.’

The planning policies relating to the site are indicated in figure 2.



**Figure 2: Planning policies relating to the site or nearby areas (map and legend taken from Sevenoaks District interactive planning policy map). Approximate site location shown in red.**

Ancient and semi-natural woodland and Ancient Replanted woodland are located within 300m of the site to the south and west as shown in figure 3.

Research by the Woodland Trust (<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/43620/impacts-of-nearby-development-on-the-ecology-of-ancient-woodland.pdf>) cautions against development near to ancient woodlands: *“Housing development may increase isolation of natural habitats by creating or increasing barriers to movement (Belisle & Clair 2002). It may be associated with the destruction of semi-natural habitats and movement corridors between ancient woodland fragments, and ancient woods and nearby semi-natural habitats. The net impact of housing on fragmentation is likely to depend on prior land use. For example, gardens and other planted areas may provide a valuable wildlife resource, as compared with intensive arable or improved pasture. However, species which make use of gardens are primarily generalist or edge species. Woodland specialists that are positively encouraged are usually from specific and more mobile species groups (e.g. birds). Most gardens are unlikely to sustain less-mobile woodland species (Blair & Launer 1997).... Invasive plants may ‘escape’ from gardens or be dumped in nearby woodland. Housing may also make ancient woods more vulnerable to invasion by fragmenting semi-natural landscapes... these effects may be associated with new housing development located near to ancient woodland.”*



**Figure 3: Ancient woodland within 300m of the site, shown in green (taken from Natural England interactive map). Approximate site location shown in red.**

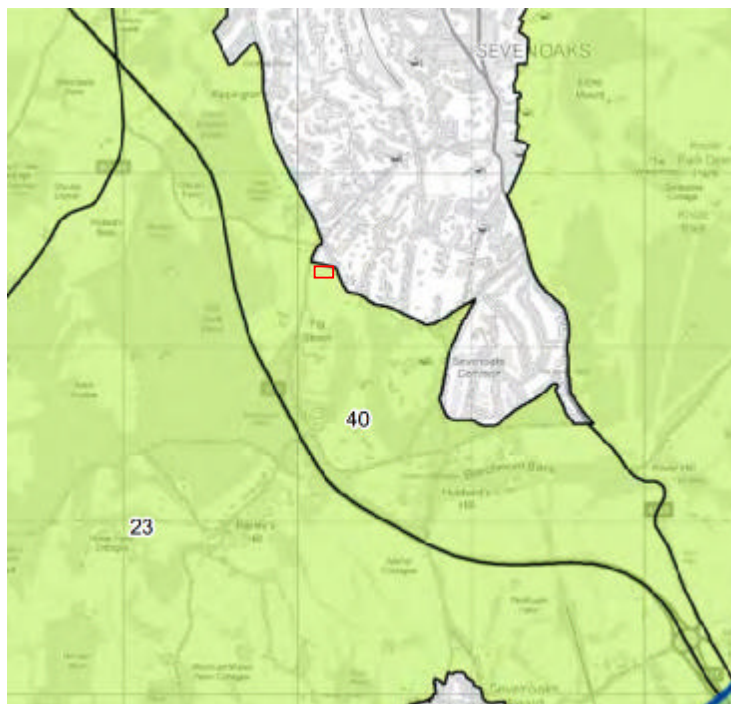
The site is designated as within the AONB and Metropolitan Green Belt Land. In a relatively recent Green Belt Assessment (GBA), undertaken by Arup and commissioned by Sevenoaks District Council in 2017, the site is contained within *Parcel 40*, as shown in figure 4. The Purposes of the Assessment are to:

1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging
3. Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

The GBA describes Parcel 40 as scoring highly on Purpose 1 and Purpose 3 as:

- *The parcel is at the edge of a large built-up area of Sevenoaks.*
- *The parcel is connected to the large built-up area of Sevenoaks. The large built-up area is predominantly bounded by features lacking in durability or permanence, consisting of Broads and the backs of houses. The parcel is an important barrier to sprawl.*
- *Approximately 2% of the parcel is covered by built form, comprising a school in the north of the parcel, and residential properties, a health centre and a school in the centre / south of the parcel. The parcel is characterised by agricultural fields and concentrated areas of woodland throughout, contributing to a very unspoilt rural character. Wooded areas restrict long views, but there are mid-length views where the parcel is more open. Overall, the parcel has a predominantly rural character.*





**Figure 4: Extract of Sevenoaks Council's Green Belt Assessment. The approximate site location is shown in red.**

Whilst the applicant argues that the Council may decide at a later date to reallocate the land, at the time the application was submitted, no such reassessment has been published; Parcel 40 continues to play a vital role in checking unrestricted urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

The applicant commissioned an AONB Appraisal (dated September 2022) which concludes that *"there are a range of measures that can be deployed to avoid or mitigate adverse effects on natural beauty indicators and special qualities...minimising changes to the fabric of the Site itself, by avoiding significant cut / fill and retaining / enhancing existing features, such as boundary vegetation and the pond; incorporating elements of the local vernacular into the architectural design of new buildings; and creating new opportunities to access and interpret the Site."*

However, it is understood that the features highlighted do not exist / have been previously removed/infilled for example, the pond was not apparent when viewing the site from neighbouring properties. Secondly, the applicant admits that the *"Kent Downs AONB Unit were approached in April 2022 in order to consult on the emerging proposals and ensure the scheme sensitively responds to the AONB context. Unfortunately the AONB Unit were not supportive of a development in this location and therefore did not consider it appropriate to enter into pre-application discussions."*

The Kent Downs AONB unit responded to the planning submission on 24 October 2002. The following has been extracted from the Unit's objection:

*"Conclusion on policy assessment*

*.. In determining the planning application under AONB policy, the decision maker is required not simply to weigh all material considerations in a balance, but to refuse the application unless they are satisfied that (i) there are exceptional circumstances, and (ii) it is demonstrated that, despite giving great weight to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty in the AONB, the development is in the public interest.*

The proposal would provide 50 new dwellings, including 50% affordable homes and also incorporates improved local access. While these collective benefits should form part of the consideration as to whether exceptional circumstances exist, these do not in our view amount to exceptional circumstances either individually or cumulatively.

Any development that is claimed to be permissible as part of an exceptional circumstances case through paragraph 177 must be exactly that – exceptional. It is only by taking a robust approach to the acceptability of major development in AONBs that great weight can properly be given to these important national landscapes.

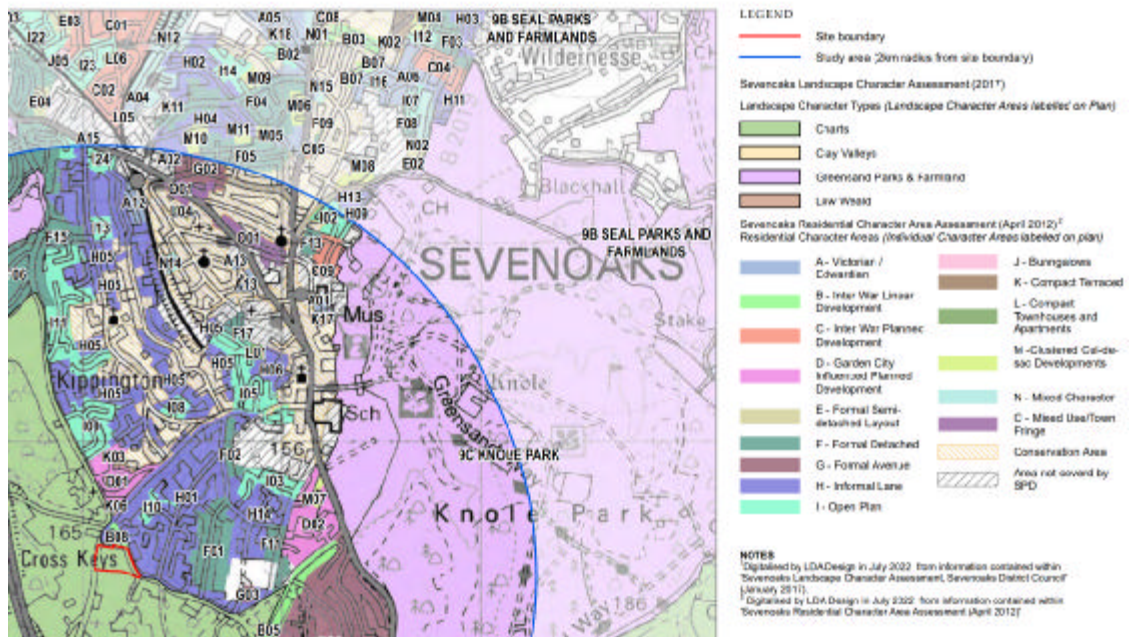
Furthermore, as explored further below and as acknowledged within the LVIA, while the proposal has sought to incorporate measures to mitigate impacts on the AONB, including retaining and enhancing boundary vegetation and avoiding significant cut and fill, the proposal would nevertheless result in residual harm to the landscape character of the countryside and AONB and therefore conflict with both the local plan and NPPF policies 176 and 177 that require the conservation and enhancement of AONBs. As such, we do not consider that the very high policy bar set in both the NPPF and local planning policy for major development to be acceptable within the AONB has been met...

...The application submission justifies the acceptability of the proposal despite its location within the nationally protected AONB partially on the basis that:

*'it is considered to make a relatively limited contribution to the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB. Being a small scale site on the edge of the settlement area, it does not contribute to the dramatic landform experienced elsewhere across the AONB; does not contain any particularly sensitive or rare landscape, ecology or heritage features; is closely associated with the urban area of Sevenoaks, which reduces its sense of remoteness and tranquillity; and it not publicly accessible'.*

While the site is relatively contained within the wider landscape, due to topography and the presence of strongly vegetated boundaries, and the development may not affect wider long distance views, the NPPF is unambiguous in relation to its policy on AONBs, requiring protection of the landscape as well as the scenic...beauty of an AONB. This protection is principally independent of the extent of public views of a development and more in respect of the protection of the land itself. Furthermore, under the designation, all areas of the AONB are of equal value and the fact that the site is not within deep countryside, is not important. Legislation and policy give equal protection to all parts of the AONB. Furthermore, we do not agree with the notion that this is small scale site, given that it comprises an area of over 2ha...we consider that the proposal would not comply with the Kent Management Plan. The proposal would fail to conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the AONB and is therefore contrary to policies LO8 of the Coire Strategy and EN5 of the Allocations and Development Management Plan. It is also in conflict with the NPPF, requiring great weight to be given to their conservation and enhancement, for development to be limited in scale and extent and for major development to be only permitted in exceptional circumstances. **As such the AONB Unit objects to the application."**

The SPD Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment (adopted April 2012) was highlighted by the applicant. The digitised version submitted by applicant, was combined with the Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment and is shown in image 1.

