

# Preliminary Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Land south of Halstead Road, Eight Ash Green

On behalf of Bloor Homes

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Terms of Reference

- 1.1. Pegasus Group have been instructed by Bloor Homes to undertake a preliminary appraisal of landscape and visual matters, in relation to land to the south of Halstead Road, Eight Ash Green, Colchester.
- 1.2. This report comprises a preliminary landscape and visual appraisal (PLVA), which sets out an initial review of considerations pertaining to landscape and visual matters. The appraisal process determines the site's various landscape and visual constraints and opportunities and its local landscape context in relation to the potential for development.
- 1.3. The PLVA considers existing landscape and visual receptors in the study area, including physical landscape resources; landscape character; and, views / visual amenity experienced by residents, recreational users (including visitors and tourists) and road users.
- 1.4. Having determined the various constraints and opportunities, the PLVA proceeds to consider how these might serve to influence the development potential of the wider site area, how the design approach to a masterplan for the site might be informed, and the implications of the constraints and opportunities upon an inherent landscape strategy as part of that masterplan.
- 1.5. The potential for development within the wider site area (hereby referred to as 'the site') is then refined in respect of an emerging masterplan, focusing built form within parts which are considered to have greater capacity and omitting areas which are considered less suitable for development in respect of landscape and visual matters, consequently demonstrating the adoption of a 'landscape led approach'.

## The Site and the Development Proposals

- 1.6. The site comprises approximately 16 hectares (ha) of agricultural land in Eight Ash Green, formed of four field parcels: one medium sized irregularly shaped arable field bound by hedgerows with trees and tree belts and three smaller more regular arable parcels. The site in broad terms is bound by existing residential development to the north and east and by agricultural land with scattered residential clusters to the west and south.
- 1.7. Beyond the site's more immediate context lies a further settlement cluster of Eight Ash Green to the east (along Spring Lane and Halstead Road) together with adjoining common land at Fordham Heath, the hamlet of Gallows Green to the north-west, and Aldham village to the west. The River Colne and the valley along which it flows lies approximately 1km to the north. The A12 dual carriageway separates this landscape from Copford village and the wider settled area of Colchester to the east / south-east; accessed from Eight Ash Green via Halstead Road and the A12's Junction 27 roundabout.
- 1.8. This PLVA considers residential development on the site, specifically the potential extents and distribution of residential built form, together with an appropriate landscape framework, which in combination reflect any identified constraints and opportunities within the site and its local context (refer to **Appendix A, Development Framework Plan**). Additional baseline information is set out in later sections of this PLVA.

## 2. APPROACH

### Overview

- 2.1. The approach and methodology used for this PLVA has been developed using best practice guidance, as set out in the following documents:
- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (April 2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition;
  - Natural England (October 2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment;
  - Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note O6/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals; and
  - Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note O2/21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations.
- 2.2. Additional sources of data and information have also been used, such as published character assessments, aerial imagery, and Ordnance Survey (OS) base mapping. These are referenced in the relevant sections of the baseline information.

### Level of Assessment

- 2.3. Principles and good practice for undertaking landscape and visual impact assessment are set out in the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of Environmental Management (IEMA) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (2013).
- 2.4. The third edition of the Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) acknowledges that landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) can be carried out either as a standalone assessment or as part of a broader EIA. The GLVIA3 notes that the overall principles and core steps in the process are the same but that there are specific procedures in EIA with which an LVIA must comply.
- 2.1. This report has been prepared as a 'preliminary' landscape and visual appraisal, whereby judgements on landscape and visual matters are drawn at a high level, with the process and resultant outcomes used to inform the design development of an indicative masterplan for the site.
- 2.2. While this report does not constitute an assessment of the impacts upon the landscape and visual resources, it nevertheless follows and applies the principles defined within GLVIA3, notably the study's scope, processes, baseline review, identification of potential receptors, and presentation of findings.
- 2.3. Landscape features and elements provide the physical environment for flora and fauna and the associated importance of biodiversity assets. This PLVA does not consider the value, susceptibility or importance on ecology and biodiversity, nor does it consider impacts from an ecological stance.

- 2.4. Heritage assets such as Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas all contribute to the overall present-day landscape character, context and setting of an area. These aspects have been given consideration in the PLVA in terms of physical landscape resources (for example trees and hedgerows) and landscape character. However, this PLVA does not address the historic significance, importance or potential impacts on heritage assets and designations; these assets are assessed in the context of landscape and visual matters only.

## **Collating Baseline Information**

- 2.5. To capture a comprehensive description of the baseline position for landscape and visual receptors, information has been collated using a process of desk study and field survey work. Field survey work was completed during March 2023.

## **Consideration of Effects**

- 2.6. Having established the relevant baseline position, the PLVA process then considers uses professional judgements in relation to the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and visual receptors, specifically in response to the nature of the potential development; the nature of potential impacts; and consequently, how these can inform an iterative approach to design.

