

Land Off Vicars Close, Biddenham, Site Appraisal

Prepared for: Phillips Planning Services Ltd

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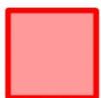
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1 Introduction

Wynne-Williams Associates has been appointed by Phillips Planning Services Ltd to appraise the suitability of a site for development with regard to the potential landscape and visual effects. The site is located off Vicars Close, Biddenham, and has potential for residential development [Figure 1]. Wynne-Williams Associates is a practice registered with the Landscape Institute with many years' experience in landscape design and various aspects of landscape planning consultancy.

Figure 1 – Site Location Plan



Appraisal site

This report briefly summarises the existing landscape context and provides an outline consideration of the potential landscape and visual effects that residential development on the site may lead to. It also offers comment on specific landscape planning policy relating to the site. All assessments are led by guidance set out in the Landscape Institute Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (GLVIA 3).

The indicative layout, accompanying this submission, is for a low density development of twelve quality houses in keeping with the established pattern of Vicars Close. The development covers only approximately 65% of the site, leaving the balance of approx. 1ha to be retained as a mixture of open landscaping and spinney. A development of this nature accords fully with the analysis and recommendations of this report and with the relevant policies and guidelines.

This report will offer recommendations to minimise the potential landscape and visual effects of developing the site. Opportunities for strengthening the landscape buffer around the site and reinforcing the visual gap between Biddenham and Bedford will also be examined.

2 The Existing Site and Context

The appraisal site is located at the southern edge of Biddenham, Bedfordshire. Biddenham is a pleasant village with a settlement history dating back to before Roman times. The central core of the village is a recognised conservation area containing various listed buildings. More information on the local planning context is included in section 2.1.

Much of the approximately 2.7ha appraisal site is currently in use for agriculture and is enclosed on all four sides by mature tree lines and hedgerow. To the north of the site there are existing properties along Vicars Close, a private road that leads to a dead-end. Adjacent houses are detached and appear to be above the national average value for housing.

East of the site, two mature tree lines and an agricultural field separates the appraisal site from existing housing along Copper Close. These are also, large, high-valued properties.

Immediately adjacent to the existing mature tree belts on the southern and western boundaries of the site, the land is bounded by the Bedford Golf Club. This is a well-maintained golf course with a series of public footpaths crossing the area. There are also three clusters of housing that are completely enclosed by the course.