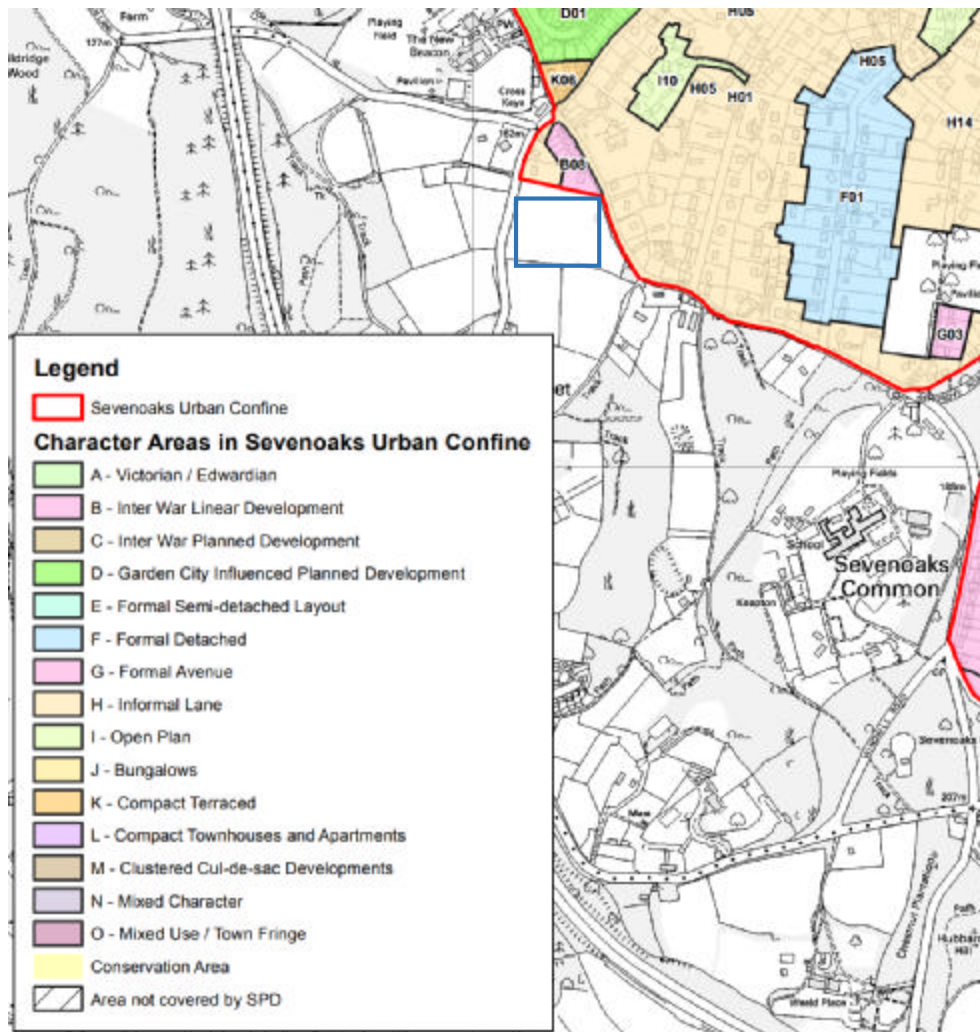


**Image 1: Digitised version of the Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment (Figure 5 in the applicant's LVIA submission) which also combines the SPD Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment. The site is shown in red.**

Image 1 appears - at first - to show that the site (shown in red) is designated as *L. Compact Townhouses and Apartments*; a similar shade of green has been used by the applicant to indicate the Landscape Character Type, which is *Charts*. Presumably the applicant meant to indicate the *landscape* character area assigned to the site rather than any residential character (which does not exist as it is not designated as housing). The Sevenoaks Urban Confine boundary has not been included.

Image 2 shows the SPD Sevenoaks Residential Character Area as originally published by the Council. The site is outside the Sevenoaks Urban Confine and therefore there is no residential character area attached to the site. However, it is noted that the land immediately to the north east, on the other side of Ashgrove Road is shown as falling within an 'Informal Lane' character area, where dwellings sit in large curtilages and are set back off the road.





**Image 2: Extract from Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment (Adopted April 2012).** The approximate site location is marked in dark blue, and is outside the Sevenoaks Urban Confine and therefore there is no residential character area attached to the site.

## 1.4 Historical context

Nearby Sevenoaks is thought to be derived from the Old English word "Seouenaca", the name of a chapel built in AD 800, surrounded by seven oak trees in Knole Park. These have been replaced several times over the centuries. Sevenoaks Greensands Commons, managed by Kent Wildlife Trust, are located within the Study Area, about 500m south-east of the site. There have been several Neolithic and Bronze Age discoveries within this part of Sevenoaks Commons (*Sevenoaks Greensand Commons Historic Review, by Kent Wildlife Trust*). The area was once used as common land and in Anglo-Saxon times. In nearby areas, oaks were predominantly planted, as these woodlands were especially important for raising pigs (the acorns foraged by pigs) were planted and managed. Within the Greensand Commons, the woodland was much more varied and interspersed with heathland, providing a rich habitat and grazing area for cattle and sheep. The Sevenoaks Commons is now designated as several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR) for their areas of ancient woodland and open heathland.

Coppicing was very common, providing much needed fuel for baking, heating and producing salt for preserving meat as well as building materials. In later times, coppicing provided the materials for making hop poles for Kent's burgeoning beer industry. It is still practiced locally today as part of woodland management.

## 1.5 Key Issues

For the purposes of this report the key issues are:

- The principle of development within the Countryside;
- Landscape and Visual effects;
- Effect on adjacent dwellings and;
- Effect on adjacent public rights of way.

## 1.6 Principle of Development

The site falls within the Countryside as defined by the local plan, and close to Listed Buildings.

## 1.7 Landscape and Visual Impact

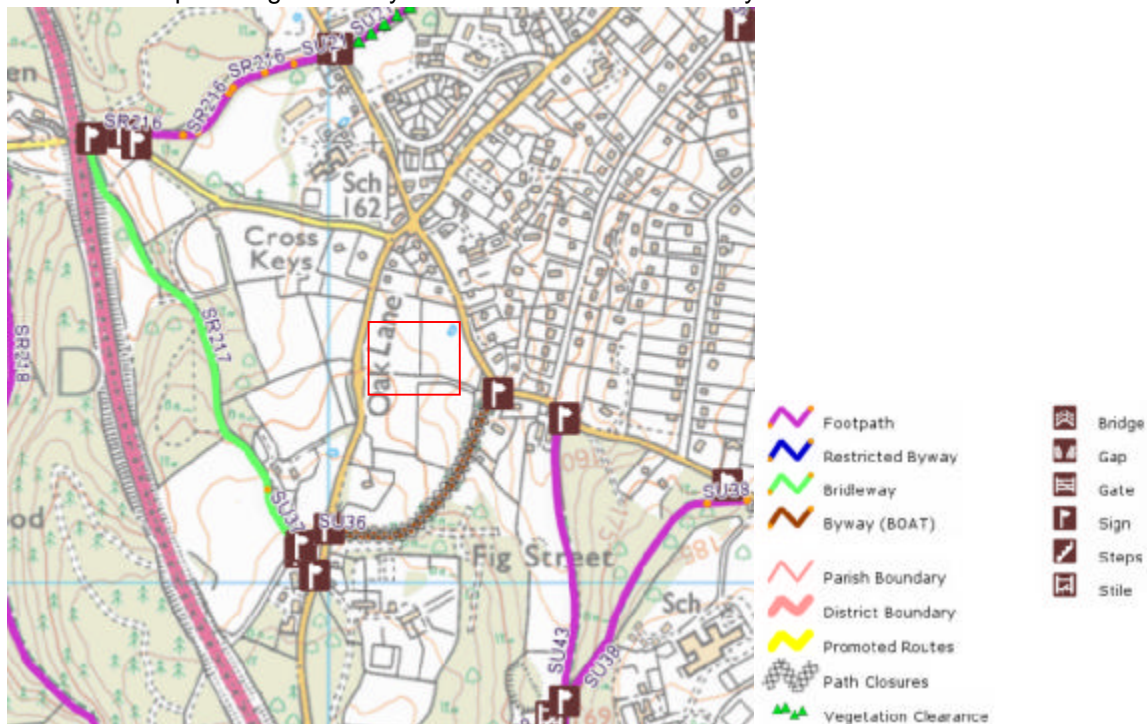
The development proposals should protect, conserve and/or enhance the key characteristics of the receiving landscape.

## 1.8 Impact on adjacent dwellings

The site is situated just outside Sevenoaks urban confines. The dwellings affected by the development are Woodside, Larches, Winfield, Cranbourne, The Pines, Fig Street House and other properties along Ashgrove Road and Oak Lane.

## 1.9 Public Rights of Way

Several public rights of way lie within or close to the study area as follows:



**Figure 5: Local public rights of way and Map legend (taken from Kent County Council interactive map).**



There are no public rights of way through the site. The closest right of way is Byway SU36 which runs approximately 200m south of the site to meet the site boundary at its south-east corner. There are views from multiple points from Byway SU36. Bridleways SU37 and SR217 were also walked. There were no views discernible from these bridleways.



**Photo 7: View east from entrance of Byway SU36 from Oak Lane**



**Photo 8: view along Byway SU36 looking eastwards**



***Photo 9: view towards the site from Byway SU36 looking north. The development would begin to be visible from horseback at this point, in the centre of the photo (approximate location shown in red).***



***Photo 10: view towards the site from Byway SU36 looking north. The development would be visible at all times of the year from horseback and on foot at this point (approximate location shown in red).***

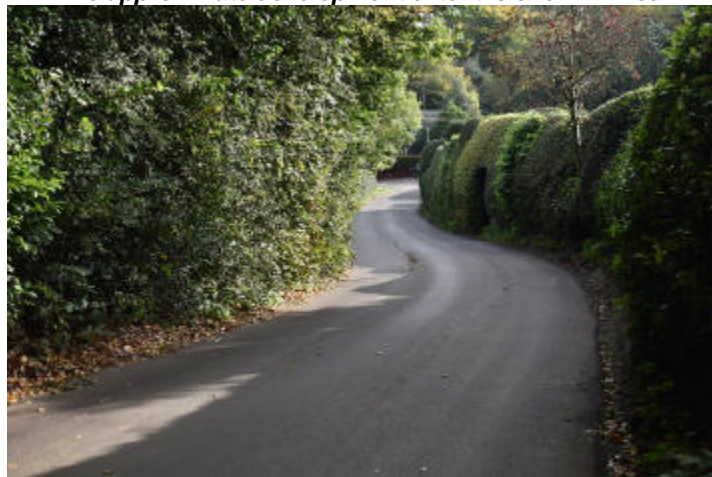


***Photo 11: part of Byway SU36 became waterlogged just before this point, indicating that the local area is already prone to run off, potentially from the adjacent undulating landform, next to which the site is located.***