## 3. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONTEXT

### Site Description

- 3.1. The site comprises four arable fields; three smaller rectilinear parcels and one larger irregularly shaped one; bound by linear vegetation comprising either hedgerows with scattered trees, hedgerows with frequent mature / established trees, or narrow tree belts.
- 3.2. Hedge lines are generally intact, although there are some gaps. To Halstead Road to the north vegetation comprises a managed hedgerow along the western and eastern ends, and a narrow tree belt opposite existing residential properties along the central section of this boundary with an open field access into the site off Halstead Road through this tree belt.

### Site Context

- 3.3. Opposite the northern boundary are existing dwellings along Halstead Road fronting directly towards the site. There are also a recently implemented vehicular junction / access and a short section of frontage on Halstead Road leading into a new residential estate opposite the site and forming part of its immediate context to the north-west. Bullbanks Farm adjoins the site's north-west corner on the southern side of Halstead Road. Further dwellings can be found backing onto the site to the east, along Turkey Cock Lane.
- 3.4. A woodland block adjoins the boundary to the south. Land immediately surrounding the site beyond the western and southern hedgerows and trees is agricultural and mixed in nature, although largely arable and divided by hedgerows or tree lines. Further scattered residences and farmsteads can be found along Foxes Lane and Daisy Green Road to the west and south respectively, at a distance of approximately 0.5km.
- 3.5. While roads serving the locality are primarily local lanes, as previously noted in Section 1 the area is crossed by the A12 dual carriageway, and Halstead Road is also the route of the A1124 between Halstead (some 10km to the west-northwest) and Colchester (to the east). Other notable transport routes include the Great Eastern Mainline between London and Norwich which serves Colchester Railway Station and flanks the A12 in the site's local context. A spur from this line –from the local station at Marks Tey – extends north, terminating at the town of Sudbury.
- 3.6. The River Colne and the valley along which it flows – in an easterly direction through Colchester to the Brightlingsea Reach – lies approximately 1km to the north, connected to a broad area of access land around the village of Fordham. Other access land (beyond that directly north of Eight Ash Green along Spring Lane at Fordham Heath), comprises a linear stretch of land along Daisy Green Road and Turkey Cock Lane.
- 3.7. There are several Public Rights of Way (PROWs) across or in the site's local landscape context. These include one public footpath passing just within the western boundary of the site from Halstead Road to Daisy Green Road, several publicly accessible routes linking Foxes Lane, Gallows Green and road around Aldham to the west, a public footpath extending south and crossing the railway and A12 into Copford (to the west of Colchester), and a footpath leading north from Halstead Road opposite Bullbanks Farm to a wider network of public routes through and along the Colne Valley.

3.8. While the topography of the site is relatively flat; at around 45m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD); the River Colne, its tributaries, and the Roman River (to the south, passing around Copford), result in gentle undulations in landform. This forms an east–west stretch of relatively higher ground at up to 50m AOD between the two rivers (and upon which the site and Eight Ash Green are situated), and a gently undulating northern valley slope from the Colne at around 15m AOD up to around 55m AOD dissected by small watercourses. Other waterbodies of note in the vicinity of the site are restricted to a series of clustered ponds just beyond the south of the site and several wet field ditches draining towards the Roman River.

## Landscape Related Designations

3.9. The site is not subject to any specific statutory or non–statutory designations of relevance to landscape and visual matters, nor are any such designations present adjacent to the site or in its immediate landscape context

3.10. Other designations that have some relevance to landscape and visual matters that are present in the landscape local to the site include:

- The woodland adjoining the site’s southern boundary is designated as Priority Habitat Inventory – Deciduous Woodland;
- There are three areas of CRoW Act Section 15 (access) Land in the vicinity, at Gallows Green, along Daisy Green Road and Turkey Cock Lane, and at Fordham Heath;
- There are a small number of listed buildings, typically comprising one of two buildings within the scattered villages or hamlets in the locality.

3.11. In general, whilst these have some relevance to considerations of sensitivity of the character of the wider landscape, they are not overly influential in respect of the value, and overall sensitivity of the site itself. The related designations noted above are considered more generally in respect of the analysis of constraints and opportunities.

## Landscape Character

3.12. Reference has been made to published guidance on landscape character for the area. The site is located in the following landscape character types/areas:

- National level – NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin (Natural England, 2013); and
- District level – Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2005) – Landscape Character Area B4 ‘Great Tey Farmland Plateau’.

3.13. A Landscape Character Assessment was produced covering the whole of Essex County, however, this was published in 2003 and thus the District level publication is both more specifically produced with reference to the borough, and more recent.

3.14. Summaries of the profiles of the relevant landscape area, relevant to the site and study area, are set out in the following section (refer to **Figure 4, Landscape Character**).