2.1 Landscape Planning Context and Character Sensitivity

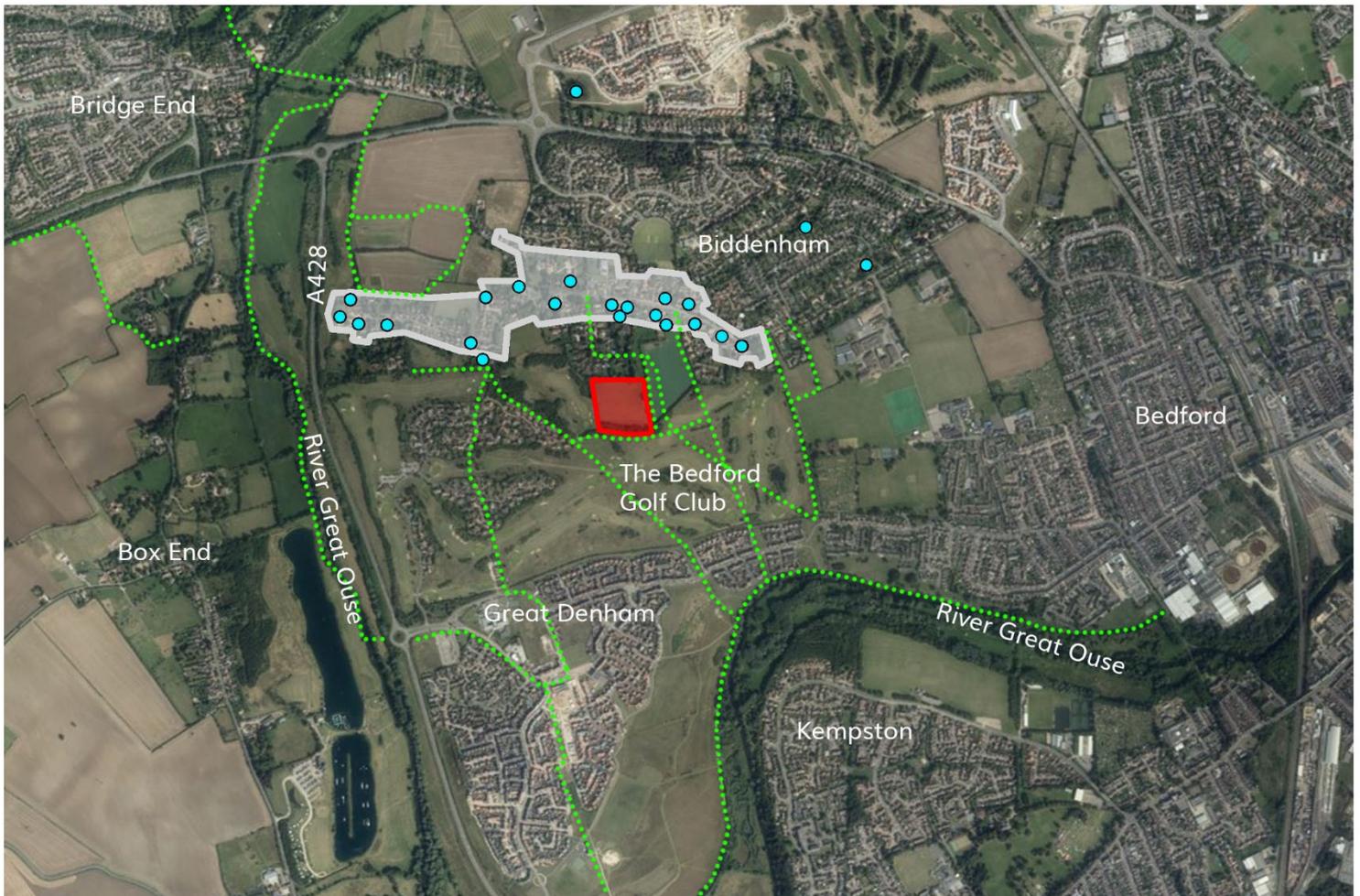
There are various landscape planning sensitivities within the wider area surrounding the site, these are identified in **Figure 2**.

The historic core of Biddenham is a conservation area, with the boundary lying 200m north of the appraisal site, and in total there are 25 listed buildings or features within 1km. As the site is so well screened by existing buildings and vegetation, it is unlikely that development on the land will affect the setting of these heritage assets.

Biddenham Pit Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located 600m north of the appraisal site, with a considerable amount of existing housing situated in the intervening space. An Ecological Appraisal of the site may be required as part of a future planning application and this would assess potential ecological effects of development.

There are multiple public rights of way (PRoW) serving the landscape to the south, east, and west of the site. Mature trees along all of the site boundaries screen the land to all PRoWs except for a short section of the footpath running directly adjacent to the north-east corner of the site (further assessment of visibility is included in section 3). Development of the site will therefore have minimal effects on recreation routes in the area.

Figure 2 – Planning Context Plan



- Appraisal site
- Biddenham conservation area
- Public rights of way
- Listed building or feature

The site is not currently identified for development within the Bedford Borough Council local plan and there are existing policies relating to the importance of maintaining the area as an undeveloped gap between the settlements of Biddenham and Bedford. These are discussed below.

2.1.1 Policy AD41 Urban Area Boundary

Policy AD41 of the Bedford Borough Council Local Plan states "Development will not be permitted in or adjoining a local gap which, because of the nature of the proposal:

I - Diminishes the gap physically or visually; or

II - Changes its character adversely; or

III - Compromises the integrity of the gap, either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or

IV - Harms the character, setting or identity of any settlements separated by the gap."

Development of the appraisal site would lead to a small reduction in the physical size of the gap. The current smallest section of gap is around 110m and is located between houses along Manor Road, Biddenham, and part of the golf course development along Carnoustie Drive. Focusing development only on the northern part of the site would maintain a gap of around 150m. This would also create opportunities to strengthen the landscape buffer at the south of the site. By enhancing the existing tree planting along the southern, eastern, and western boundaries, the visual gap between Biddenham and Bedford would be reinforced.