***Photo 12: View towards the site from Byway SU36, adjacent to Woodside dwelling, looking northwest. The approximate development extent is shown in red.***



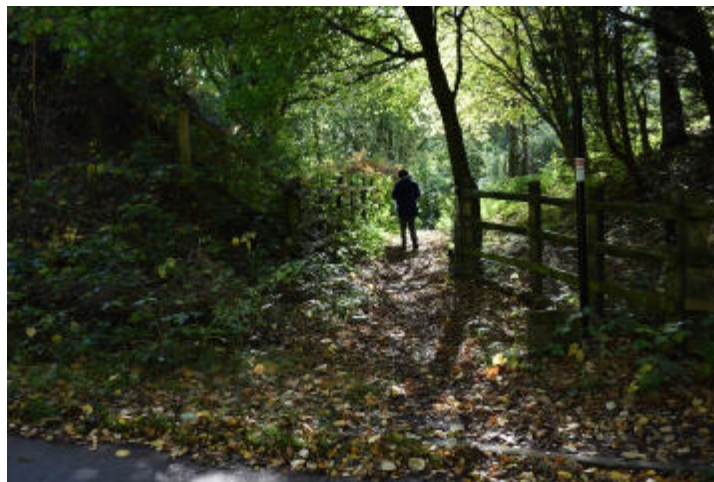
***Photo 13: View east from the entrance of Byway SU36 as it meets Ashgrove Road. It is understood that this area, and Pocket Hill and Hopgarden Lane are prone to runoff from the steeply undulating fields.***



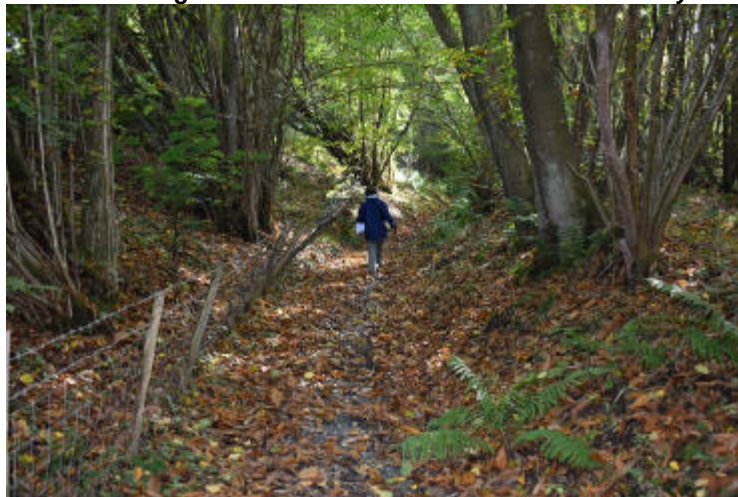
***Photo 14: Looking south into the entrance to Byway SU36 as it meets Ashgrove Road.***



***Photo 15: Looking westwards to the site from Ashgrove Road.***



***Photo 16: Looking southwards from the entrance to Bridleway SR217.***



***Photo 17: Looking southwards along Bridleway SR217, as it passes through a traditional coppice, which is characteristic of the Charts landscape area.***





***Photo 18: Looking westwards from Bridleway SR217, as it passes an equestrian area.***



***Photo 19: At the entrance of the short Bridleway SU37, at Oak Lane, looking towards the point at which it joins Bridleway SU37.***

## **1.10 Analysis**

This report centres on the effects arising from the development site on both the existing landscape character and visual resource of the local area. It identifies and assesses the significance of and the effects of the change resulting from the existing development. This is considered both upon the existing landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity. It aims to judge how the site development will affect the landscape and visual matters including:

- conservation and enhancement of landscape character and scenic value;
- protection and enhancement of the landscape everywhere and particularly in designated areas;
- protection and enhancement of local distinctiveness;
- improvement of the quantity and quality of publicly accessible open space.

## **1.11 Baseline conditions**

A landscape character and visual intrusion study has been made of the site and surrounding areas and an assessment has been made to describe what changes (landscape and visual effects) will occur from the proposals and these have been quantified.

This report pays particular attention to whether the proposals have materially affected the landscape designations above, and views into and from the site from points of public access. In addition, it considers whether these changes will affect the existing landscape character and quality of the area. What changes there are to views and the sites capacity to accept change and the suitability of the site to receive the development.



## SECTION 2: PRINCIPLES, PROCESS AND PRESENTATION

### 2.1 Methodology

This report has been carried out in accordance with:

- The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, (2013) third edition produced by the Landscape and Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment.
- Guidelines for Landscape Character Assessment, (2002) Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH);

2.1.1 In accordance with published guidance, landscape and visual impacts are assessed separately although the procedure for assessing each of these is closely linked. A clear distinction has been drawn between landscape and visual effects as described below:

- Landscape effects relate to the effects of the existing development on the physical and other characteristics of the landscape and its resulting character and quality.
- Visual effects relate to the effects on views experienced by visual receptors (e.g. residents, footpath users, etc.) and on the visual amenity experienced by those people.

2.1.2 Three stages have been used that lead to the identification of potential impacts, prediction of their magnitude and the assessment of their significance and are as follows:

Project description/specification	Provides a description of the proposed development for the purpose of the assessment, identifying the main features of the proposals and establishing parameters.
Baseline Studies	Establishes the existing nature of the landscape and visual environment in the study area, including any relevant changes likely to occur independently of the development proposal. Includes information on the value attached to the different environmental resources.
Identification and description of effects	Systematically identifies and describes the effects that have occurred, including whether they are adverse or beneficial.

### 2.2 Baseline Studies

The first step in the production of this LVIA has been to establish the baseline landscape and visual conditions which are then reviewed alongside the development proposals. This forms the basis for the identification and description of the changes that have resulted in the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.

- For the landscape baseline the aim is to provide an understanding of the landscape as a resource in the area(s) that have been affected – its constituent elements, its character and the way this varies spatially, its geographic extent and history, its condition, the way in which the landscape is experienced, and the value attached to it.
- For the visual baseline, the aim is to establish the area in which the development is visible, the different groups of people who may experience views of the development, the places where they will be affected and the nature of the views and visual amenity at these points.

- The level of detail included has been gathered to assess the likely significant effects and is appropriate and proportional to the scale and type of development and the type and significance of the landscape and visual effects likely to occur.

## **2.3 Identification and Description of effects**

The effects have been based on the different components of the development and identification of the receptors that will be affected by them. These include:

- landscape receptors, including the constituent elements of the landscape, its specific aesthetic or perceptual qualities and the character of the landscape in different areas; and
- visual receptors – the people who will be affected by changes in views or visual amenity at different places.

The effects have been identified by establishing and describing the changes resulting from the different components of the development and the resulting effects on individual landscape or visual receptors.

## **2.4 Assessment and significance of effects**

Identifying and describing the effects of a project is in itself of limited value. It is important to also assess their significance and is an evidence-based process combined with professional judgement. It is important that the basis of such judgements is transparent and understandable, so that the underlying assumptions and reasoning can be understood by others.

Professional judgement has been used to assess the nature of a landscape or visual receptor's sensitivity by combining judgements about its susceptibility to change arising from the specific proposal with judgements about the value attached to the receptor. When considering the nature of effects its magnitude should be determined by combining judgements about matters such as the size and scale of the change, the extent of the area over which it occurs, whether it is reversible or not and whether it is short or long term in duration.

A three-step process has been employed to allow the identification of significant effects to be as transparent as possible with the effects being identified and described as accurately as possible as follows:

### **2.4.1 Step 1: Assessment against agreed criteria**

This has considered each effect in terms of its sensitivity with judgments about:

- the susceptibility of the receptor to the type of change arising from the specific proposal;
- the value attached to the receptor.

The sensitivity of landscape character is described within this assessment as high, medium or low.

Sensitivity	Landscape Examples
Low	<p>Typically, an undesignated landscape with some local community importance such as: parks; recreation areas; or the landscape has a value expressed in local publications. Few landscape elements remain intact and in good repair; few buildings and material are in local vernacular. Large-scale landform/land cover/development; featureless; coarse grained; open with broad views</p> <p>Frequent presence of utility, infrastructure or industrial elements; contemporary structures e.g. masts, pylons, cranes, silos and/or industrial sheds that have vertical emphasis; functional, man-made land-use patterns and engineered aspects evident</p> <p>Busy and noisy with obvious human activity and development; prominent movement.</p>
Medium	<p>Typically, a valued landscape of regional or local landscape of conservation importance such as: Special Landscape Areas; and Unregistered Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest</p> <p>Some landscape elements remain intact and in good repair; some building styles/materials are local vernacular Medium-scale landform/land cover/development; textured; semi-enclosed with middle-distance views.</p> <p>Some evidence of man-made elements, which may be partially out of scale with the landscape and may be only partially consistent with vernacular styles.</p> <p>Some noise is evident, but human activity/development is not dominant; noticeable movement</p>
High	<p>Typically, a highly valued landscape of international and/or national landscape or conservation importance such as: National Parks; Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and Registered Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest</p> <p>Most landscape elements remain intact and in good repair and most building styles and materials are local vernacular.</p> <p>Small-scale landform/land cover/development; human-scale indicators; fine grained, enclosed with narrow views; sheltered. Absence of man-made elements; traditional or historic settlements; natural features and natural forms of amenity parkland, perceived as natural "wild land" lacking in man-made features, land-use elements and detractors.</p> <p>Sense of peace, isolation or wildness; remote and empty; no evident movement</p>

**Table1: Landscape Sensitivity**

The sensitivity of a visual receptor group to a development depends on a number of factors such as the occupation of the viewer, their viewing expectations, duration of view and the angle or direction in which they would see the site. The following criteria have been used for this assessment:

- Low Sensitivity - People within industrial and commercial facilities or at their place of work (e.g. offices);
- Moderate Sensitivity - Users of urban roads and urban public rights of way which do not appear to be used frequently for recreational activities or the specific enjoyment of the landscape; recreational activities not specifically focused on the landscape (e.g. football);
- High Sensitivity – Residents (both permanent and temporary e.g. tourist); users of long distance / recreational footpaths, users of municipal parks; users of riverside walks and other public rights of way which appear to be used frequently for recreational activities or the specific enjoyment of the landscape; users of navigable watercourses; slow-paced recreational activities which derive part of their pleasure from an appreciation of setting (e.g. bowling, golf); allotments; visitors to historic features / estates where the setting is important to an appreciation and understanding of cultural value.

It is important to appreciate that it is the visual receptor (i.e. the person) that is sensitive and not a property, public right of way or road. Therefore, a large number of people may use a motorway for example, but this does not increase the sensitivity of the receptors using it. Conversely a residential property may only have one person living in it but this does not reduce the sensitivity of that one receptor. The number of receptors affected at any given

location may be a planning consideration, but it does not alter the sensitivity of the receptor group.