## National Landscape Character

3.15. At a national level, the site is situated within the National Character Area (NCA) 111: Northern Thames Basin, described as an area of diverse landscapes from the wooded Hertfordshire plateaux and river valleys to the west and the predominantly arable Essex Heathlands in the east with areas of urbanisation throughout. There is a wide variety of semi-natural habitats – albeit often fragmented. Where relevant to the site and its landscape context, the key characteristics of NCA 97 are as follows, those particularly relevant to the Site are emboldened:

- ***“The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys. The prominent hills and ridges of the ‘Bagshot Hills’ are notable to the northwest and extensive tracts of flat land are found in the south.***
- *Characteristic of the area is a layer of thick clay producing heavy, acidic soils, resulting in retention of considerable areas of ancient woodland.*
- *Areas capped by glacial sands and gravels have resulted in nutrient-poor, free-draining soils which support remnant lowland heathlands, although these are now small. Areas that have alluvial deposits present are well drained and fertile.*
- *The water bearing underlying Chalk beds are a main source of recharge for the principal London Basin Chalk aquifer.*
- *A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea, and slightly steeper valleys of the rivers Stour, Colne and Roman. Numerous springs rise at the base of the Bagshot Beds and several reservoirs are dotted throughout the area*
- *The pattern of woodlands is varied across the area and includes considerable ancient semi-natural woodland. Hertfordshire is heavily wooded in some areas as are parts of Essex, while other areas within Essex are more open in character. Significant areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are also present.*
- *The field pattern is very varied across the basin reflecting historical activity. Informal patterns of 18th-century or earlier enclosure reflect medieval colonisation of the heaths. Regular planned enclosures dating from the Romano-British period are a subtle but nationally important feature on the flat land to the south-east of the area. In the Essex heathlands 18th- and 19th-century enclosure of heathlands and commons followed by extensive 20th-century field enlargement is dominant.*
- *Mixed farming, with arable land predominating in the Hertfordshire plateaux, parts of the London Clay lowlands and Essex heathlands. Grasslands are characteristic of the river valleys throughout. Horticulture and market gardening are found on the light, sandy soils of former heaths in Essex, particularly around Colchester, along with orchards, meadow pasture and leys following numerous narrow rivers and streams.*
- *The diverse range of semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, lowland heath and floodplain grazing marsh and provide important habitats for a wide range of species including great crested newt, water vole, dormouse and otter.*

- *Rich archaeology including sites related to Roman occupation, with the Roman capital at Colchester and City of St Albans (Verulamium) and links to London. Landscape parklands surrounding 16th- and 17th-century rural estates and country houses built for London merchants are a particular feature in Hertfordshire.*
- *The medieval pattern of small villages and dispersed farming settlement remains central to the character of parts of Hertfordshire and Essex. Market towns have expanded over time as have the London suburbs and commuter settlements, with the creation of new settlements such as the pioneering garden city at Welwyn and the planned town at Basildon.*
- *Brick-built dwellings are characteristic from the late 17th century onwards. Prior to this dwellings and farm buildings tended to be timber built with weatherboarding, now mainly painted white but traditionally black or tarred, and whitewashed plaster walls.”*

3.16. Given the scale of the NCA these physical components and characteristics are likely to be represented across the wider context of the NCA, and, as identified in the NCA’s Summary, will notably vary in prevalence across the NCA. Consequently, in this context, together with the extents of the site, changes at a site level will be small scale and not likely to impact upon landscape character as defined by the NCAs. The NCA guidance does however give an indication of key characteristics relevant to the surrounding landscape context.

3.17. Reference has also been made to the published landscape character assessment prepared at a finer grain and more local scale.

### **District Landscape Character**

3.18. At a district level, landscape character is defined by the ‘Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment’ published November 2005. The site and its immediate context are located in Landscape Character Area (LCA) B4, the ‘Great Tey Farmland Plateau’, although the boundary with the ‘Easthorpe Farmland Plateau’; LCA B2; lies to the east of properties along Turkey Cock Lane. Both LCA B2 and B4 are within the wider Landscape Character Type of the ‘Farmland Plateau’ (see Figure 4).

3.19. The key characteristics of LCA B4 are described by the study as follows, those of relevance to the site are emboldened:

- ***Gently sloping farmland plateau consisting of a mixture of medium to large-scale enclosed, predominantly arable fields;***
- ***Linear belts and small patches of predominantly deciduous woodland;***
- ***Small nucleated settlements and scattered farmsteads;***
- ***Comprehensive network of footpaths and winding lanes;***
- ***Peaceful and tranquil atmosphere.”***

3.20. Visual characteristics are identified as including Great Tey’s church tower from several locations within the area, and attractive views across the Colne Valley slopes into the valley along the northern edge of the valley; neither of which are prevalent features in the

proximity of the site. Views are also strongly influenced by sky, which serves of accentuate skyline linear woodland.