As the appraisal site is extensively screened by existing vegetation and buildings, development of the land would not lead to changes in the character of the surrounding landscape. Nevertheless, careful design would be needed to ensure that proposed development complemented the local vernacular and high quality of existing dwellings in the immediate vicinity.

2.1.2 Policy AD43 Urban Open Spaces and Gaps

The Local Plan states that development will not be permitted on land south of Biddenham as it provides "visual breaks to safeguard local distinctiveness including views". The document goes further to assert development will not take place "unless it can be demonstrated that the reasons for designation are not compromised". The lack of visibility in or out of the appraisal site (further discussed in section 3) restricts its ability to act as a visual break as essentially it is only the boundary trees that are visible. Development that were to include reinforcement of tree planting around the site would strengthen the visual break between Biddenham and Bedford.

Any future development plans for the appraisal site would need to ensure that boundary vegetation is retained, with boundary planting strengthened in the only discernable gap – a small section of the north-east corner.

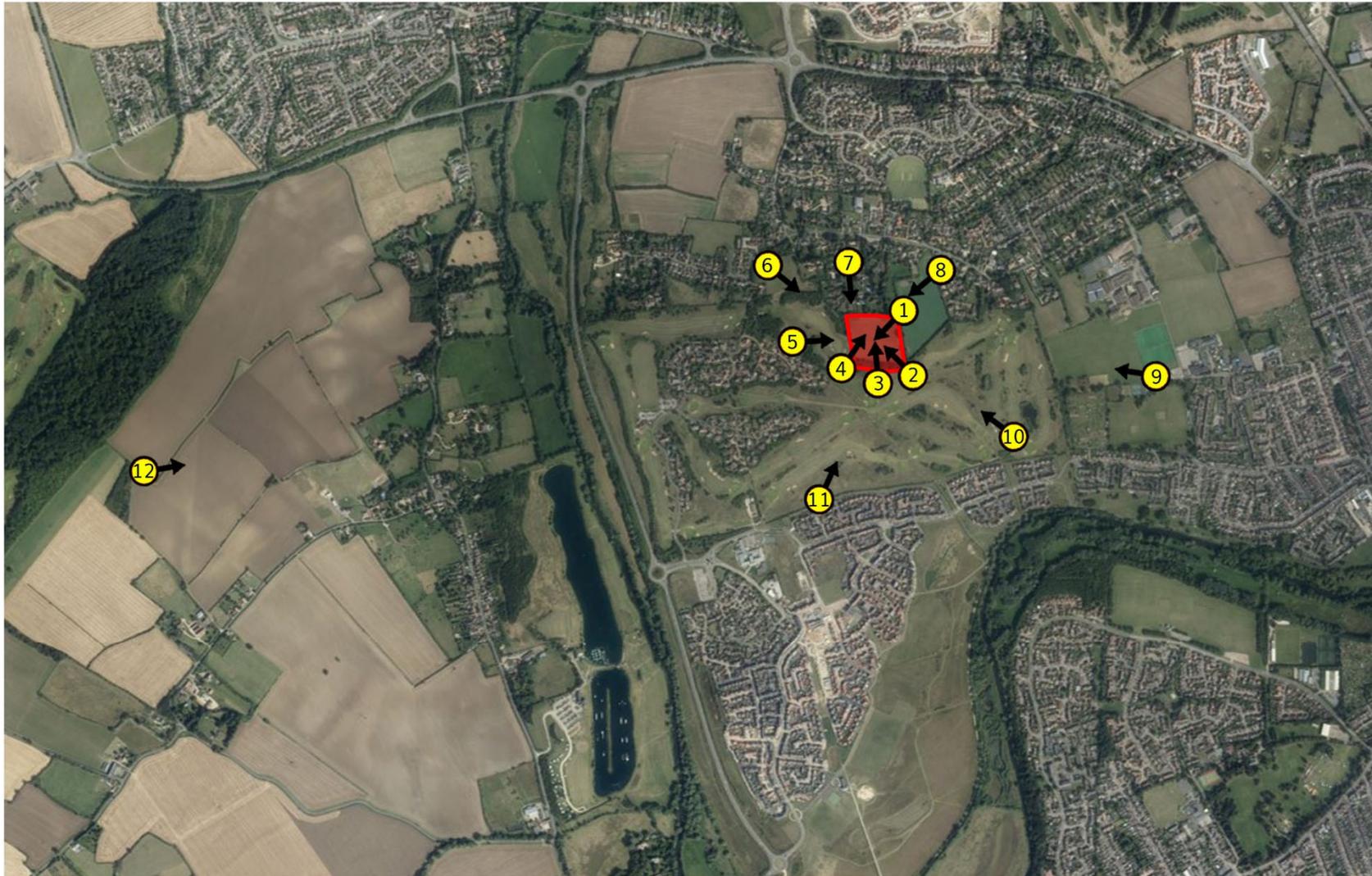
3 Visibility of the Appraisal Site

3.1 Visual Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors

In the area surrounding the site, the most sensitive visual receptors have been identified as residents in their own homes and users of the PRoW network. Efforts were also made to assess the potential for visual coalescence between Biddenham and other parts of Bedford if the appraisal site were to be developed.

A selection of viewpoints was chosen to be representative of views into the site from the surrounding area. **Figure 3** shows the location of each viewpoint with marker numbers correlating to full analysis available in **Section 5, Appendix A**. The viewpoints are all taken from publicly accessible locations.

Figure 3 – Viewpoint Location Map



Appraisal site



Viewpoint location

3.2 Appraisal of Potential Visual Effects

Assessment of viewpoints 1-12 shows that the site is extensively screened by existing vegetation on all four sides, and by existing buildings to the north. The only viewpoint where views into the site were observed was from viewpoint 1. This is due to a small gap in the tree line at the north-east corner of the site. To reduce potential visual effects on receptors using the adjacent footpath, boundary tree planting in this gap is recommended.

Viewpoint 7 shows the view from Vicars Close looking south towards the appraisal site. If a future access route were to be installed at the point where the road turns to the east, the access road may be visible from this viewpoint. Any potential visual and character effects would be minimised by using a material palette that complements the existing built development and retaining as much boundary vegetation as possible.