The magnitude of effects on landscape character is influenced by a number of factors including:

- the size and scale of the effect;
- the geographic extent of the area that will be affected;
- the duration of the effect and its reversibility.

Other factors may include: the extent to which existing landscape features are lost or altered, the introduction of new features and the resulting alteration to the physical and perceptual characteristics of the landscape. It is recognised that usually the landscape components in the immediate surroundings have a much stronger influence on the sense of landscape character than distant features whilst acknowledging the fact that more distant features can have an influence on landscape character as well. Professional judgement has been used to determine the magnitude using the following criteria listed below:

#### **No Change**

- No notable loss or alteration to existing landscape features;
- No notable introduction of new features into the landscape / townscape; and
- Negligible change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.

#### **Slight Change**

- Minor loss or alteration to existing landscape features;
- Introduction of minor new features into the landscape; and
- Minor alteration to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.

#### **Moderate Change**

- Some notable loss or alteration to existing landscape features;
- Introduction of some notable new features into the landscape; and
- Some notable change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.

#### **Substantial Change**

- A major or total loss or alteration to existing landscape features;
- Introduction of major or dominant new features into the landscape; and
- A major change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.

Effects on landscape character may be adverse or beneficial and therefore the magnitude of effects is recorded as Substantial Adverse, Moderate Adverse, Slight Adverse, Slight Beneficial, Moderate Beneficial or Substantial Beneficial and No Change.

#### **Magnitude of Impacts on Views and Visual Amenity**

Visual impacts are caused by the introduction of new elements into the views of a landscape or the removal of elements from the existing view.

Professional judgement, justified and clearly set out, has been used to determine the magnitude of impacts using the following criteria:

- **No change:** - No change or Negligible change in views;
- **Low Change:** - Some change in the view that is not prominent but visible to some visual receptors; (Beneficial or adverse)
- **Moderate Change** - Some change in the view that is clearly visible in the view and forms an important but not defining element in the view; (Beneficial or adverse).
- **High Change:** - A major change in the view that has a defining or dominating influence on the overall view. (Beneficial or adverse).

#### 2.4.2 Step 2: Combining Judgements

The next step has been to combine separate judgements on the individual criteria and aims to demonstrate:

- how susceptibility to change and value together contribute to the sensitivity of the receptor;
- how judgments about scale, extent and duration contribute to the magnitude of the effects;
- how the resulting judgments about sensitivity and magnitude are combined to inform judgments about overall significance of the effects.

The approach to combining judgments have been arrived at using an overall profile with the judgments against individual criteria arranged within a table to provide an overall profile of each identified effect. An overview of the distribution in the profile of the assessments for each criterion can then be used to make an informed judgment about the likely significance of the effect.

#### 2.4.3 Step 3: Judging the overall significance of the effects

This report has sought to distinguish between what are considered to be the significant and non-significant effects on landscape and visual amenity arising from the proposed development. The final overall judgment of the likely significance of the predicted landscape and visual effects has been summarised in a series of categories of significance reflecting combinations of sensitivity and magnitude and are appropriate to the nature, size and location of the proposed development.

The magnitude of change is then considered against the sensitivity and quality of the landscape resource, the receptor, together with the existing character or panorama/view. In formulating the significance of impact, reasoned professional judgement is required which is explained within the assessment. This is carried out both in terms of the predicted impacts on landscape character or on visual amenities. The significance thresholds are predicted as: high, moderate, low, negligible and neutral.

Weight has also been given to the significance of impact in terms of the Local/Borough, County, National or International context. For example, a view from a footpath close to a village that is in a non-designated landscape may result in a high degree of change that would give rise to an impact of locally high significance. This level of significance is obviously different from a high degree of change experienced from a footpath in a national park where the significance may be of national importance.

The criterion for weighting significance is based on the following:

- **Local/Borough Level** – These are usually areas of some landscape and visual interest and these include parishes/towns where people live and recreate. These landscapes may have local landscape designations and may include popular walks/beauty spots.
- **County/National Level** – These are usually areas of the highest importance and landscapes will be designated as World Heritage Sites, National Parks, Heritage Coasts or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The predicted magnitude of change will have a greater degree of significance within this landscape and visual environment.

In order to draw a distinction between levels of significance (beyond significant/not significant) a word scale for degrees of significance has been used as follows: Major, moderate, minor and negligible. In LVIA however, any judgement about what constitutes a significant effect is ostensibly a subjective opinion expressed as in this case by a competent

and appropriately qualified professional assessor. The level of the landscape and visual effects is determined by considering in tandem the sensitivity of the landscape or view with the magnitude of change.

The Table below has been used to demonstrate the general relationship between sensitivity and magnitude based on the specific criteria given above but is given for illustrative purposes only (i.e. it is not used rigidly to determine the level of an effect upon any given receptor). At all times, professional judgement is used to determine the overall level of effects (informed by judgements made regarding sensitivity and magnitude).

Magnitude of Effect	Sensitivity of receptor			
	High	Moderate	Low	Negligible
Substantial Adverse	Major Negative	Major to Minor Negative	Moderate Negative	Minor Negative to Neutral
Moderate Adverse	Major to Moderate Negative	Moderate Negative	Moderate to Minor Negative	Neutral
Slight Adverse	Moderate Negative	Moderate to Minor Negative	Minor Negative	Neutral
No Change	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Slight Beneficial	Minor to Moderate Positive	Minor Positive	Minor Positive	Neutral
Moderate Beneficial	Moderate Positive	Moderate Positive	Moderate to Minor Positive	Neutral
Substantial Beneficial	Major Positive	Major to Moderate Positive	Moderate to Minor Positive	Neutral

**Table 2: Magnitude of Effect and Sensitivity**

The level of effect is described as Major Negative, Moderate Negative, Minor Negative, Minor Positive, Moderate Positive or Major Positive. An effect may also be recorded as Neutral either where there is No Change to a receptor or where the change is so Negligible as to not warrant recording as a minor effect. In reporting on the significance of the identified effects attention has been paid to the scope for reducing any negative/adverse effects that are properly understood and addressed by the design proposals.

### **Effect Magnitude**

The magnitude of change relates to the degree in which the proposed development alters the fabric of the landscape character or view. This change is categorised as High, Moderate, Low, Negligible or Neutral. It is also possible for a low-high magnitude of change to occur that has a neutral effect on the landscape character or view, due to the development being compatible with the local area.

These are defined as follows:

High:	Change resulting in a high degree of deterioration or improvement to a landscape or view (beneficial or adverse)
Moderate:	Change resulting in a noticeable deterioration or improvement to a landscape or view (beneficial or adverse)
Low:	Change that would result in a low degree of deterioration or improvement in the landscape or view (beneficial or adverse).
Negligible:	Change resulting in perceptible degree of deterioration or improvement in the landscape or view (beneficial or adverse)
Neutral:	It is also possible for a low-high magnitude of change to occur that has a neutral effect on the landscape character or view, due to the development being compatible with the local area.

**Table: 3 Magnitude of Change**

### Significance Threshold

The magnitude of change is then considered against the sensitivity and quality of the landscape resource, the receptor, together with the existing character or panorama/view. In formulating the significance of effect, reasoned professional judgement is required which is explained within the assessment. This is carried out both in terms of the predicted effects on landscape character or on visual amenities. The significance thresholds are effects as: high, moderate, low, negligible and neutral.

Weight must also be given to the significance of impact in terms of the Local/Borough, County, National or International context. For example, a view from a footpath close to a village that is in a non-designated landscape may result in a high degree of change that would give rise to an impact of locally high significance. This level of significance is obviously different from a high degree of change experienced from a footpath in a national park where the significance may be of national importance.

These are defined as follows:

High:	A magnitude of change that materially affects a landscape or views that has little or no scope to accommodate change.
Moderate:	A magnitude of change that materially affects a landscape or view that may have the ability to accommodate change.
Low:	A magnitude of change that materially affects a landscape or views that has the ability to accommodate change.
Negligible:	A magnitude of change that has little effect on a landscape or views that has the ability to accommodate change.
Neutral:	It is also possible for a magnitude of change to occur that results in an impact of neutral significance due to the change being compatible with the character and visual amenities of the local area.

**Table 4: Significance of Impact**

## SECTION 3: THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

### 3.1 Project Description

The application (22/02645/OUT) is an *Outline application for the development of 50 dwellings with all matters reserved except access. Land South Of Larches Ashgrove Road Sevenoaks Kent.*



**Image 3: Existing site plan as submitted by applicant (from Sevenoaks District Council website)**







**Image 6: Proposed street scene as submitted by applicant (from Sevenoaks District Council website)**

### 3.2 Vehicle Movement on Site

It is proposed by the applicant that any vehicles would enter the site from Ashgrove Road.

### 3.3 Lighting

No street lighting currently exists within the site.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment undertaken by LDA Design as part of the applicant's submission, includes the following on lighting proposals:

Page 12 : *'Lighting will be to the minimum level necessary to provide the required level of illumination ..... In pedestrians or cycleway areas lights will be low-level cowled lighting design .... Lighting will be zoned to provide higher lighting levels along main routes (albeit whilst aiming for minimum standards of illumination)...*

Para 2.7.2:

*'Potential Night-time Effects and Lighting...*

*...Key lighting design measures will include:*

- *Lighting will be to the minimum level necessary to provide the required level of illumination.*
- *LED lights will be used to that enable increased control, improve colour definition, and save on energy.*
- *Luminaires will be designed and oriented to restrict light directionality only to the areas necessary. This will include double asymmetrical luminaires and full horizontal cut-off designs to prevent light spill.*
- *In pedestrian or cycleway areas lights will be low-level cowled lighting design.*
- *Lighting will be zoned to provide higher lighting levels along main routes (albeit whilst aiming for minimum standards of illumination).*
- *If security lights are to be provided on buildings these will be of a full horizontal cut-off design with appropriate accessories to prevent light spill. They will also be fitted with motion sensors with timers set to the minimum value.'*

On p.52, the report suggests that:

*'The Proposed Development would increase, marginally, the amount of ambient illumination within the landscape, which would potentially affect the dark night skies of the AONB. However, as set out in Section 2.7. Assumptions and Limitations, the Site is located in close proximity to the existing settlement of Sevenoaks and presently is influenced by the ambient illumination from existing and adjacent residential properties within the Site's immediate context. It is anticipated that any additional lighting produced and subsequently experienced by potential receptors would not be dissimilar to the amount of lighting presently experienced within the Site's general vicinity and the wider context of Sevenoaks.'*

*The Proposed Development will ensure – in order to avoid and mitigate any adverse effects on the 'special qualities' of the AONB – that the following measures are implemented:*

- *Seek to retain Ashgrove Road and Oak Lane as dark and well-vegetated routes;*
- *Minimise light spill from new development; and*
- *Retain and enhance existing vegetation and create new habitats including for birds.*

*It is judged that whilst the Proposed Development would not fundamentally disrupt the tranquillity or remoteness of the AONB, the susceptibility would be Medium. Combining value and susceptibility, this special quality would be of a **High – Medium sensitivity**. Effects on this special quality would be of a Small-scale.'*

We disagree that the effect on tranquillity and remoteness in relation to lighting, would be of a 'small-scale'; the placement of 50 dwellings, with hard standing, tarmacked roads and reflective surfacing would significantly alter lighting levels, especially considering the existing landscape. The application site is not within the urban confines of Sevenoaks, but in a rural area – currently grassland - which is extremely sensitive to changes in light levels.