- 3.21. With planning and land management issues including a decline in hedgerow management, increasing traffic pressures on minor roads, and farmland management changes and potential expansion of village settlements in adjacent LCAs impacting upon landscape character, the Landscape Strategy Objective is to 'conserve and enhance'. Planning and management guidelines comprise:
- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;
  - Encourage the screening of visually intrusive modern farm buildings with tree belts;
  - Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character;
  - Conserve open views to landmark churches;
  - New farm buildings are sensitively located to respect character and avoid the skyline
  - Conserve and enhance orchards as distinctive landscape features;
  - Encourage sensitive conversion of vernacular barns;
  - Conserve and manage the LCA's ecological structure of woods, copses and hedges;
  - Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland as important landscape, historical and nature conservation features; and
  - Strengthen existing hedgerows through hawthorn planting and management of elm.
- 3.22. For context, the 'Overall Key Characteristics' of LCA B2 published by the Colchester Borough study are described below:
- *"Raised farmland plateau, dissected by the wooded Roman River valley in the east;*
  - *A mixture of small, medium and large irregular, predominantly arable fields;*
  - *Small patches of deciduous woodland and several ponds/ reservoirs;*
  - *Area crossed by a network of narrow, sometimes winding lanes;*
  - *Airfield, surrounded by large open fields has a dominant influence on the landscape character in the south of the area;*
  - *Settlement pattern consists of small villages and hamlets with scattered farmsteads;*
  - *amongst predominantly arable agricultural land".*
- 3.23. Reference to these characteristics, particularly those at the most detailed level of assessment, can inform the analysis of constraints and opportunities in relation to the site

and such an approach will consequently support an appropriate response to the context of the local landscape character.

- 3.24. The benefit of the more local level assessment over the much broader NCA guidance is that it undertakes the assessment of landscape character at a more detailed level and the finer grain of analysis accounts for the context of the site in its wider landscape context.

## Visual Amenity

### Context

- 3.25. This section provides a description of the nature and extent of the existing views from within, towards and between the site and the surrounding area. It also includes reference to specific locations or receptors that are predicted to have views of potential development across the site.
- 3.26. Establishing the specific nature of these views provides an understanding of the context and setting of representative viewpoints and the nature of views in terms of distance, angle of view, and seasonal constraints associated with specific visual receptors.
- 3.27. The identification of key sensitive receptors and links to illustrative viewpoints are carried forward to the appraisal process and supported by **Figure 5: Viewpoint Locations and PRoW** and **Figure 6: Viewpoint Photographs**.

### Visual Envelope

- 3.28. The visual envelope is the area of landscape from which a given site or proposed development will potentially be visible. It accounts for general judgements on the theoretical visibility of a site or potential development within it and can be used to set a broad context for the study area within which to address landscape and visual impacts.
- 3.29. The extent of a visual envelope is influenced by the physical landscape components of an area, such as topography, vegetation, and buildings and can also be influenced by distance from a site. As such, within the broad coverage of a visual envelope there can be variability in terms of the opportunity for views, whereby a greater or lesser degree of visibility may or may not be evident in a particular part or at certain locations within the envelope.
- 3.30. The nature of the local topography, presence of hedgerows, occurrence of woodland and tree lines, and distribution of settlement influences the potential visibility of the site within its local landscape context. These factors also contribute to the degree of containment, both physically and visually. Consequently, the visual envelope of the site is defined as follows:
- to the north by existing residential settlement and woodland on the plateau;
  - to the east along Turkey Cock Lane;
  - to the south along Daisy Green Road; and
  - to the west around Aldham.

- 3.31. While there may be occasional locations from which the site may additionally be perceived (marginally or partially) at longer distances and from areas of comparatively elevated ground, the defined visual envelope described above represents the site's primary area of influence from within which views are most likely to be focused.
- 3.32. Potential residential development would introduce elements situated above the existing ground plane of the site and consequently may be visible within the wider landscape, however this is unlikely beyond the visual envelope as described above.
- 3.33. Within this visual envelope, overall, there is greater enclosure and a more intimate scale in the east – where field parcels are comparatively smaller and more frequently defined by tree lines and hedgerows – with a stronger sense of the characteristic 'larger-scale' views more strongly influenced by sky in the west – where fields are larger, hedgerows can be gappier and the prevalence of trees along boundaries is often lower; with the exception of roadsides. In broad terms, this variance in scale and landscape features is essentially reflected in the extent of the visual envelope.

### **Visual Receptors**

- 3.34. Receptors of the highest sensitivity include people engaged in outdoor recreation whose attention is likely to be focused on the landscape (for example, users of PROW in the open countryside; and visitors to heritage or tourist attractions where views of the landscape are important to their setting or experience) and residents.
- 3.35. Receptors of intermediate sensitivity include users of local roads and defined 'scenic routes' where views of the landscape are likely to be of greater importance.
- 3.36. Receptors of lowest sensitivity include people where an appreciation of the landscape is of lower importance to the activity, such as people engaged in outdoor sport; people who are focused on their job; and road and rail users travelling through a landscape at speed.
- 3.37. Based on the approximate visual envelope, the principal visual receptors are likely to include:
- Residents fronting directly towards the site along the opposite side of Halstead Road;
  - Residents backing onto the site along Turkey Cock Lane;
  - Local residents at short to medium distance from the site, along Daisy Green Road and on the eastern fringes of Aldham, to the south and west respectively;
  - Users of the PROW network crossing the site, whereby (notwithstanding the ability to incorporate a right of way within green space as part of a proposal) views would inevitably change;
  - Users of the PROW network adjacent to the site boundary and approaching at short / immediate distance (most notably from the south and north-west);
  - Users of the local network of lanes and roads at intermittent locations where built form and vegetation permits; and
  - Users of the PROW network at long distance broadly to the west.

3.38. The following viewpoints have been included as representative locations (refer to **Figure 5, Viewpoint Locations and PROW** and **Figure 6, Viewpoint Photographs**).