The site was not visible from all other viewpoints and it was not possible to perceive the internal area of the site contributing towards a visual gap between settlements. Nevertheless, it would be important to retain all boundary vegetation to ensure that any form of visual coalescence is avoided.

4 Conclusions

The appraisal site is located at the southern end of Biddenham, Bedfordshire, and is currently in use for agricultural production. There are various landscape planning sensitivities within the area surrounding the site including the Biddenham conservation area, a number of listed buildings, and a series of PRoWs that offer recreational routes. In addition, the land forms part of an open space gap between Biddenham and Bedford. There are policies in place to restrict development in this area to maintain a physical gap and prevent visual coalescence between the two settlements.

The extensive screening offered by mature boundary vegetation on all sides of the site and existing buildings to the north limits potential character and visual effects to a minimal level. To reduce potential effects further, a small gap in the tree line in the north-east corner of the site should be planted with native tree species. Any access route that may be proposed off Vicars Close will need to be designed sensitively, with as much boundary vegetation retained as possible.

It was not possible to appreciate the value that the internal area of the site offers as a visual gap between settlements due to the existing boundary vegetation. Therefore, it is assessed that development of the site would not lead to visual coalescence as long as the boundary vegetation is retained.

To minimise the physical reduction of green gap between Vicars Close and housing along Carnoustie Drive, development should be clustered to the north of the appraisal site, with a large green buffer remaining in the southern part of the land. To complement the existing character of Biddenham, residential development should be limited to low density, low rise properties, constructed to a high-quality finish. Material palettes should be consistent with the local vernacular. The indicative layout,

accompanying this submission, accords fully with the analysis and recommendations of this report and with the relevant policies and guidelines.

We recommend that any future planning application for the land is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal that outlines the many opportunities for ecological enhancement on the site.

5 Appendix A - Photo Viewpoint Analysis



Viewpoint 1

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs adjacent to north-east corner of the appraisal site, looking south-west.

Description of view: Gap in existing boundary vegetation can be seen in the foreground with views available into the appraisal site in use for crop production.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route.

Comment: Development may result in some character and visual effects, but boundary tree planting in the gap would reduce this to a minimal level.