There appears to be no clear lighting strategy within the submission and the report states that:

*'It is anticipated that a detailed lighting strategy will be prepared for the Proposed Development, secured through relevant planning conditions.'*

However, since the applicant's report states that the tranquillity in relation to the lighting is of High – Medium sensitivity, we argue that a lighting strategy and a detailed lighting diagram and report be submitted by the applicant before the application is considered, in order to properly assess the affect on the Study Area and the dark skies of the AONB.

### **3.4 Appearance**

The applicant proposes to build 50 dwellings at a higher density than those in the immediate surrounding area. Therefore the massing and development density jars within the landscape setting, urbanising this otherwise rural landscape. If the applicant follows traditional architectural forms (following the guidance as set out in the *Kent Downs AONB Design Guide*), the density of the dwellings would still be incongruous within the landscape setting. The applicant proposes to retain as much of the surrounding vegetation (semi-mature native trees) as possible, in order to maintain the screening which these afford, although, owing to open views of the site from other private and public places, and its elevated location, such screening is limited. Furthermore, the Green Belt seeks to maintain openness within the rural setting and the density of the housing development proposed would run counter to this openness and lead to encroachment and urban sprawl onto the countryside.

Within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment submitted by the applicant, the authors admit that:

*'The Proposed Development would also potentially affect the presence of bird that are audible from within and adjacent to the Site as a result of vegetation loss within the Site.'*

## SECTION 4: ASSESSEMENT OF LANDSCAPE CONDITION

### 4.1 The Study Area

The geographical study area for this assessment has been confined to a 1.0 km radius around the site. Beyond this distance the magnitude of effects arising from the proposal is either negligible or not possible to be perceived.

A Landscape Character Assessment has been carried out within the study area and is the key tool to understanding the landscape and has been used to set the landscape baseline. This has been carried out by a mix of desk study and field work to identify and record the character of the landscape and the elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual factors which contribute to it. This has been used to identify and describe:

- the elements that make up the landscape in the study area, including:
  - physical influences – geology, soils, landform, drainage and water bodies;
  - land cover, including different types of vegetation and patterns and types of tree cover;
  - the influence of human activity, including land use and management, the character of settlements and buildings and pattern and type of fields and enclosures;
- the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape – such as its scale, complexity, openness, tranquillity or wildness;
- the overall character of the landscape in the study area, including any distinctive Landscape Character Types or areas that can be identified and the particular combinations of elements and aesthetic and perceptual aspects that make each distinctive, usually by identification as key aspects of the landscape.

Generally, a landscape character will have least capacity to accept change if the change proposed involves elements that do not already exist or if the landscape character is particularly sensitive to change. The character of a site might be sensitive to change because it is very visible in the landscape, so an exposed landscape of scenic beauty would probably be spoiled by most forms of development; but if the character of the site and its surrounds is considered to be poor, such a change may be beneficial rather than adverse. A site is also more likely to be sensitive to change if it is a mature landscape with long-established features or historical connotations; in which case a development upon it might remove those connotations without the possibility of them being reinstated in the short term.

As part of the baseline description the value of the potentially affected landscape has been established. This means the relative value that is attached to a landscape by society, bearing in mind that a landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a variety of reasons.

A range of factors has been used to help in the identification of valued landscapes and includes:

- Landscape quality (condition) – measures of the physical state of the landscape. This may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
- Scenic quality: used to describe landscape that appeal primarily to the visual sense;
- Rarity: The presence of area elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a Landscape Character Type;
- Representativeness: Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples;

- Conservation interests: The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest;
- Recreational value: Evidence that a landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important;
- Perceptual aspects: A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notability, wildness and or tranquillity;
- Associations: some landscapes are associated with literature and particular people, such as artists, writers or events in history that contribute to perceptions of natural beauty of the area.

For the purpose of this report we have considered the following to assist in ascribing value:

- whether the areas fall within recognised national designations such as National Park or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- local planning documents which may show the extent of and policies for local landscape designations;
- Information on the status of individual or groups of features such as Conservation Area, listed buildings, Tree Preservation Orders, cultural heritage such as historic landscapes;
- Art and literature, including information that may indicate the value attached to the identity of a particular area;
- material on landscapes of local or community interest, such as local green spaces, village greens or allotments.

The value of each landscape character zone is categorised as High, Moderate, and Low as follows:

High:	Nationally designated landscapes, which have a high scenic quality, a strong sense of place, are generally un-spoilt and have a highly distinctive character, and often contain areas or features of ecological or cultural significance. They may also include 'intact' examples of rare landscape types, e.g. heath land, or representative examples of valued landscapes, e.g. chalk scenery.
Medium:	Locally designated landscapes, which have attractive qualities and where character and sense of place are still strong but which are not 'special' or distinctive to the same degree as those above. The landscape generally has a positive character but there may be intrusive influences or signs of neglect or decline in landscape condition which compromise its quality.
Low:	Landscapes which are further along the scale of decline and where landscape structure is substantially weakened and landscape quality and sense of place are significantly compromised by inappropriate development, poor land management or other intrusive influences, e.g. built development, airfields, pylons etc.

Table 5: Landscape Value

To determine the sensitivity and landscape capacity of the site, it is necessary to assess the character of the area in which the site lies, and the contribution the site makes to that character; and to consider whether the development proposed upon it would so change the site that it would significantly alter the character of the area as a whole.

To make such a judgment it is necessary to be informed by the following:

- the site's position and orientation in the landscape;
- the character of the area;
- the site's physical condition and inherent character;
- the site's visibility in the landscape; and
- the form of development proposed.

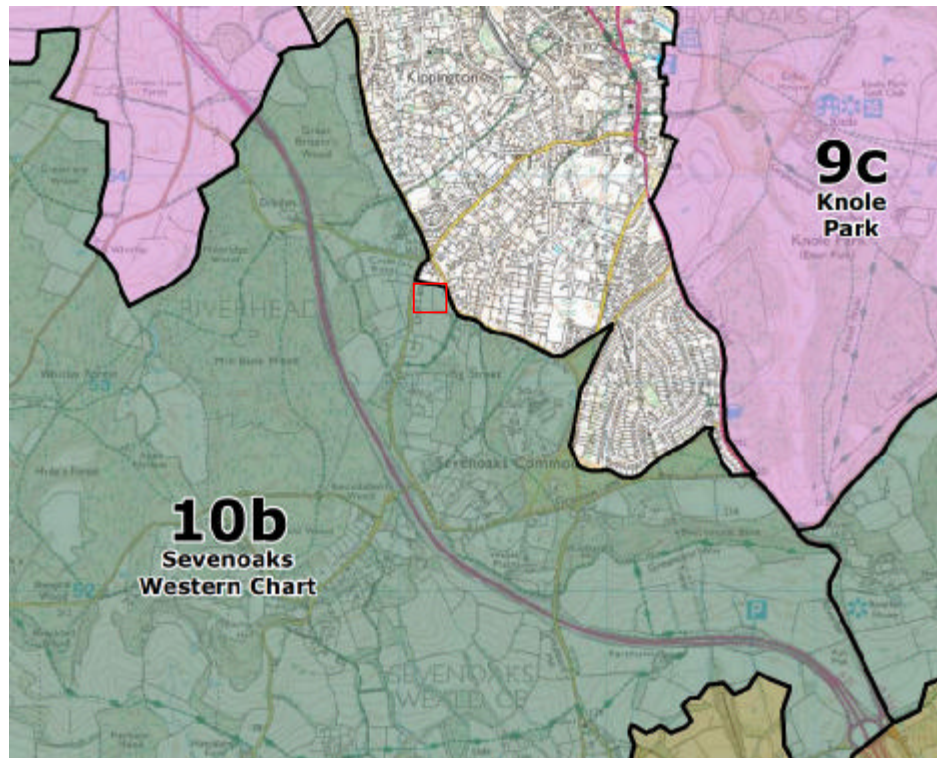
## 4.2 Landscape Baseline

The Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment was completed by LUC in 2017. It is intended "to provide context for policies and proposals within the emerging Local Plan, inform the determination of planning applications, and inform the management of future change.'

The site is found within Character Area *10b Sevenoaks Western Chart*. The Key Characteristics are:

- Undulating woodland and agricultural landscape, steeply climbing to central hills reaching over 200m AOD.
- Extensive wooded commons of dense, mixed broadleaf, acid woodland with irregular pasture clearings and heath.
- Historic land uses such as wood pasture, coppice used for charcoal burning.
- Rural settlement set around greens or in a linear pattern fringing commons.
- Large mansion houses set in woodland on the ridge, for example West Heath School.
- Generally enclosed landscape with occasional glimpsed views over the Low Weald from the steep south facing scarp.





**Image 6: Extract from LUC Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment. The site location is shown in red, within 10b Sevenoaks Western Charts character area.**

Key sensitivities / valued attributes are described as '*characteristics which are particularly valued for their contribution to character and for the ecosystem services they provide*'.

- Large areas of common land and remnant wood pasture that provide a strong sense of place and historic time depth.
- The mosaic of heath, unimproved pasture and woodland that provides a distinct sense of place and important habitats.
- Extensive mature woodlands and coppice that provide a strong sense of containment and sense of place as well as tranquillity and recreational opportunities.
- Historic *assarts* representing fields converted from woodland from the Medieval period.
- Rural settlement character comprising villages set around greens or scattered in a linear form along the edge of commons which reflect an historic form of settlement.
- Large mansions amongst the charts and associated gardens which provide a sense of history.
- Narrow wooded lanes that cross over the Greensand Ridge.
- The long distance views from clearings on the southern scarp slope that provide a strong sense of elevation and contribute to scenic quality.

The stated local objectives to conserve and enhance landscape character are:

- Conserve the extent and characteristic species of woodland with an emphasis on mixed
- broadleaf acid woodland.
- Reinforce the strong pattern of hedgerows, shaws, and conserve isolated field and hedgerow oak trees.
- Conserve the enclosed, narrow lanes and plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees along roads.
- Maintain pastoral uses amongst woodland and restore habitats such as wood pasture and heathland.
- Conserve the tranquillity and rural character of the landscape.