- Viewpoint 1: from the PROW between Halstead Road and Daisy Green Road where it crosses the site, within the boundary and near the southern corner;
- Viewpoint 2: from the PROW between Halstead Road and Daisy Green Road at mid-distance to the south of the site adjacent to properties along Daisy Green Road;
- Viewpoint 3: from Turkey Cock Lane at a field access between properties at mid-distance to the south-east of the site;
- Viewpoint 4: from Halstead Road (A1124) passing through Eight Ash Green, at short distance to the north-east of the site;
- Viewpoint 5: from Halstead Road opposite the northern boundary;
- Viewpoint 6: from Halstead Road opposite Bullbanks Farm at short distance to the north-west;
- Viewpoint 7: from the PROW between Halstead Road and Fiddler's Hill, just north of Bullbanks Farm at short distance to the north-west;
- Viewpoint 8: From Daisy Green Road at Green Acres at mid-distance to the south-west of the site; and
- Viewpoint 9: From the PROW south of Alham at its junction with Brook Road at long distance to the west of the site.

## 4. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

### Overview

- 4.1. Earlier sections of this PLVA consider the baseline scenario in respect of landscape and visual matters, including an appraisal of the site in its existing context in Section 3.
- 4.2. This section comprises an analysis of the landscape and visual attributes of the site, including an analysis of its role and contribution to the local landscape context. The analysis highlights pertinent points where relevant; and the subsequent identification of the key (development) constraints and opportunities in landscape and visual terms.
- 4.3. This subsequent analysis of landscape and visual matters has informed the design process for the site, with the design evolution of the masterplan subsequently informed by landscape and visual opportunities and constraints.
- 4.4. This approach ensures that the masterplan respects the surrounding landscape, draws on this to create a sense of place and identity, and takes a strong environmental lead.

### Analysis

- 4.5. The site comprises one irregularly shaped and three rectilinear arable fields bound by hedgerows with trees and tree belts. The site in broad terms is bound by existing residential development to the north and east and by agricultural land with scattered residential clusters to the west, south and east.
- 4.6. Topographically, the site is relatively flat and lies on a plateau at around 45m AOD. Despite its comparatively elevated position within the wider context of the valleys of the Rivers Colne and Roman to the north and south-west, the flat or very gently sloping landscape around much of Eight Ash Green (including the site) combined with the distribution of settlement, frequent hedgerows and tree cover results in a local landscape that benefits from some enclosure, which is particularly notable in the vicinity of the site and its immediate farmed context to the east and south. Taken together, these factors contribute to the Site's physical and visual containment.
- 4.7. The site and its immediate context are located in Landscape Character Area (LCA) B4, the 'Great Tey Farmland Plateau'. Within this wider agricultural landscape it is fairly 'typical' in respect of its character, particularly the gently sloping nature of the predominantly arable farmland plateau with linear belts and small patches of woodland, network of footpaths and small nucleated settlements, and wooded skylines in larger-scale views to the west. Planning and management guidelines include the conservation and management of the LCA's ecological structure of woods, copses and hedges, and the strengthening of existing hedgerows, which both the distribution of built form and the design of the green infrastructure should seek to respond to.
- 4.8. Neither the site nor its immediate context are subject to any designations specific to landscape character or visual matters, although a Priority Habitat woodland block lies adjacent to the southern boundary. Treatment of the site's boundaries and peripheral areas in closest proximity to this woodland should be carefully considered as part of the overall layout and approach of the masterplan.

- 4.9. The existing pattern and nature of green infrastructure features varies within the site's context from east to west. These comprise hedgerows in varying conditions with mature trees, outgrown hedgerows and tree lines, vegetated field ponds (to the south), and structural planting around properties and along local routes. As the site itself comprises a single field parcel, the features along its boundaries can potentially be strengthened and incorporated into a development layout, preserving the scale and pattern of a landscape and delivering a development that can be more readily assimilated into the landscape context by virtue of the response of green framework.
- 4.10. Overall, the green infrastructure network offers opportunities to enhance existing features and strengthen linear connections within, along or adjoining the site boundaries.
- 4.11. The site is well contained within the local landscape, particularly to the north, east and south. In broad terms, views of the site are principally restricted to within the site itself (from the PRoW within the western boundary, viewpoint 1) passing along Halstead Road (viewpoints 4, 5 and 6) or at short distance (viewpoints 2 and 3), and intermittently a mid to long-distance; largely to / from the south-west (viewpoints 8 and 9). While there may be some potential for longer-distance intervisibility to the north-west across the Colne Valley, in its immediate context the site is well screened by both existing residential built form and new dwellings currently under construction to the north of Halstead Road, limiting the opportunities for such views and the likely presence of the site within them. There is a notable settled influence upon the site due to the proximate residential built form, particularly that on the opposite side of Halstead Road to the north.
- 4.12. While there is a good network of public rights of way in the immediate and wider landscape, potential views of the site from these paths quickly become obscured by the presence of successive linear vegetative features (such as field hedgerows, tree lines and wooded lanes) together with the occurrence of woodland. As such, it was considered that only the footpath crossing the site (viewpoint 1) and one other at short distance to the north-west (viewpoint 7) were likely to observe change within their views as a result of any development within the site.
- 4.13. The analysis has informed the identification of constraints and opportunities for the site which will influence the potential for development at a more refined stage of design, along with its spatial extent and incorporated approach for mitigation. These matters are considered further in the following sections.
- 4.14. Points in relation to the analysis described above are supported by Figure 1: Site Location, Figure 3: Topography, Figure 4: Landscape Character, and Figure 6: Viewpoint Photographs.