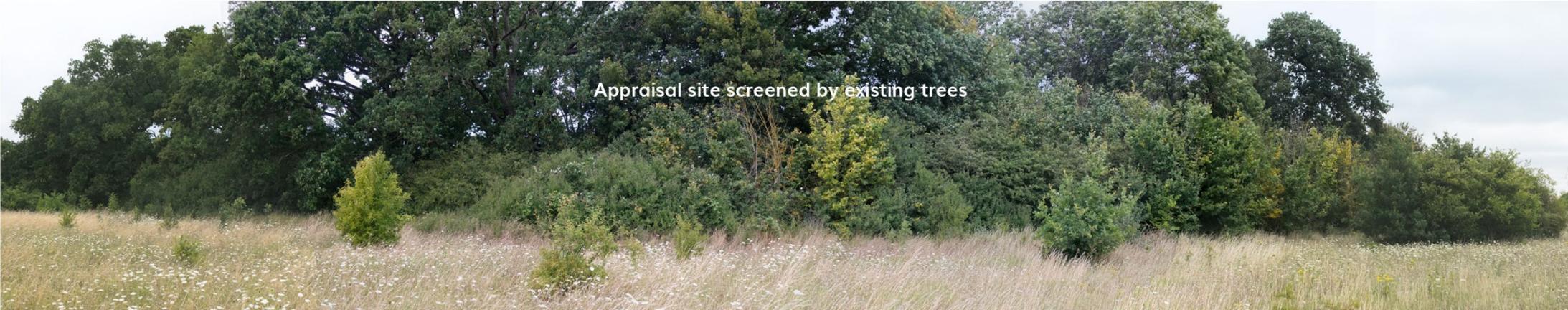
Viewpoint 2

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs adjacent to south-east corner of the appraisal site, looking north-west.

Description of view: Dense existing vegetation along the appraisal site boundary is visible.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 3

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs adjacent to southern boundary of the appraisal site, looking north.

Description of view: Long grass at the edge of the golf course can be seen in the foreground, with existing boundary trees seen in the background.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route, and it forms part of the setting for the golf course.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 4

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs through the golf course, between the appraisal site and the eastern edge of the golf course residential development. Looking north-east.

Description of view: Part of the golf course playing area is visible in the foreground with existing boundary trees seen in the background.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route, and it forms part of the setting for the golf course.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 5

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs adjacent to eastern edge of the golf course residential development, looking east.

Description of view: Dense existing vegetation along the edge of the golf course is visible.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route and it also lies adjacent to residential back gardens.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 6

Location of viewpoint: Taken from publicly accessible verge adjacent to church End in Biddenham village, looking south-east.

Description of view: Private back garden and fencing can be seen in the foreground, with arable field visible in the midground. Existing mature tree line can be seen in the distance.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route and it represents views out of the conservation area.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 7

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs down Vicars Close north of the appraisal site, looking south.

Description of view: Private road can be seen in the foreground, with residential garage and hedgerow seen in the midground. Distant views to existing property and trees in the background.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route.

Comment: Potential site access may be visible. Appropriate material selection and retention of boundary trees will reduce visual and character effects to a minimal level.



Appraisal site screened by existing trees

Viewpoint 8

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs adjacent to Merrill's Field east of the site, looking south-west.

Description of view: Arable field can be seen in the foreground, with existing boundary trees seen in the background.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 9

Location of viewpoint: Taken from publicly accessible land adjacent to Bedford Sports and Hockey Centre, looking west.

Description of view: Sports pitches and fencing can be seen in the foreground, with existing mature trees seen in the background.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the facilities for recreation.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 10

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs through the golf course between the appraisal site and Old Ford End Road. Looking north-west

Description of view: Part of the golf course playing area is visible in the foreground with existing mature trees seen in the background.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route, and it forms part of the setting for the golf course.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 11

Location of viewpoint: Taken from publicly accessible land north of Masters Close, looking north.

Description of view: Grass-covered bund at the edge of the golf course seen in the foreground, with existing mature trees seen in the background.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the areas for recreational route, and it represents views from nearby properties.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.



Viewpoint 12

Location of viewpoint: Taken along public footpath that runs along ridge close to Hangers Wood SSSI quite far west of the appraisal site, looking east. The viewpoint was selected for its high vantage point over the area.

Description of view: Arable field can be seen in the foreground, with existing residential development and mature tree lines seen in the far distance.

Character and visual sensitivities: Sensitive receptors will use the footpath as a recreational route.

Comment: No potential character or visual effects noted.