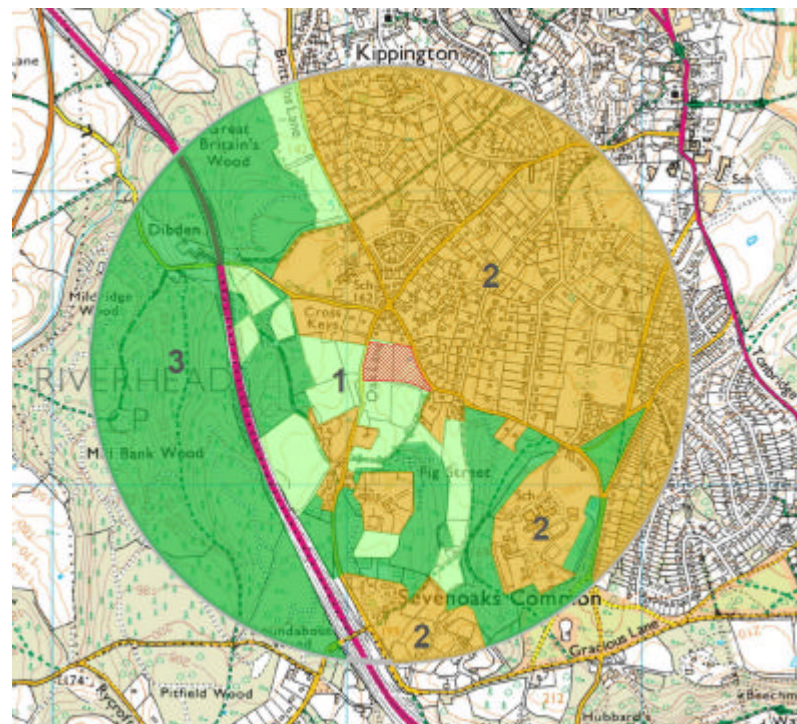
- Maintain the scale and pattern of linear settlement around commons, isolated farmsteads and hamlets – ensure any new development respects this historic pattern.
- Ensure any new development respects the existing rural setting of small settlements, conserving distinctive greens and commons and avoid ridgeline development.
- Seek the use of sympathetic local building materials such as brick, ragstone and tile hanging.
- Conserve dramatic views south and seek to encourage more viewing opportunities.

#### 4.3 Locally based Landscape Character Assessment

The *Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment* is by necessity of a broad scale and in order to refine this, we have carried out a locally based Landscape Character Assessment to identify the distinct landscapes within the study area which is defined by a 1-kilometre radius from the development site.

Our assessment largely agrees with the *Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment* findings and has identified three distinct landscape zones:

- 1 Agriculture / Equestrian use
- 2 Rural Settlement / Built Form
- 3 Woodland (some ancient)



**Figure 6: Locally based Landscape Character Assessment as defined by Petrow Harley Landscape Architects**



#### 4.3.1 Landscape Character Zone 1: Agriculture / Equestrian

The Agriculture / Equestrian area is made up of small to medium sized fields and paddocks enclosed by open timber and post fencing, mature trees and hedgerows of varying condition. Much of it is in active use, or rough grassland. The application site lies within this zone.



*Photo 20: View south west from Bridleway SR217, looking over equestrian land*

The zone is characterised by the following features:

- Wide, open skylines;
- Small to medium sized fields, bounded by rural timber rail and post fencing, hedgerows and mature trees in varying condition;
- Some accessibility via footpaths and bridleways;
- Located within an Archaeological Notification Area, the Metropolitan Green Belt and AONB.

The zone is rated as having overall **High Value and High Landscape Sensitivity**

#### 4.3.2 Landscape Character Zone 2: Rural Settlement/Built Form

The Rural Settlement area is largely composed of mixed age residential properties with mainly rural boundary treatments. The roads leading to them are tarmacked and well maintained. There are several listed buildings within this zone. The application site lies close to this zone.



***Photo 21: View north along Ashgrove Road, showing modern, large detached housing.***

The zone is characterised by the following features:

- Both rural (native hedging and more open) and suburban (ornamental planting and closed) boundary treatments;
- Properties comprising single and two-storey dwellings, mixed ages, but rarely older than 1930s (with exception of the listed cottages at Cross Keys), varying in style. Properties sometimes displaying vernacular architecture with use of bricks, tiled roof, and timber beams;
- Most properties clearly visible from well maintained, tarmacked roads;
- Located within an Archaeological Notification Area;
- Attractive, tranquil, and rural setting.

The zone is rated as having overall **Medium Value and Medium Landscape Sensitivity**.

#### **4.3.3 Landscape Character Zone 3: Woodland**

As indicated in the Historical Context section of this report, the area has been associated with traditional coppicing.

- Contains a network of ancient replanted, ancient natural and semi natural woodland;
- A managed landscape, with traditional coppicing still undertaken;
- Short distance views, but some longer views where the treeline opens;
- Located within an Archaeological Notification Area, the Metropolitan Green Belt and AONB.



***Photo 22: Ancient woodland located adjacent to Byway SU36.***



*Photo 23: Ancient woodland located adjacent to Byway SU36.*



*Photo 24: Traditional coppicing along Bridleway SR217*

The zone is rated as having overall **High Value and High Landscape Sensitivity**.

#### **4.4 Publicly Accessible Places and Public Rights of Way**

The proposed development makes little contribution to the wider AONB since it visually reasonably well contained. However, it has significant local affects. There are several open views to the site from Byway SU36.

#### **4.5 Prediction and description of Landscape Effects**

Having established the landscape baseline this has been combined with the proposed changes (development) to identify and describe the landscape effects. The first stage has been to identify the components of the landscape that are likely to be affected and are referred to as landscape receptors and include overall character, key characteristics, individual elements or features and specific aesthetics or perceptual aspects.

Judgements have been combined against individual criteria and arranged in a table to provide an overall profile of each identified effect. An overview has then been taken of the distribution of judgments for each criterion to make an informed professional assessment of the overall significance of each effect.

#### **4.6 Use of site as development land**

The predicted landscape effects are considered to be as follows:

##### **4.6.1 Description: Landscape Character Zone 1: Agriculture/Equestrian.**

The development site lies within this local character area as defined by Petrow Harley.

It is considered that the proposed development would radically and irreversibly alter the landscape character, from grassland/ agricultural use to suburban housing. Being located within the AONB and Green Belt, the development would have a **Substantial Adverse Effect**. It is argued that no landscaping proposals submitted by the applicant could reduce the effect since development within this location of the AONB or any part of Parcel 40 of the Green Belt Assessment is highly inappropriate and contrary to local plan policy.

A summary of the Landscape Effects is listed in the table below:

<b>Potential receptor</b>	<b>Spatial extent</b> Local, regional or national	<b>Duration</b> Permanent, long-term or short-term	<b>Nature</b> Direct, indirect, secondary or cumulative	<b>Significance</b> Substantial, moderate, low or neutral (beneficial or adverse)	<b>Notes</b>
1 Agriculture/Equestrian	Local	Permanent	Direct	Substantial Adverse	The proposed Development Site is located within this zone. The zone provides an important rural / pastoral backdrop to views from other zones and is a defining feature in the landscape, creating an important sense of openness, reminiscent of the area's commons. The development proposal is incongruous with the zone, would create a fragmented, closed and urbanised landscape and is therefore highly inappropriate within the landscape setting.
2 Rural Settlement/Built Form	Local	Permanent	Direct	Substantial Adverse	The site is adjacent to this zone and clearly visible from it. There are open views from this zone to the development, throughout the year. The development proposals would distinctly urbanise views from this zone.
3 Woodland	Local	Permanent	Direct	Substantial Adverse	The site is adjacent to this zone and clearly visible from it. There are open views from this zone to the development, throughout the year. The development proposals would distinctly urbanise views from this zone.

**Table 6: Summary of landscape effects**

## SECTION 5: ASSESSEMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS

### 5.1 Visual Baseline

#### 5.1.1 Visual Appraisal

A visual appraisal has been undertaken to assist in the understanding of how the Development Site affect views available to people and their visual amenity. A site visit was undertaken in October 2022 by Robert Petrow (CMLI) and Helen John (CMLI). Site visits were carried out when deciduous planting was still partly in-leaf; the screening afforded by them was still effective; it is therefore an “autumn” assessment. The camera used was a Nikon D3500.

The appraisal has been carried out by reference to Ordnance Survey mapping data and then site visits. This has allowed a ‘Zone of Visual Influence’ to be established (ZVI) which is the study area for assessing visual effects. This establishes the area in which the development may be visible, the different groups of people who may experience views, the viewpoints where they will be affected and the nature of views at those points.

A word scale has been used to describe the visual presence the application site within the view as follows:

- **Substantial:** – where the site forms a dominant element in the view.
- **Moderate:** – where the site forms an important part in the view.
- **Slight:** – where the site forms a limited or partial element in the view.

An assessment has then been made whether the development site has an adverse, beneficial or neutral effect upon the view.