## **Constraints and Opportunities**

- 4.15. Having undertaken an analysis of the landscape and visual baseline and considered the context of the site in this part of the landscape, the following section sets out the constraints and opportunities in respect of landscape and visual matters.
- 4.16. Landscape and visual constraints for the site are summarised as follows:
- The existing PRoW within the site along the western boundary, which represents a physical constraint, but also relates to visual amenity considerations of users;

- Residential properties fronting directly towards the northern boundary along Halstead Road, including those near the north-western corner of the site with southerly views across the western extents of the site;
- Residential properties backing onto the site to the east;
- Potential filtered views of the site from properties at short to mid distance to the south-west and south;
- Vegetation around the site, defining field boundaries and contributing to the wider green infrastructure network;
- Two utilities easements crossing the western field of the site, broadly north-south;
- Priority habitat woodland adjoining the south-eastern boundary; and
- Longer potential views from the south-west due to larger field parcels and comparatively reduced boundary vegetation.

4.17. Landscape and visual opportunities for the site are summarised as follows:

- Due to its position directly opposite existing residential development along Halstead Road and adjoining the rear of properties along Turkey Cock Lane, the site is already influenced by the settled extents of the village;
- Eight Ash Green already comprises a series of settled clusters to the north and south of Halstead Road (broadly along Spring Lane / Abbotts Lane, Turkey Cock Lane, and Wood Lane / John Flower Avenue , the site adjoining existing housing at the village's western end;
- While there is the potential for some limited longer-distance views of development, the site benefits from localised physical and visual enclosure which provides control over the degree of visibility from locations and receptors at short and medium distances;
- The topography of the site is flat, in and of itself presenting little by way of a constraint upon the potential distribution of development;
- There is the potential to reinforce the existing retained framework of green infrastructure to the site's perimeters and crossing the site by way of the internal field hedgerows, helping development to be assimilated into the landscape rather than imposed upon it. This framework has potential linked functions in respect of other environmental matters (for example, ecology and drainage); and
- The existing green infrastructure network can benefit from enhancement through additional landscape planting and long-term management which will contribute to a series of strengthened and connected series of structural landscape features and areas in the longer term.

## Preliminary Development and Landscape Strategy

- 4.18. Based on the analysis of landscape and visual constraints and opportunities, regarding the site's strategic development potential there is a need to establish a robust and enduring green infrastructure framework to balance with a proposed development envelope. Both elements can develop in response to the local landscape context which will in turn help to avoid or reduce impacts.
- 4.19. The overarching principles for the landscape strategy aim to:
- Take into consideration and carefully respond to the landscape character in the local context and the surrounding landscape;
  - Identify existing features and opportunities that can or could provide protection of visual amenity for identified receptors, including new or enhanced screening or visual filtering benefits;
  - Retain and engage existing landscape elements and features defining the site within a new landscape structure for development; and
  - Avoid loss or damage to retained landscape elements and features, maintaining and strengthening the connectivity of the existing green infrastructure framework including that which meets and extends beyond the site boundary.
- 4.20. Consideration of the constraints and opportunities can guide recommended mitigation measures, so this forms an inherent part of a future illustrative masterplan. Responding to constraints, and working up to opportunities will ensure that impacts are avoided or minimised from the outset.
- 4.21. Adopting this approach ensures that potential development on the site incorporates appropriate mitigation and avoids or reduces potential adverse effects. There will remain some degree of anticipated impacts (as would be expected for all greenfield sites) but, subject to the incorporation of a suitable mitigation strategy into the masterplan, such impacts can be avoided or minimised. The result will be emerging development proposals that can bring positive effects in respect of both environmental matters and good design.
- 4.22. This places a particular emphasis on green infrastructure across the site (including strategic or structural landscape planting and open space distribution) and the role that landscape characteristics and green infrastructure have in determining the spatial parameters and connections within the potential development.
- 4.23. In reference to the identified constraints and opportunities associated with potential development of the site, the key considerations for integration into the design of the development and landscape strategy are summarised as follows and illustrated on the Development Framework Plan at Appendix A:
- Halstead Road benefits from a tree line to the western field that provides filtering of views experienced both by passing road users and residents opposite the site. It should be retained as part of the scheme and could benefit from further reinforcement with new planting which would enhance the existing vegetation and provide greater degrees of screening in views from along Halstead Road.