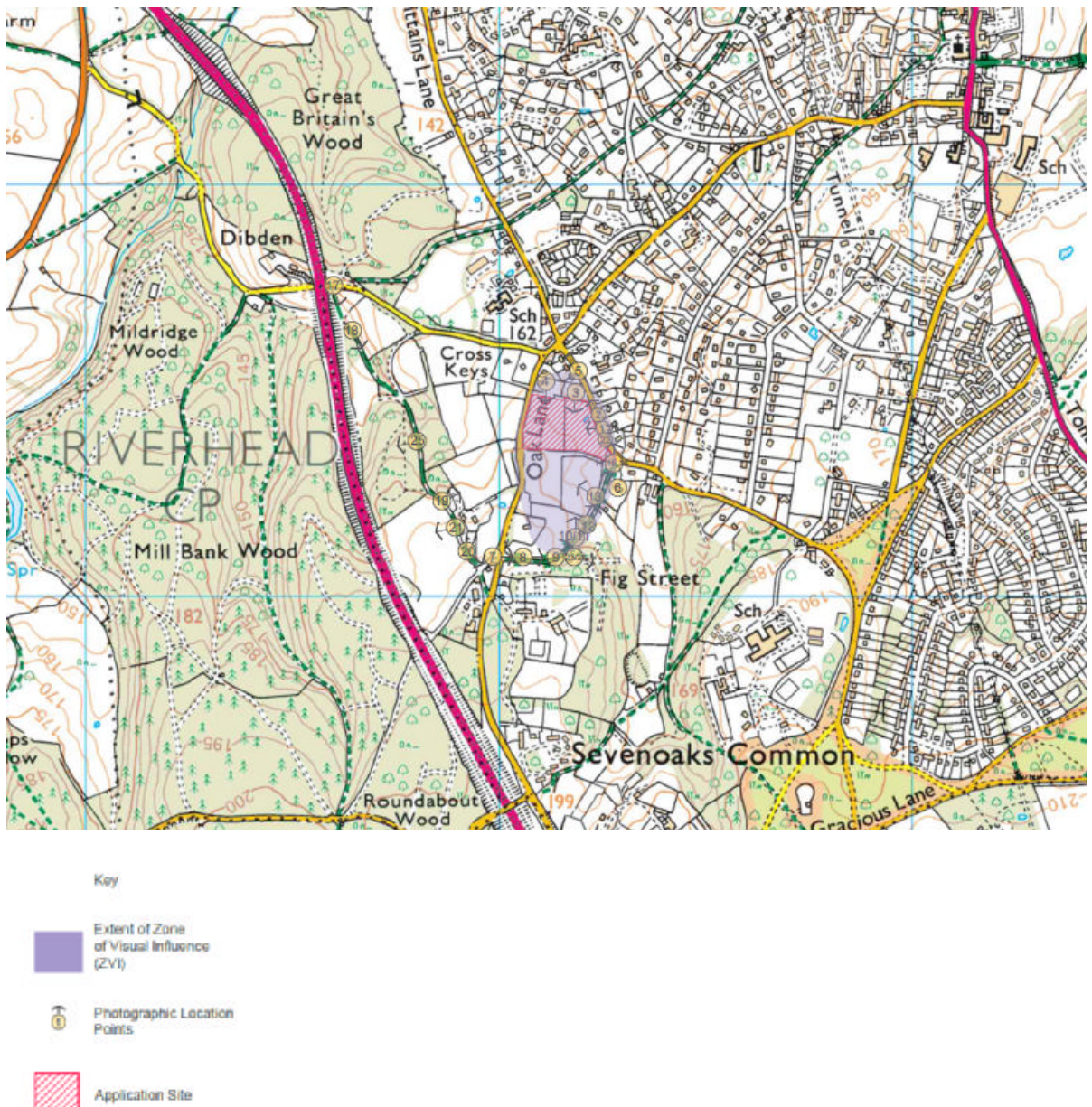
#### 5.1.2 Visual Envelope

The extent of the visual envelope of the site is illustrated on Figure 6 in which the shading shows all areas (private land or buildings, or publicly accessible places), from which the site is visible.

The visual appraisal has concentrated on assessing the degree to which the site can be seen from publicly accessible places, public rights of way and private residences, taking into account distances from the site, topography and the screening and/or filtering effect of buildings and vegetation. The places where views of the site are possible – i.e. visual receptors – are categorised into the following groups:

- Public highways and transport links;
- Public rights of way;
- Public places or visitor sites;
- Residential properties; and
- Work Places.





**Figure 7: Zone of Visual Influence**

## 5.2 Visual effects

The baseline study has shown that views from all sides into the site are mostly contained by mixed hedgerow, and mature trees/ scrub.

### 5.2.1 Public Highways and Transport

#### *Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View*

There are filtered views into the site from the adjacent Ashgrove Road. Should the development be carried out, there are likely to be numerous open views into the site, especially where banks, trees and hedgerows are proposed to be removed. There may also be open and filtered views to the development from Oak Lane.

The sensitivity of visual receptors are considered to be **medium**.

#### *Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect*

It is considered in the context of the AONB and the Green Belt, that the visual effect of the proposals is **Substantial Adverse**.

#### **5.2.2 Public Rights of Way**

##### *Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View*

There are currently, with existing vegetation, filtered and open views into the site from Byway SU36. If the development is carried out, there will likely be both filtered and open views to most of the housing estate, which will have an urbanising effect on the landscape character, radically altering it from its current rural character.

The sensitivity of these visual receptors are considered to be **high**.

##### *Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect*

It is considered in the context of the AONB and the Green Belt, that the visual effect of the proposals is **Substantial Adverse**.

#### **5.2.3 Other public places, visitor sites or workplaces:**

##### *Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View*

There are no known workplaces near the site.

##### *Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect*

There are no known views into the site from workplaces.

#### **5.2.4 Existing Residential Dwellings**

##### *Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View*

There are substantial open views of the site from nearby dwellings, many of which overlook the AONB and currently enjoy a rural, pastoral perspective. The dwellings which will be substantially affected and have open views to the site all year round, include Woodside (off Byway SU36), Larches (adjacent to the site's western boundary), Winfield and Cranbourne (adjacent to the site's northern boundary). The Pines and Fig Street House and other properties along Ashgrove Road and Oak Lane may have filtered views of the site during winter months.

The sensitivity of these visual receptors are considered to be **high**.

##### *Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect*

It is considered in the context of the AONB and the Green Belt, that the visual effect of the proposals is **Substantial Adverse**.

The table below shows a summary of visual effects

The visual impact upon the existing receptors is summarised within the table below with a word scale to describe the visual effect as follows:	<b>Duration</b> Permanent, long-term or short-term	<b>Nature</b> Direct, indirect, secondary or cumulative	<b>Significance</b> Substantial, moderate, slight or neutral (beneficial or adverse)	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Visual receptor</b>				
<b>Public Highways and Transport (public views)</b>				
Ashgrove Road Oak Lane	Long	Direct	Substantial Adverse	Views are filtered to open during winter months from these roads as they pass the site, especially where hedgerows and mature trees are to be felled and cleared.
<b>Public rights of way (public views)</b>				
SU36	Long	Direct	Substantial Adverse	It is likely that the full extent of the development will be visible at times from the Byway, through both open and filtered views at all times of the year.
<b>Public places or visitor sites, work places</b>				
None	-	-	-	There are no public places, visitor sites or work places visible from the site.
<b>Residential properties (private views)</b>				
Woodside, Larches, Winfield, Cranbourne, The Pines, Fig Street House and other properties along Ashgrove Road and Oak Lane.	Long	Direct	Substantial Adverse	Woodside (off Byway SU36), Larches (adjacent to the site's western boundary), Winfield and Cranbourne (adjacent to the site's northern boundary) and substantial views of the site throughout the year. The Pines and Fig Street House and other properties along Ashgrove Road and Oak Lane may have filtered views of the site during winter months.

**Table 7: Summary of visual effects**



## SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This report has set out the Planning Policy Context that has been applied to the Development Site and objectively considered the landscape character of the site, the surrounding areas including public rights of way and dwellings and its visual relationship to these. This has allowed the extent of any effects from the development to be assessed and quantified.
- 6.2 The site lies within the **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Metropolitan Green Belt and an Archaeological Notification Area** as defined in the local plan. The site is within Parcel 40 of the recent Green Belt Assessment undertaken by Sevenoaks District Council in 2017. Purposes of the Assessment are:
1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
  2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging
  3. Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
  4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

The GBA describes Parcel 40 as scoring **highly** on Purpose 1 and Purpose 3 as:

- *The parcel is at the edge of a large built-up area of Sevenoaks.*
  - *The parcel is connected to the large built-up area of Sevenoaks. The large built-up area is predominantly bounded by features lacking in durability or permanence, consisting of Broads and the backs of houses. The parcel is an important barrier to sprawl.*
  - *Overall, the parcel has a predominantly rural character.*
- 6.3 The Development Site is located within the *Charts* character area. Our own local character assessment defines the site as being within Landscape Character Zone 1: Agriculture/Equestrian. Our assessment supports the recent Green Belt Assessment undertaken by Sevenoaks District Council. Owing to the site's particular placement next to an existing settlement area, any development of the site would significantly reduce Parcel 40's overall capacity to provide a barrier to urban sprawl. The development site in its existing form, provides an important rural / pastoral backdrop to views from other zones and is a defining feature in the landscape, creating an important sense of openness, reminiscent of the area's commons. The development proposals would create a fragmented, closed and urbanised landscape and is therefore highly inappropriate within the landscape setting.
- 6.4 It is judged that the landscape effects, owing to the site's location within the AONB are **Substantial Adverse**; whilst the applicant argues that: *"there are a range of measures that can be deployed to avoid or mitigate adverse effects on natural beauty indicators and special qualities..."* this assertion was evidently not supported by the Kent Downs AONB unit who *"were not supportive of a development in this location"*. The development would also have a **Substantial Adverse** effect locally, on the area just outside the AONB creating an irreversible and adverse change in the local landscape.
- 6.5 With regards to the Archaeological Notification Area, we were unable to find documentation within the planning submission and, if there has been no competent archaeological assessment undertaken of the site, this should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.
- 6.6 We agree with Sevenoaks District Council's Green Belt Assessment and the opinion of the Kent Downs AONB unit, that development within this parcel of land is not appropriate. Any development within the site and the wider Parcel 40 also contradicts the local plan.
- 6.7 We conclude that development of this Green Belt site for housing within the Kent Downs AONB is highly inappropriate and would have a **Substantial Adverse** effect on both the landscape character, which is rural *Agricultural/ Equestrian* and would critically undermine the capacity of Parcel 40 to prevent urban sprawl, one of the fundamental purposes of the Green Belt.