- The remainder of the site's northern boundary to Halstead Road is defined by a field hedgerow, beyond which a small number of residents have views across the site. By incorporating open space in the north-west and north-east, their existing open southern outlooks would be retained as far as possible.
- Existing field boundary vegetation would benefit from reinforcement planting, such as with hawthorn (identified in the Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment as an appropriate species), both restoring the continuity of these hedgerows, and providing more robust screening within potential views from the east and west. This would observe the LCA's guidelines as set out for LCA B4 in the Landscape Character Assessment.
- There is a current field access from Halstead Road along the northern boundary, and consequently an existing break in the vegetation along the road. This should be planted to improve screening of potential development and offset vegetation losses through the creation of the new site access from Halstead Road.
- Existing woodland adjoining the south-eastern boundary is designated as 'Priority Habitat Inventory – Deciduous woodland' by Natural England. While this is of greater relevance to ecological considerations, the woodland is nevertheless a notable feature in the site's immediate landscape context. There is an opportunity by way of a scheme within the site to incorporate an appropriately designed landscape buffer, of a nature and design that reflects both landscape and ecological advice.
- There are two easements crossing the west of the site, constraining to some degree the physical distribution of land uses within the site. The western-most of the two provides a logical western extent of built form in landscape and visual terms, considering the approach to a potential green infrastructure strategy, the need for provision of public open space, the alignment of the existing PRoW, views into and across the site, and the pattern of settlement along Halstead Road. It also results in the situation of development as closely connected to the existing village as possible. These aspects are set out in more detail in the following points.
- Open space within the west of the site allows the existing open southerly aspects from dwellings opposite the site's north-western corner to be preserved.
- Allocation of green space along the length of the western boundary would also provide an open and undeveloped setting to the PRoW route passing along the inside of the western boundary, while also facilitating ready access to new public open space in this part of the site.
- In addition to potentially preserving open views from Halstead Road at the site's western end, green space along the west would result in the southern-most portion of the site also remaining undeveloped, largely retaining the existing undeveloped nature of partial views from along the PRoW on the approach to the site from the south, as well as potential glimpses of the site from properties at short distance along Daisy Green Road.
- Another principal area of green space in the north-east would further contribute to preserving the open setting along Halstead Road, and maintaining undeveloped land directly opposite existing residents with views beyond the roadside hedgerow.

- Reinforcement and gapping up of hedgerows where necessary (particularly that along the western boundary) would help to further screen and soften views of any built form within the site, as well as reinforcing the field boundary pattern around the site and into the local landscape. This could be further complemented with new hedgerow tree planting, which is relatively absent along the western hedge. The distribution of development towards the east would also provide set back of new dwellings from the western boundary, fronted by green space and landscaping.
- Views of a potential scheme from the PRoW north of Bullbanks Farm would only be possible over a limited section of the footpath (seen through a gap between existing residences and the farm stead buildings). Views could benefit from softening / filtering through the inclusion of hedgerow trees along the western boundary or scattered tree planting between the site boundary and potential development in order to allow the open southerly views from Halstead Road to equally be retained.
- There is the potential for long distance views from the north-west, although there are likely to be few receptors for whom development within the site is unlikely to be readily perceived by virtue of established and new residential development to the north of Halstead Road, as well as the presence of intervening woodland.

4.24. The key landscape and visual aspects are summarised in the following table. These are set out against identified constraints in order to demonstrate the clear link between the development and landscape mitigation strategy and response to the identified constraints.

*Table 1: Summary of indicative landscape mitigation*

Constraint	Development and landscape mitigation strategy
Field pattern and scale	Existing boundary features would be retained, providing overall structure to the development and landscape proposals, and the basis of a reinforced landscape pattern.
Field boundary hedgerows, including hedgerow trees and small tree groups (including appropriate buffers)	Retain existing hedgerows and strengthen with new infill shrub and tree planting where required.  Incorporation of green corridors, open space and landscape buffers along internal field boundaries to provide sympathetic treatment adjoining existing features.
Woodland	Opportunity to enhance the existing woodland adjoining the south-eastern boundary through potential new structural planting or other landscape treatment appropriate to ecological objectives for the PHI woodland.
Right of way network, physically crossing the site	Public footpath to be retained along its existing alignment, integrated into a broad swathe of green space along the l western boundary. This would also provide direct access to new public open space in the site from this route.

<p>Views and visual amenity of users</p>	<p>The landscape strategy seeks to address residential views directly overlooking the site at short distance from the north, as well as taking into consideration views in the local context to the south and west. New boundary strengthening planting along the west, south-east and east is intended to further soften any views of potential development. As well as facilitating the setting back of built form from the adjoining and comparatively more open countryside to the west, carefully siting it in the eastern portion of the site provides any new dwellings with greatest degrees of enclosure and screening in the wider landscape context.</p> <p>Other additional structural planting will add further screening to potential views of built form.</p>
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- 4.25. In the context of the overall need for residential development which may need to come forward on greenfield sites, a degree of landscape and/or visual impact is an inevitable consequence for most, if not all, sites that come forward.
- 4.26. In relation to landscape and visual matters, for appropriate sites to come forward it is necessary to consider those where impacts are limited and where mitigation can be incorporated that can successfully avoid impacts and/or minimise residual impacts.
- 4.27. The landscape and visual considerations have been used to shape the overall development envelope, which will be subsequently refined with reference to other technical constraints and environmental/design disciplines as proposals progress.
- 4.28. It is considered that, with an appropriate approach to mitigation and the implementation of a robust green infrastructure strategy, residential proposals within the site can be accommodated within a responsive framework of existing retained and proposed landscape features which reflect the landscape and visual characteristics of the site and its local landscape context.