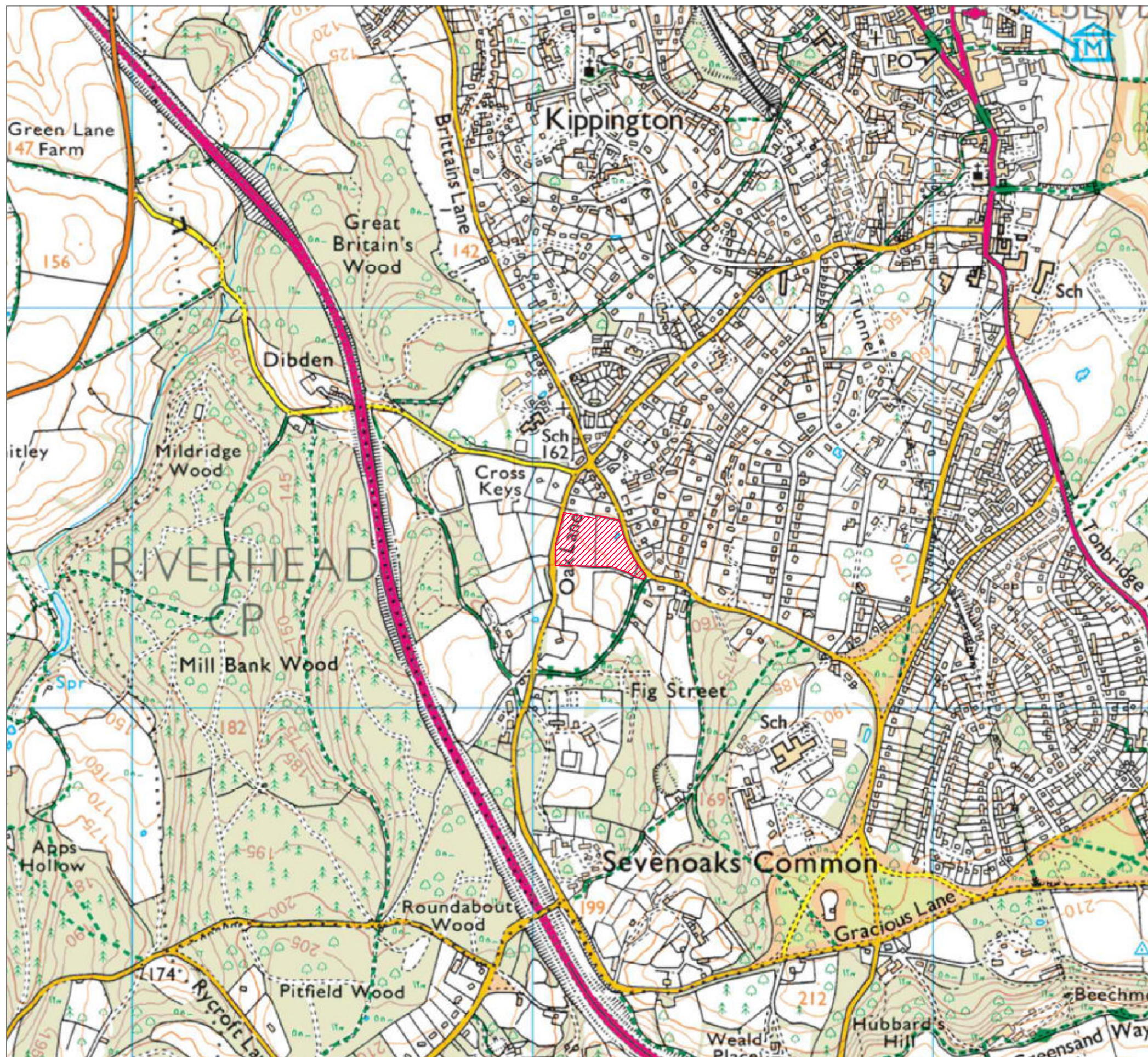
## Appendix A: Drawings

Site Location

Landscape Character

Zone of Visual Influence and Photographic Location Points

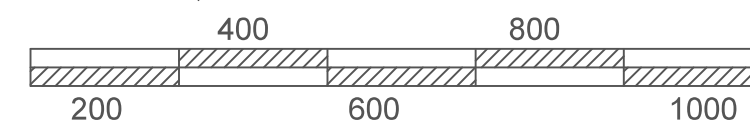
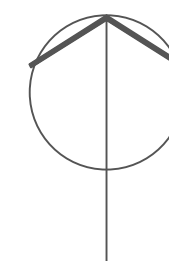




Key



Site Location



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tel: 020 8949 0803 email: mail@petrow-harley.com

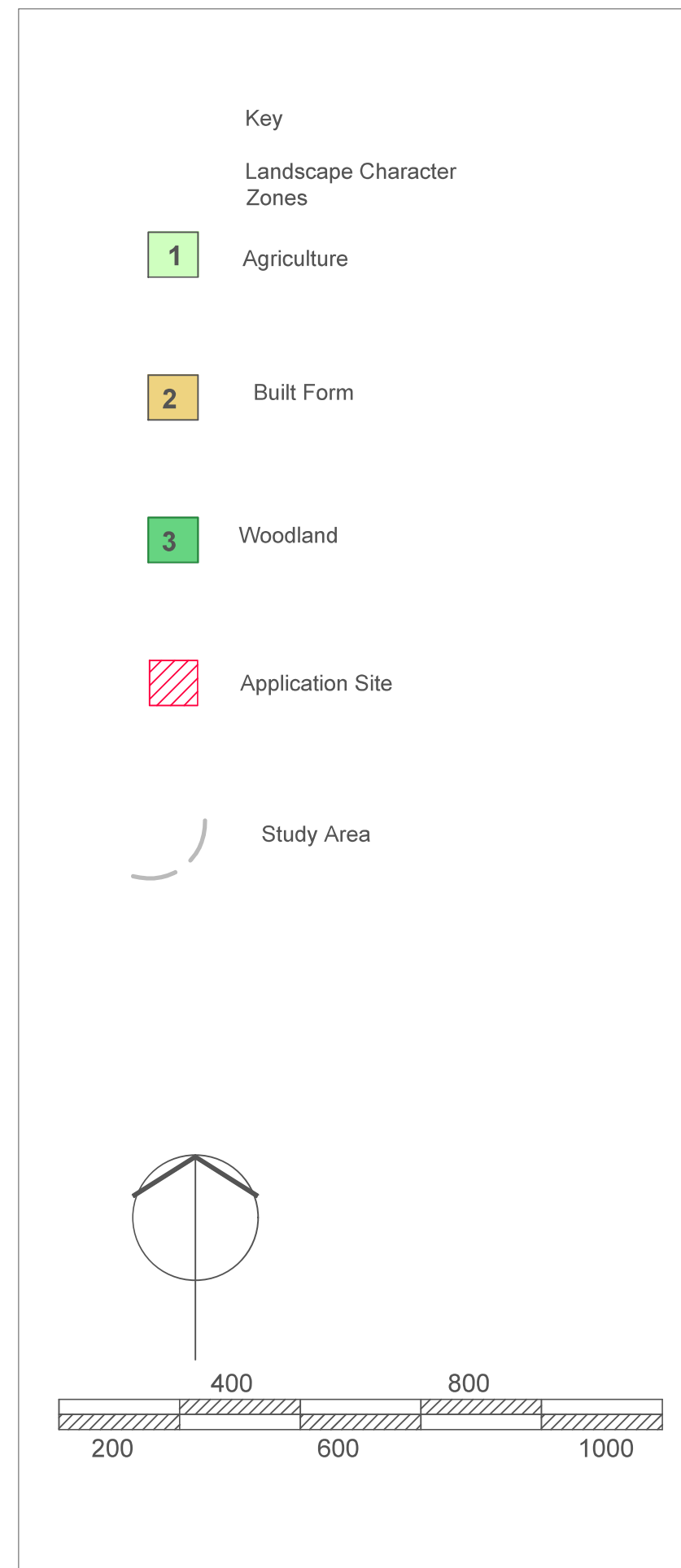
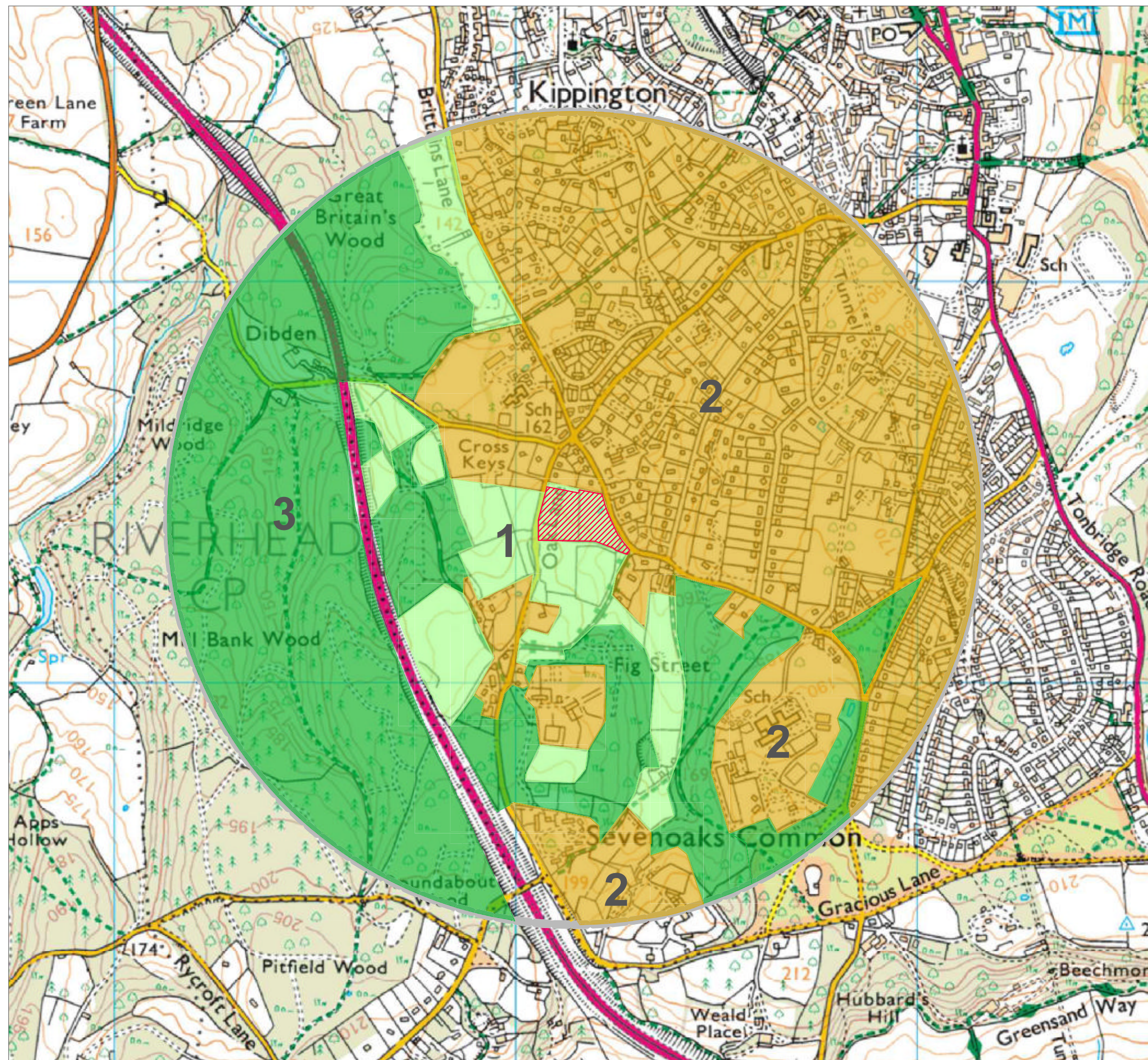
**PROJECT:**  
Land west of Ashgrove Road,  
Sevenoaks, Kent

**SCALE:** 1:10,000 @ A3

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**Figure 8**  
**Site Location**







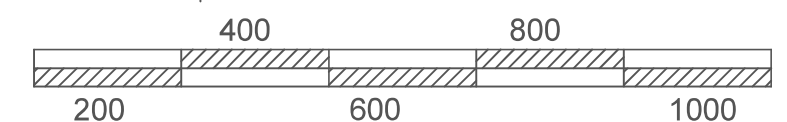
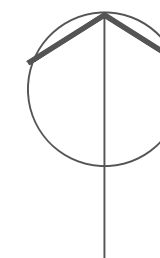


Key

Extent of Zone  
of Visual Influence  
(ZVI)

Photographic Location  
Points

Application Site



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**PROJECT:**  
Land west of Ashgrove Road,  
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**SCALE:** 1:10,000 @ A3

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**Figure 10**  
**ZVI and Photo locations**