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 5.1. This report has been prepared as a preliminary appraisal of landscape and visual matters (PLVA) in relation to land to the south of Halstead Road, Eight Ash Green, Colchester.
- 5.2. The PLVA identifies the key constraints and opportunities in respect of the site and surrounding landscape context. The analysis considers the specific nature of the type of development being considered and informs the inherent proposals for an indicative development strategy. The preliminary development form consequently incorporates a landscape mitigation strategy which seeks to avoid, reduce or remedy adverse impacts.
- 5.3. In terms of delivering housing growth in an area, any site will result in some impact in relation to landscape and visual matters. However, the analysis undertaken for this PLVA shows that the site benefits from a notable degree of enclosure within the local landscape, and that there is some existing influence upon the site from the immediately adjacent residential settled edge of the village. The site has the potential to accommodate development whereby both the masterplanning exercises to date, and further design evolution going forward, can aim to effectively avoid or reduce identified potential impacts through effective mitigation.
- 5.4. The preliminary landscape mitigation strategy responds to local landscape characteristics such as public access, field boundaries, tree belts and topography etc; all current physical features in the landscape.
- 5.5. Consequently, residual landscape and visual effects would be limited and occur at a localised level, and the use of existing landscape components to guide the landscape strategy and subsequent augmentation of these components can set an appropriate and robust edge to the settlement in the longer term.
- 5.6. These landscape and visual considerations have been used and will continue to shape the overall development extents and distribution, which will be subsequently refined with reference to other technical constraints and environmental/design disciplines.
- 5.7. In this context – and given that potential development within the site would seek to limit landscape and visual impacts at a local level wherever possible through a careful design process – it is considered that a residential scheme of this scale could be successfully accommodated in landscape and visual terms.



## APPENDICES.



## Appendix A:

### Illustrative Masterplan

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-  **SITE LOCATION**  
(15.96HA)
-  **INDICATIVE DEVELOPABLE AREA**  
(6.95HA)  
APPROXIMATELY 250 HOMES
-  **INDICATIVE PRIMARY ACCESS POINT**  
(SUBJECT TO FUTURE SPECIALIST INPUT)
-  **POTENTIAL EMERGENCY ACCESS POINT**  
(ALLOWING ACCESS TO PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS)
-  **POTENTIAL PEDESTRIAN CROSSING**  
(SUBJECT TO FUTURE SPECIALIST INPUT)
-  **INDICATIVE TREE-LINED PRINCIPAL STREET**  
(WITH GREEN VERGES)
-  **EXISTING PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY (PROW)**
-  **PROPOSED RECREATIONAL PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE ROUTE**
-  **POTENTIAL FUTURE FOOTWAY ALONG HALSTEAD ROAD**
-  **INDICATIVE LOCATION FOR A LANDMARK BUILDING**
-  **PUBLIC OPEN SPACE**  
(LANDSCAPE BUFFERS, GREEN CORRIDORS, UTILITIES EASEMENTS, PLAY AND RECREATION AREAS, SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE FEATURES AND RECREATIONAL PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLE ROUTES)
-  **EXISTING VEGETATION**  
(SUBJECT TO TREE SURVEY)
-  **PROPOSED STRUCTURAL PLANTING**
-  **INDICATIVE ATTENUATION BASINS AND SWALES**  
(SUBJECT TO FUTURE SPECIALIST INPUT)
-  **LOCAL EQUIPPED AREA OF PLAY (LEAP)**  
(FORMAL CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA)
-  **POTENTIAL COMMUNITY PARKLAND AND INFORMAL TRIM TRAIL**
-  **POTENTIAL SKATE PARK**
-  **ESSEX AND SUFFOLK WATER - WATER PIPE AND ASSOCIATED 12M EASEMENT**
-  **LOCAL HIGH PRESSURE (LHP) GAS MAIN (CADENT GAS) AND ASSOCIATED 19M EASEMENT**
-  **CONSULTATION ZONE ASSOCIATED WITH THE LHP GAS MAIN (74M WIDE)**

**OPEN SPACE PROVISION:**  
 MINIMUM REQUIRED\*: 1.70HA  
 PROVIDED AS PART OF THE PROPOSALS: 8.00 HA\*\*  
 \* BASED ON COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL SPD - PROVISION OF OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES (JULY 2006), ASSUMING 2.83HA OVERALL ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE PER 1000 POPULATION  
 \*\* EXCLUDING SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE SYSTEMS (SUDS)

**WOODLAND (LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE)**  
 STRUCTURAL PLANTING AND SCREENING

STRUCTURAL PLANTING AND SCREENING

## LAND SOUTH OF HALSTEAD ROAD, EIGHT ASH GREEN, COLCHESTER – DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN

