

Highsted Park (South-east Sittingbourne)



Elevated views north-west over Sittingbourne from crest of Rodmersham dry valley



Orchards along valley at Highsted



Dry valley with remnant parkland west of Kent Science Park



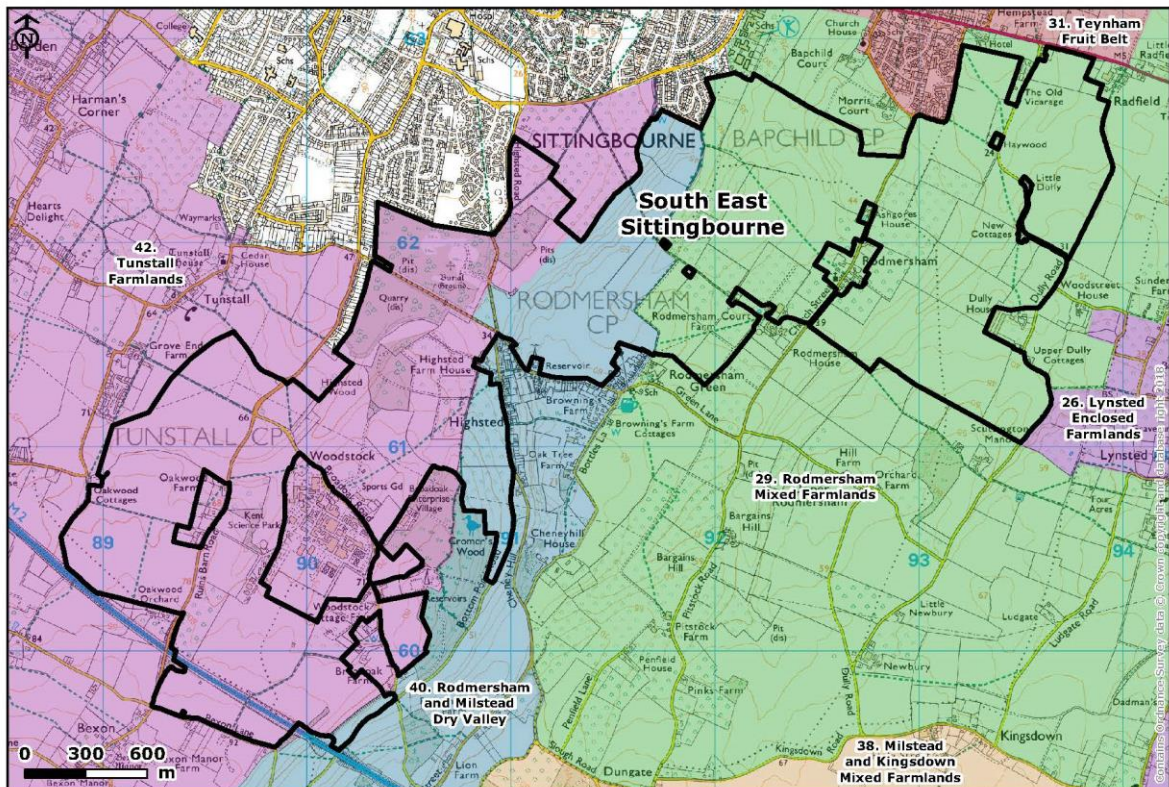
Sunken wooded lanes east of the Kent Science Park

- 1.1 This short report provides an overview of the landscape context and sensitivities of the land wrapping around the south-east of Sittingbourne, which is being promoted by Quinn Estates as a new Garden Village for Swale in response to the New Garden Communities Prospectus.
- 1.2 The proposals comprise a new strategic southern relief road linking the A2 with the M2 (including new junctions onto both). The road forms the catalyst for development in four main clusters along its length, delivering c. 11,500 residential dwellings, associated community facilities (education, medical, sport and leisure) and c. 120,000 sq m of commercial floorspace as an extension to the Kent Science Park. It is suggested that the construction would be completed in 4 separate phases, over a 15-20 year period, with estimated delivery of 700 units per annum across the site.
- 1.3 Greenspace would comprise public open space, the retained framework of hedgerows, tree belts and woodland, and more formal sports pitches, play areas and amenity space. Open space / landscape buffers / corridors would provide multi-functional GI, a SuDS network and visual separation between each built-up area.
- 1.4 The relief road is established along the western edge of the proposed development largely within the Tunstall Farmlands character area (42), cutting through the minor dry valley west of the Kent Science Park extending to the east of Sittingbourne urban edge before cutting across the main valley of Rodmersham and Milstead Dry Valley (40) and onto the lower dip slope of Rodmersham Mixed Farmlands (29) where it joins the A2. The road forms the catalyst for residential and commercial development in four large clusters along its length in close proximity to the edge of Sittingbourne. There is very narrow rural separation from the existing settlement edge, mostly only 1 field depth of undeveloped land.

- 1.5 This is a preliminary assessment based on a site visit and understanding of the landscape character context. Further detailed landscape and visual appraisal will be required as the proposal moves forward within the planning process.
- 1.6 The report covers:
- Landscape and visual context/baseline
 - Evaluation - Key landscape and visual sensitivities
 - Commentary on initial landscape evidence provided by the developer
 - Outline landscape and visual guidance
 - Conclusion

Landscape and Visual Context / Baseline

- 1.7 The site lies to the south-east of Sittingbourne, extending from the M2 and north of the A2, including the Kent Science Park and adjacent to settlements at Bapchild, Tunstall Highsted, Rodmersham Green and Rodmersham. The southernmost part of the site which extends south of the M2 is within the Kent Downs AONB. Much of the area forms part of a dry valley system extending from the AONB and is largely designated as an Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level (AHLV). The proposed development areas to the west of Ruins Barn Road and east towards Rodmersham and Bapchild encompass the flatter valley sides/dip slope and are not part of the AHLV.
- 1.8 The area extends across three main landscape character areas: Tunstall Farmlands (No.42); Rodmersham and Milstead Dry Valley (No.40); and Rodmersham Mixed Farmlands (No.29). A small part of the development also extends north of the A2 into the different Teynham Fruit Belt landscape (No 31).



Key Characteristics

1.9 The proposed garden settlement and southern relief road covers an extensive area of varied and contrasting character south-east of Sittingbourne, including open arable farmlands on the dip slope to the east and south-west and the intervening more enclosed dry valley landform, with its associated woodland, and more intricate land cover pattern. This is reflected in the three main constituent landscape character areas, as described below.

29: Rodmersham Mixed Farmlands

- Open, gently rolling fields in predominantly arable use, with small areas of pasture.
- Established and recently planted commercial orchards and associated shelterbelts around farmsteads and settlements (e.g. Rodmersham).
- Significant hedgerow removal, which has increased the openness and apparent scale of the landscape.
- Winding rural roads link small settlements and farms.
- Long views from elevated areas north and south, including to the Swale and St Nicholas Church, Rodmersham.
- Relative tranquillity and no evidence of pylons or visually intrusive buildings.
- Rodmersham Green – attractive settlement set around green and extending in linear form along rural roads.
- The historic buildings and Conservation Area at Tonge Mill (LCA 31)

40: Rodmersham and Milstead Dry Valley

- Steeply sloping dry chalk valley with rounded ridgelines contiguous with the AONB.
- Narrow rural lanes run through the valley, connecting farms and linear settlements e.g. Highsted.
- Large arable fields with some areas of orchard enclosed by small to medium woodlands.
- Enclosed landscape contrasts with isolated long unrestricted views from high points to Sittingbourne, Sheppey and the Isle of Grain/ Essex Coast.
- Relative sense of remoteness, despite close proximity to well-defined urban boundary of Sittingbourne and visually prominent M2 crossing the valley to the south.
- Ancient woodlands including Kent Wildlife Site at Cromer's Wood.

42: Tunstall Farmlands

- Includes part of minor dry valley system contiguous with the Kent Downs AONB.
- Woodland including ancient and semi-natural woodland e.g. the edge of Cromer's Wood.
- Large arable fields, with some remnant orchards e.g. at Sittingbourne settlement edge.
- Parkland landscape and features around Kent Science Park.
- Kent Science Park campus development within an otherwise rural landscape.
- Narrow winding lanes.
- Generally enclosed character within minor valley landform.
- Strong sense of rurality and relatively strong sense of remoteness in parts, although M2 and pylons detract from rural tranquillity.

Visual receptors

1.10 Visual receptors comprise views from:

- People enjoying countryside recreation/ users of the numerous public rights of way both within and outside of the site boundary, and potential views for recreational users within the Kent Downs AONB, and recreational visitors to the nature reserves/woodland;

- Passing views of motorists on the road network and minor lanes including designated Rural Lanes.
- Employees and visitors to the Kent Science Park would have views of the proposed development as well as people on public buildings on the edge of Sittingbourne. There are no specific tourist attractions, promoted viewpoints or national trails within the area.
- Residents in existing settlements – Sittingbourne, Tunstall, Bapchild, Rodmersham Green and Rodmersham.

Landscape value

- 1.11 The southern part of the site, between Bexon Lane and the M2, falls within the Kent Downs AONB. The land north of the M2 to the edge of Sittingbourne is designated as an Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level. This area has visual continuity and integrity with the Kent Downs AONB and the dry chalk valleys are identified as one of its special qualities. It has high scenic value and the whole area forms part of the setting of the AONB. The land east of footpath ZU39 and extending north to Highsted Quarries and the urban edge of Sittingbourne is also designated as an Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level.
- 1.12 The area around Highsted quarries, between Bapchild and Rodmersham Green (west of Church Street) and the land between the north of Cromer’s Wood and Sittingbourne settlement edge are all designated as Important Countryside Gaps. Local Green Spaces are present in the northern half of the Highsted Quarries, and immediately adjacent to the proposed development at the playing field and field south of Sittingbourne Community College.
- 1.13 Highsted Quarries and Cromer’s Wood are both designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Cromer’s Wood and undesignated Highsted Wood are both ancient woodland. These areas have local value for biodiversity and are part of the rural landscape setting to Sittingbourne, Rodmersham Green and Highsted.
- 1.14 The Rodmersham Green Conservation Area is adjacent to the eastern site boundary, and contains a number of listed buildings. There are also listed buildings in Highsted on the site boundary. Bottom Pond Road, Church Street, Dully Road, Highsted Road and Ruins Barn Road are all locally designated as rural lanes.
- 1.15 Local recreational value is provided by public rights of way crossing the landscape and its proximity to Bapchild, Rodmersham, Rodmersham Green, Sittingbourne, Tunstall and the Kent Science Park. The landscape has local value as part of the rural landscape setting to these settlements, and in providing a rural gap between the settlements.

Evaluation

Key Landscape and Visual Sensitivities

- The distinctive steeply sloping dry valley landform is of greater sensitivity, and the open valley crests are visually prominent. It would be difficult to integrate linear infrastructure and large blocks of residential development in relation to the articulated topography of the dry valleys.
- The visual, physical and character continuity and integrity with the Kent Downs AONB. The dry valleys represent one of the AONB’s special qualities and the area has an important role as the setting to the AONB.
- Open and elevated areas have high visibility within the surrounding landscape and local settlements including long views north out to the Swale and beyond, and south towards the Kent Downs AONB. St Nicholas church tower, Rodmersham, is a prominent feature in local views
- Generally, relatively high levels of tranquillity and strong rural character across much of the area despite proximity to Sittingbourne. Role of the area in providing rural separation between Sittingbourne and outlying villages.
- Well defined settlement edges of existing development e.g. at Sittingbourne and Bapchild and well contained character of existing villages e.g. Rodmersham Green with area forming rural setting to the villages.

- The locally designated rural lanes are features of higher sensitivity in terms of the contribution they make to landscape pattern, complexity, visual character and time depth.
- Cromer's Wood/Highsted Wood and Bex Wood are ancient woodland and a feature of higher sensitivity, as are the small areas of traditional orchard and pasture through the valley, and historic parkland at Kent Science Park. The woodland would also be sensitive to adjacent residential development on its immediate borders.
- Highsted Quarries, part of the LWS, provides a rural separation between Sittingbourne and Highsted, as well as a green edge to the settlement edge of Sittingbourne and local wildlife resource.
- The land south of the Kent Science Park in particular provides an important rural and visual separation between the Kent Downs AONB south of the M2 and the existing low rise development at the Science Park.

Summary of impacts and sensitivities by character area

29: Rodmersham Mixed Farmlands

- 1.16 The relief road would join the A2 to the east of Bapchild with a large area of residential development extending to the east of Bapchild and continuing east of the relief road. A relatively narrow area of undeveloped land/open space is retained south of Bapchild to Rodmersham. Two large blocks of residential development climb the lower dipslope south of Bapchild to the east and west of Rodmersham. Development will also extend north of the A2 and Lomas Road/ the railway within the adjacent fruit belt landscape. An undeveloped rural enclave is shown around Rodmersham.
- 1.17 In this area the elevation, openness and long views are highly sensitive. The area to the south and north of the A2 would essentially appear fully developed extending the urban edge of Sittingbourne in a linear form to encompass Bapchild almost as far east as Teynham. Along the A2, this would give the impression of an enlarged area of Sittingbourne rather than a new garden settlement. The small remaining parcels of open land south of the existing A2 and the new relief road/housing are likely to be unsustainable as farmland and therefore vulnerable to future development. The narrow rural gap east of Sittingbourne (Murston – Snipehill) would also be vulnerable. The small rural settlement of Rodmersham Green would form part of a much more extended urban area and there is currently limited information in how this would be integrated in practice. The two blocks of development on the dipslope south of Bapchild would be visually prominent and due to the elevation and openness of the landscape here are unlikely to offer options for effective screening

40: Rodmersham and Milstead Dry Valley

- 1.18 In the masterplan for the proposed garden settlement the valley floor is to an extent kept free of development and forms an area of open space and woodland with development on the visually and topographically sensitive valley sides. The relief road cuts into and across the valley in the north and includes a large roundabout/junction within the valley to access residential development to either side, including a block of development on the steep valley side adjacent to the existing edge of Sittingbourne and further blocks on the sides towards Rodmersham. Here, the road would descend/ascend the steep valley side with areas of residential development shown across the contours. A further block of residential development spills onto the valley side/crest to the west of Highsted and adjoining the boundaries of ancient woodland. Development on these steep slopes would be highly prominent.
- 1.19 The key sensitivities are the dry valley landform and rural character, high scenic value and continuity/physical integrity with the AONB including dry chalk valley qualities and ancient woodland. It is recognised that the proposed development respects some of these elements by leaving a part of the valley floor open. Key sensitivities are the relief road crossing of the valley to the north including the road junction, roundabouts and slip roads on the valley floor and climbing the valley sides and the associated visually prominent blocks of residential development on the steep valley sides and development adjoining the immediate edge of the ancient woodland.

42: Tunstall Farmlands

- 1.20 This masterplan for the proposed scheme shows the route of the relief road, with a large junction on the M2 impinging into the AONB to the south and the road continuing to the north through the minor dry valley west of the Kent Science Park, continuing along the upper edge of the valley skirting east of Highsted Quarries before dropping down to cross the valley and continuing to Bapchild in the north. The road runs extremely close to and is likely to impinge on the the quarry and Highsted Wood Ancient Woodland and having crossed the valley bottom at Stockers Hill it then climbs the visually prominent steep valley side.
- 1.21 A roundabout to the west of the Kent Science Park provides access to two large blocks of development, west on the more open dip slope towards Tunstall and east within the minor dry valley north of the Science Park. A large area of extended commercial development is indicated to the south of the existing Kent Science Park abutting the M2 and boundary of the AONB. At this stage it is not known what this commercial development would entail. Further areas of residential development are envisaged north of the relief road, including within part of the Highsted Quarries LWS.
- 1.22 The key sensitivities are the subsidiary valley landform north and west of the Kent Science Park and its area of parkland and the open and visually exposed character of the dip slope towards Tunstall. The proposal brings an area of substantial residential and commercial development onto the dip slope immediately adjoining the AONB effectively extending the urban edge of Sittingbourne substantially southwards in a linear form leaving only small isolated areas of agricultural land separating it from the existing urban edge and from Tunstall and Bapchild. A further key sensitivity is the physical loss and direct impact of the motorway junction on the AONB, impacts of large scale commercial development on the immediate edge/setting of the AONB. It is likely that increased traffic flows on rural lanes to access the junction will adversely affect a significant area of the AONB. The proposals will involve a loss of woodland, including ancient woodland at Highsted Wood to accommodate the relief road. There will be some loss of woodland/Local Green Space/LWS at Highsted Quarries, particularly to the northern quarry where residential development is proposed. Residential development extends around much of Cromer's Wood, and mitigation will be needed to ensure no damage is caused to the site.

Commentary on landscape evidence provided by the developer

- 1.23 This section provides initial comments on the landscape information and evidence provided by the developer in their submission to Swale BC. This is contained within the Highsted Park document by Quinn Estates and the accompanying Landscape Technical Note (July 2018) by David Williams Landscape Consultancy. It contains general comments and specific comments on the developer's approach to landscape sensitivity, the Link Road and the AONB.
- 1.24 In the main this is an accurate document, listing the landscape sensitivities and potential opportunities, including an extended section on green infrastructure. There are minor inaccuracies and some inconsistencies which include:
- The document notes that the Kent Science Park currently influences the setting of the Kent Downs AONB. Our opinion is that the small scale, low height and contained nature of this development does not influence the AONB at its present extent.
 - The document notes that the vast majority of the area is not constrained by landscape designations when in fact a large part is AHLV.
- 1.25 **Approach to Landscape Sensitivity:** The document refers to the Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal report (2011). The Technical Note describes the different sensitivities within the site and uses this to give a merged overall sensitivity for the whole site of 'moderate'. Current guidance states that sensitivity is produced for a specific piece of land, in relation to a specific type of development. Amalgamating the sensitivities of each landscape character area is not appropriate in this case. It should also be noted that the LCA is a strategic borough wide document and identifies broad overall generic sensitivities. More detailed specific work is necessary to build on the LCA and indicate sensitivities to the proposals outlined in this document.

- 1.26 Given the high sensitivities associated with this area (AONB/AHLV) the developer should provide more evidence to show precisely how the scheme is landscape-led and how *'the natural attributes of the location, including landform, landscape character, wooded areas...have been embraced and have led to a scheme which seeks to respect and conserve key features of the landscape'*.
- 1.27 **Kent Downs AONB:** There is limited discussion of the relationship between the development and the Kent Downs AONB, beyond mention of improved connectivity. A small section of the southern part of the site is within the Kent Downs AONB and much of the land has an influence on the setting of the AONB. The current buildings in the Kent Science Park are relatively well screened from the AONB by the relatively low height and bulk plus position in a slight dip in the landform. Additional impacts will include the impact of greater traffic on the rural lanes of the AONB to join the new M2 junction which are not identified in this document. It is not clear what mitigation measures will be taken to ensure that the new development does not cause harm to the AONB or impact on its special qualities. The point made at paragraph 3.1 of the Landscape Technical Note that the development would only impact on 0.003% of the AONB is a spurious argument. The applicant should provide a greater in-depth understanding of impacts on the special qualities and setting of the AONB as set out in the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement. The Landscape Technical Note does refer to these documents, and in section 3 acknowledges there will be some adverse landscape and visual effects on the setting of the AONB and the dry valleys that extend from the AONB. In our opinion more work is required and the developer should be asked to provide an indication of how para. 172 of the NPPF is addressed, how the development conserves and enhances landscape and scenic beauty and how the proposal meets the tests for development within/in the setting of an AONB.
- 1.28 **Rural lanes:** There is no mention within the submission document or the Landscape Technical Note about how the locally designated rural lanes will be integrated into the development, or how these will be enhanced. It is noted that the masterplan currently shows connections between the new road and the existing rural road network and this is likely to substantial increase traffic on local roads both within the AONB and other minor rural lanes with associated impacts on rural character and qualities.
- 1.29 **Boundaries and interface with Sittingbourne urban edge:** There is currently a well-defined settlement edge at Sittingbourne. The masterplan shows some retention of this through open space buffers however in some locations only a small amount of woodland/trees is shown separating the current settlements and the new development. Given the close physical proximity of the new residential development to existing settlements it is difficult to understand how new settlements will interact with existing settlements, or with each other. The small areas of landscape remaining that separate new settlements from Sittingbourne and Bapchild are likely to be unsustainable for farming and therefore vulnerable to degradation and future infill and therefore negating the design aims of this scheme as a 'necklace' of individual small villages. If the scheme were to be progressed further consideration would need to be given to mechanisms to conserve the openness and sense of separation between new development and existing settlements of Sittingbourne, Bapchild and Tunstall. This may require a greater area of land purchase and long term management covenants if the scheme were to be progressed.

Guidance

- 1.30 If this site proposal was to be progressed through the planning process a detailed landscape masterplan would need to be developed, accompanied by an LVIA. From our understanding of the landscape and visual sensitivities the following guidance is recommended.
- 1.31 This proposal is led by the construction of the new link road between the A2/M2. The landscape impacts could be reduced if the road was considered on its own and separate to the wider development proposals. The guidance is therefore set out for each element of the scheme.

The Relief Road

- Road design being the minimum necessary as a single carriageway will be less harmful than a dual carriageway.

- Junction design to minimise encroachment into the AONB and substantial landscape enhancement along Bexon Lane.
- Considering all options for the route of the link road aiming to retain the road location as far as possible on the dip slope rather than within the dry valley and away from the exposed valley crest and minimising intrusion into the valley as far as possible, accepting that a crossing of the valley is required to link the A2 with the M2 via the Kent Science Park.
- Design to limit access onto surrounding local road/rural lane network from the relief road (could be more easily achieved if residential development not associated).
- Further consideration of A2 junction location including options west of Bapchild.
- Careful design of the road where it cuts across the valley west of Rodmersham. In the absence of residential development the need for the intrusive junction and slip roads could be avoided as there are no requirements to create access to new development areas.
- Design of the road as a parkway/habitat corridor including reinstatement of chalk grassland along faces and cuttings. Planting to integrate the road along the valley crests.
- Landscape management strategy and management agreement to conserve and enhance character and avoid incremental development and infilling of left over land between Sittingbourne and the road and to maintain a rural landscape setting to the road.

Residential and employment development

1.32 The proposals for residential development are bolted onto to the link road, and appear to relate to landownerships and achieving a quantum of development to support the road. As such they currently do not appear as a fully integrated garden village development. The following guidance is noted:

- Careful design of development as an integrated scheme including integration with existing areas of settlement at Tunstall, Bapchild, Rodmersham, Rodmersham Green and avoiding creation of small isolated areas of residential development, and unsustainable green 'cordons' and slivers of land.
- Keeping residential development away from the locally designated landscape (AHLV) represented by the steeply articulated topography of the dry valley south of Sittingbourne where it would have very high visual and character impacts.
- Reducing extent of commercial development in association with the Kent Science Park within the larger extended area up to existing M2, and clearer specification of low rise campus style development in relation to the existing buildings.
- Development masterplan to avoid small gaps and slivers of undeveloped land adjoining existing development edges which would likely to become unsustainable for farming and vulnerable to infill. These areas of land should be brought into the masterplan and the boundaries of the area extended, with a land management plan prepared setting out mechanisms for their retention as high quality landscape edges and buffers.
- Avoid creation of extensive linear development eastwards creating a continuous urban area between Sittingbourne – Bapchild – Teynham.
- Avoid loss of woodlands and particularly areas of ancient woodland and seek to connect and link areas of woodland. Ensure that all woodland is appropriately buffered from development on its immediate edges.
- Avoid loss of LWS at Highsted Quarry.
- Create a comprehensive green corridor network along the dry valley.
- Create a comprehensive plan for woodland creation, landscape screening and buffering to integrate development and avoid hard urban edges and intrusion onto skylines in views from the valley and along the A2.

Conclusion

- 1.33 This is a very challenging site for development of a road and residential development of the scale proposed. In landscape terms much of the area is highly sensitive including part of the Kent Downs AONB and its immediate setting and representing special qualities (dry valley) extending out from the AONB boundary. The landscape quality is recognised by the local landscape designation. Within Swale there is no precedent for urban development climbing the dip slope transition between the coastal plain, fruit belt and chalk downs of the AONB or extending within the dry valleys. It is very difficult to achieve a scheme which is landscape-led in this context and there are limited opportunities to fully mitigate impacts in this location of high landscape sensitivity.
- 1.34 If a development of the size and scale proposed in this location were to be progressed, significant adverse landscape impacts would need to be accepted. At a minimum any scheme in this location would require:
- Exploration of all possible route options for the desired link road to minimise its extent and impact and maximise opportunities for integration;
 - Extended site boundaries to permanently secure areas of landscape buffer/green gaps and/or mitigation for visual/landscape impacts;
 - Reduced residential development areas to avoid the most sensitive locations (as set out above);
 - Clear identification of measures to minimise impact on the AONB including reduced extent of commercial development;
 - A single carriageway with reduced access onto the local rural road network.

Land at Bobbing



View south-west over arable fields towards Keycol Hill



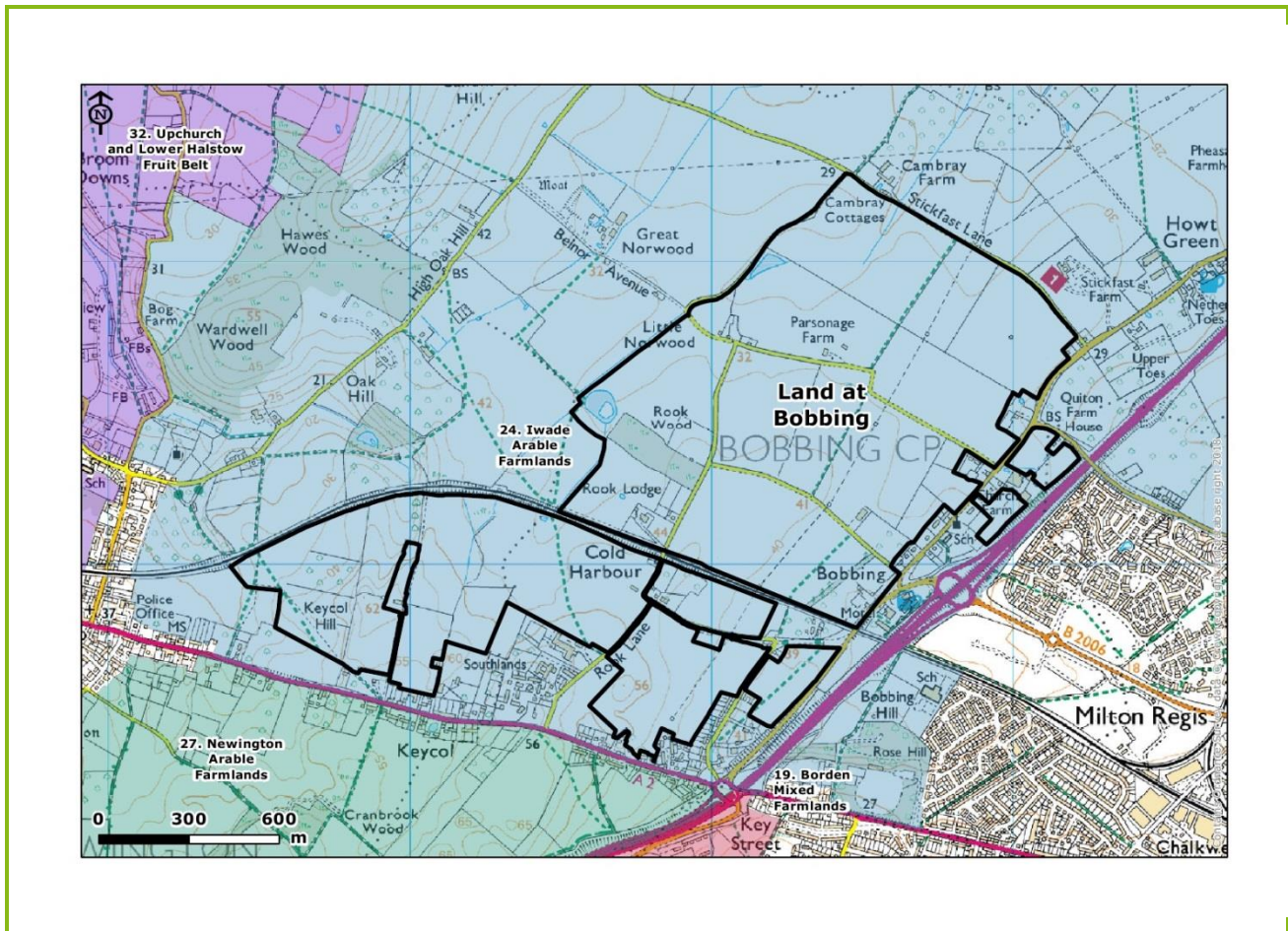
View north from site boundary with Bobbing (Sheppey Way)

- 1.1 This short report provides an overview of the landscape context and sensitivities of the land at Bobbing for a new Garden Village for Swale in response to the New Garden Communities Prospectus.
- 1.2 The whole site (as extended to the south-east beyond Rook Lane in October 2018) comprises circa 226 ha in total. The figures below relate to the original extent of the site (c. 201ha) as of August 2018 for which fuller details have been provided. This assessment may need to be amended if further information comes forward for the extended site area.
- 1.3 The proposals involve 87 hectares of residential development (c. 2,500 dwellings) and an associated 6 ha of community facilities and 3 ha of flexible employment space. The majority of this development would be sited to the north of the railway line in proximity to Bobbing Village. Further to the south-west, to the south of the railway line, a smaller area of residential development is proposed together with a substantial area of “parkland” public open space, which is intended to act as a permanent open space buffer to the village of Newington, to the west.
- 1.4 Greenspace would comprise circa 100 hectares (or 50% of the site), concentrated in the proposed parkland in the south-western edge of the site. Additional open space is proposed in the form of a new Bobbing Village Green, new linear parks / ecology corridors, allotments and a SuDS network, and the retained Rook Wood as a “reserve”.
- 1.5 This is a preliminary assessment based on a site visit and understanding of the landscape character context. Further detailed landscape and visual appraisal will be required should the proposal move forward within the planning process.
- 1.6 The report covers:
 - Landscape and visual context/baseline
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Landscape and Visual Context / Baseline

- 1.1 The site (as extended to the south-east in October 2018) comprises circa 226 hectares of predominantly arable farmland in close proximity to Bobbing Village, to the west of the A249 and north of the A2. The land is dissected by the London to Dover/Ramsgate railway line. It does not contain any landscape designations.

1.2 The site falls within a single landscape character area: Iwade Arable Farmlands (No.24).



Key Characteristics

- An open agricultural landscape dominated by large and medium scale undulating arable fields including hops, with a very open and exposed character.
- Limited enclosure is provided by the treed boundary with Bobbing village and Sheppey Way to the south and east, by the mature planted corridor of the London – Dover railway line which bisects the site in cutting from east to west, and by a fragmented and limited hedgerow network (including remnant orchard apple trees) and occasionally lined by ditches and ponds.
- Rook Wood is a block of designated ancient woodland forming an important landscape and ecological feature within the central part of the site.
- The tower of St Bartholomew’s church (Grade I listed), Bobbing, is a landmark skyline feature in some views to the east.
- The site boundary with Bobbing village comprises linear development of intermittent, low density dwellings and their well-vegetated curtilages along Sheppey Way, with views focussed around the church as a landmark feature.
- A more pronounced undulating and gently rolling landform in the south-western part of the site, with field trees, small copses and hedgerows in the vicinity of Keycol Hill (high point of site at c.62m AOD) breaking up the expanse of arable fields and providing a more varied, scenic character. Views to the west/north-west from this elevated area incorporate the tower of St Mary’s church (Grade I listed), Newington.
- The local ridgeline of Callum Hill, including Hawes and Wardwell Woods to the west (Area of High Landscape Value – Swale Level) provides visual containment and a scenic rural backdrop in views from the site.

- Expansive long range views are possible to Iwade, across the Swale and the Isle of Sheppey to the north-east, and the wooded dip slope of the Kent Downs AONB to the south.
- Parsonage Lane is (in part) a scenic, winding rural lane with an important mature hedgerow forming the north-western boundary of the site, which links with Coldharbour Lane and Rook Lane running north-south through the site. All of these are locally designated rural lanes along part or all of their length.
- The site contains several farmsteads and modern agricultural storage sheds, but few other buildings. Electricity pylons and transmission lines are dominant and intrusive features, particularly within the northern part of the site.
- Variation in the south-eastern corner of the site formed of open arable fields partly enclosed by housing along the A2 and Bobbing Hill, with minor areas of horse paddocks/pasture, which slope down quite steeply from the high point around Rook Lane to Sheppey Way.

Visual receptors

- Visual receptors comprise passing views from the network of six public footpaths traversing the site, together with minor lanes, including Rook Lane / Cold Harbour Lane and Parsonage Lane, which provide north-south access through the centre of the site to the A2. Many individual private views are possible from the houses which adjoin / neighbour the site. There are no tourist attractions, promoted viewpoints, national trails or notable recreational areas (e.g. country parks or local public green space) within or adjacent to the site.

Landscape value

- 1.3 The site does not contain any national or local landscape designations, and is situated a minimum distance of 2.5km away from the Kent Downs AONB to the south. However, the site does hold certain local landscape values, including its value for recreation via the PRoWs crossing it in combination with its proximity to the settlements of Bobbing, Keycol and Newington.
- 1.4 The site also has local value as part of the rural landscape setting to the settlements, contributing positively to the wider, strongly rural backdrop which incorporates the more elevated Area of High Landscape Value (Swale level) further to the north-west. Parsonage Lane, Cold Harbour Lane and Rook Lane are all locally designated rural lanes.

Evaluation

Key Landscape / Visual Sensitivities

- The more pronounced and rolling landform in the south west part of the site is of greater sensitivity than the flat to gently undulating landform that characterises the main part of the site.
- Open, partly elevated area with large scale arable fields are less sensitive in terms of land cover and scale but also have high visibility within the surrounding landscape and local settlements at Bobbing and Keycol.
- The area of ancient woodland at Rook Wood, occasional infield clumps of trees and hedgerows including mature oak and ash plus orchard trees are features of higher sensitivity. The simple landscape pattern of regular arable field is less sensitive.
- Small pockets of greater tranquillity and more rural character notably along sections of Parsonage and Cold Harbour Lanes and in the SW part of the site are of higher sensitivity. The majority of the site is affected by road and rail noise, to varying degrees, resulting in low levels of tranquillity.
- The locally designated rural lanes (Parsonage Lane and Coldharbour Lane – in part; and Rook Lane – in full) are features of higher sensitivity in terms of the contribution they make to landscape pattern and complexity, visual character and time depth.
- The area to the west of the site south of the railway line provides rural separation and setting for the smaller settlement at Newington and at Keycol.
- Presence of pylons and overhead powerlines are dominant features on the site, and views out of the site to development and infrastructure means that there is no sense of remoteness associated with this area.
- Important views include the long views out of the site to the west to the scenic rural backdrop of the Callum Hill / Wardwell Hill ridgeline and woodland (Area of High Landscape Value – Swale Level) and the views across the site to the church tower at Bobbing.
- Role in providing rural separation between Bobbing, Newington and Sittingbourne.

Summary

- 1.5 The main sensitivities of this site relate to its function as rural landscape and context for the existing settlements and relationship with the wider rural area including the Wardwell Hill backdrop and role as separation/rural gap. The key sensitive attributes are its visual exposure, some areas of more elevated topography, hedgerows and mature trees, the large block of ancient woodland at Rook Wood and isolated areas of more rural and tranquil character within the western and south-western parts of the site. The area on the western part of the site, south of the railway is important in providing separation and rural setting for Newington and Keycol.

Commentary on landscape information provided by the developer

- 1.6 This section provides an assessment of the principal submission document, entitled 'Land at Bobbing - Second Stage Submission to Swale Borough Council, August 2018'. This submission includes a general overview of site characteristics and local landscape context (page 6), and specific commentary on landscape character and visual impact (pages 18-20).
- 1.7 The landscape evidence focusses on the largest land parcel within the site, to the north of the railway line, with comparatively little commentary on the land parcels to the south of the railway line, which are in part proposed as 'parkland'. The 'high-level' / strategic landscape features of the site, e.g. the hedgerow and woodland network, and its general condition / status, landform and PRoWs have been accurately identified and described.
- 1.8 The designated rural lanes within the site are proposed to be retained, although it is unclear at this stage how the increased volumes of traffic generated by the proposal would be controlled along the lanes and their rural character conserved.

- 1.9 The 'evolving masterplan' (page 12) provides an indicative network of different types of open space throughout the site, in addition to internal and boundary landscape 'buffers' (providing visual screening in addition to biodiversity/amenity value).
- 1.10 Consideration of how the proposed extensive parkland area will connect with the new areas of housing, in terms of both pedestrian/cycle accessibility and habitat connectivity, is lacking from the current submission. This area is currently separated from the larger part of the site to the north by the London to Dover/Ramsgate railway line, which results in significant severance between the areas either side of the line, with only limited minor level crossings providing access across. Page 23 of the submission states 'existing level crossings will be improved in consultation with Network Rail'. At a more strategic level, consideration also needs to be given to how a development of this scale would support and connect to the Swale Green Grid Strategy, to facilitate and encourage car-free travel, local points of interest and potential areas of habitat creation and enhancement. Stickfast Lane and High Oak Hill, adjacent to/close to the site, are part of the Strategic Green Grid Route.
- 1.11 Page 25 of the submission, under the subject of local landscape context, states 'the Council's Urban Extension Landscape Capacity Study concluded that this area had 'high' capacity to accommodate change'. This is incorrect. The significant majority of the site was excluded from this study, with only a small part of it, between Bobbing Hill and Sheppey Way, forming part of Study Area 13 where the capacity to accommodate change was considered to be 'moderate'.
- 1.12 A short very high level summary of landscape and visual impacts is included which makes some very broad conclusions on levels of impacts. These would need to be supported by a more detailed LVIA to feed into design and mitigation.
- 1.13 More information is required on what is meant by a 'Landscape - led approach' in practice and what the 'strengthened landscape resource' would comprise.

Guidance

- 1.14 If this proposal was to be progressed through the planning process a detailed landscape masterplan would need to be developed, accompanied by an LVIA. From our understanding of the landscape and visual sensitivities the following opportunities are noted:
- Design and locate the SuDS features, particularly swales as key elements of the green infrastructure network, to utilise the natural rise and fall of the land. At present, the evolving masterplan (excluding the parkland block) indicates a relatively limited open space and SuDS network, with no information as to whether the SuDS network would extend into each block of residential development. These areas would be expected to each be served by and designed around naturalistic swales, attenuation and retention ponds.
 - There are significant opportunities to incorporate new, traditionally-managed (low intensity) orchards using varieties of local provenance, as key multi-functional community resources and features of the site's green infrastructure network. This would reference the traditional dominance of fruit farming over the majority of the site up until the 1950s and 1960s, and contribute to reinforcing / conserving the time-depth within the landscape.
 - There are opportunities to increase woodland cover, where appropriate, to limit visual impact and enhance habitat connectivity. The ancient woodland within the proposed Rook Wood reserve is irreplaceable (NPPF para 175) and should be connected to new native woodland and hedgerow planting, with a potentially greater buffer of open space to new surrounding built form and infrastructure. Current Natural England and Forestry Commission standing advice states mitigation measures could include leaving an appropriate buffer zone of semi-natural habitat between the development and the ancient woodland or tree (depending on the size of the development, a minimum buffer should be at least 15 metres).
 - There are opportunities to restore and extend the hedgerow network, including planning for the next generation of hedgerow trees.
 - Integrate designated Rural Lanes into the new settlements, ensuring their special rural qualities are conserved and enhanced. Utilise the character and qualities of existing rural lanes in

designing new roads within the site, to contribute to maintaining local distinctiveness and a sense of rurality.

- Consider how the existing areas with relatively higher scenic value and sense of rurality and tranquillity (generally the western and south-western parts of the site) can be preserved and sensitively integrated within the wider site masterplan. This could take the form of more significant open space / vegetated buffers to new built form, to provide a more gentle transition between built-up areas and neighbouring undeveloped farmland, and a focus on car-free routes.
- Aim to maintain existing relatively dark night skies by carefully considering the site-wide lighting strategy (both adopted and non-adopted roads and footways), utilising the latest technology to minimise light spill and glare. This is particularly important at the rural edges towards Wardwell Hill and Callum Hill.
- Preserve the predominantly undeveloped skyline character by avoiding locating new development on upper slopes, ridgelines and other high points within the site, where it would be more visible on the skyline and in longer views from adjacent settlements and the wider area. Such locations would include the areas around Keycol Hill and Rook Lane.
- Consider incorporating important and locally distinctive skyline features and views within the general layout and design of key vistas, e.g. maintain and focus views to St. Bartholomew's church, Bobbing, from the proposed 'Bobbing Village Green'; maintain the open views to the Callum Hill ridgeline and woodland from western parts of the site.

- 1.15 It is considered that there also needs to be further justification for converting the existing south-western land parcel from agricultural use to parkland, in terms of impacts on landscape and visual character, including further detail on what this parkland would comprise. Retaining the existing landscape baseline by removing this land parcel entirely from the proposed development could better serve the same function of preserving the existing undeveloped landscape character, openness and settlement gap to Newington, providing this was aligned with proposals to restrict future infill development. This would suggest a need for integration of amenity and rural spaces within or better related to the proposed development to the north east of the rail line. This may require extension of the existing red line boundary to the north of the existing site with a proviso that a sense of separation is maintained in relation to existing development at Iwade.

Conclusion

- 1.16 This site does not contain any national or local landscape designations and overall is considered to be moderately sensitive. It is considered that the site could accommodate a degree of development providing the above guidance is implemented to respect the key sensitivities and minimise landscape and visual impacts, including the site's relationship with neighbouring settlements, and its function and value as a rural setting and buffer. Further work is required to develop the masterplan for the site in line with the above guidance and a comprehensive landscape and visual impact assessment is required to guide the master planning process, including opportunities for mitigation and enhancement. There may be some significant landscape and visual impacts, although these are likely to relate to local landscape features and views.

Land South of Faversham



Open arable fields with shelterbelts, looking towards wooded ridgeline of the Blean

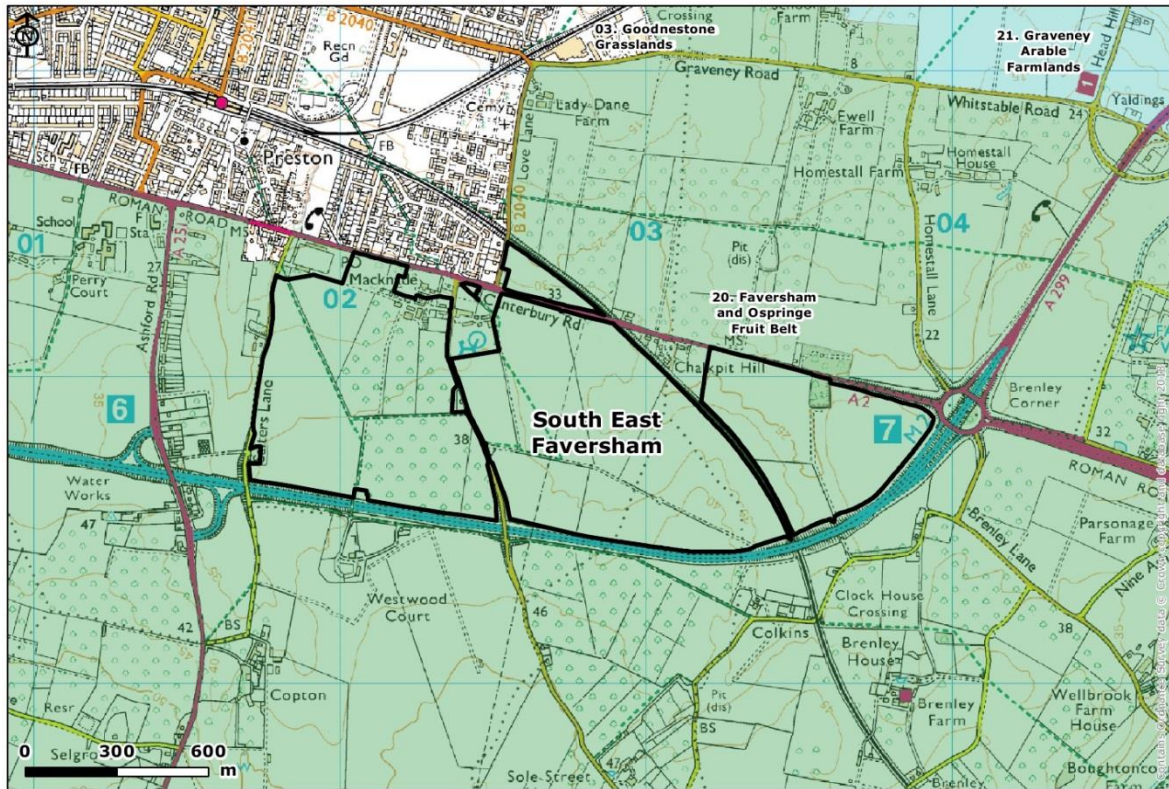


Blackcurrant production with spire of St Mary of Charity, Faversham and Isle of Sheppey in background

- 1.1 This short report provides an overview of the landscape context and sensitivities of the land south of Faversham which is being promoted by the Duchy of Cornwall as a new Garden Village for Swale in response to the New Garden Communities Prospectus.
- 1.2 The proposals comprise a mixed-use development, combining residential development (c. 2,500 dwellings) and 15-20,000 sq m of commercial/business/retail space, employing c. 2,500 people. Community facilities would be sited in the centre of the development, and existing uses of the site including Faversham Town FC and Faversham Cricket Club would be integrated into the site.
- 1.3 Greenspace would be provided through a series of linked landscaped spaces, green corridors, squares and pocket parks within the development and foot and cycle connections to Faversham and the surrounding countryside would be improved. Salters Lane and Selling Road would be retained and enhanced as rural roads. A linear park is proposed at the south of the site as a buffer to the M2, and will also provide public open space and areas for food growing.
- 1.4 This is a preliminary assessment based on a site visit and understanding of the landscape character context. Further detailed landscape and visual appraisal will be required as the proposal moves forward within the planning process.
- 1.5 The report covers:
 - Landscape and visual context/baseline
 - Evaluation - Key landscape and visual sensitivities
 - Commentary on initial landscape evidence provided by the developer
 - Outline landscape and visual guidance
 - Conclusion

Landscape and Visual Context / Baseline

- 1.6 The site comprises approximately 131ha of predominantly arable farmland to the south-east of Faversham, extending between the A2 and the M2, with a small area north of the A2. The site is crossed north-south by Selling Road and the London-Dover railway line, with Salter's Lane forming the site's western boundary. It does not contain any landscape or ecological designations. The south-east of the site is 250m from the Kent Downs AONB, while the north of the site is 1.5km from the Swale SPA, SSSI and Ramsar site.
- 1.7 The site falls within a single landscape character area: Faversham and Ospringe Fruit Belt (No.20).



Key Characteristics

- An agricultural landscape dominated by medium-scale undulating arable fields, blackcurrant production and some areas of orchard, with an open character.
- Limited localised enclosure provided by straight poplar and alder shelterbelts within the fields and a fragmented and limited hedgerow network along Salters Lane and Selling Road.
- The church tower of St Mary of Charity, Faversham (Grade I listed) is a landmark skyline feature in some views to the north.
- The wooded ridgeline of the Blean (Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level) to the east provides a scenic rural backdrop in views from the site. There are views to the Isle of Sheppey to the north from the site, with wind turbines prominent.
- The eastern part of the site, including the land north of the A2 is more undulating than the western areas. There is a localised higher point (40m) adjacent to the M2.
- The site is enclosed by major transport corridors of the M2, A2 and London-Dover railway, which impinge on tranquillity within the site. There is no public access in the east of the site with an absence of PRoWs.
- The site contains the Macknade farm complex and Faversham Cricket club. The site is adjacent to residential properties at Chalkpit Hill, the Macknade Fine Foods complex, Faversham Town FC and the Waste Recycling Centre on the western side of Salters Lane.
- An electricity transmission line runs north-east to south-west through the site, to the east of Selling Road.

Visual receptors

- Visual receptors comprise passing views from the three public footpaths which traverse the site, together with users of rural lanes Salters Lane and Selling Road. Motorists on the A2 will also

have passing views, although much of the site is screened by roadside vegetation. Passing views are also possible from the railway. Views would also be possible for employees and visitors to the Macknade Fine Foods facility, as well as users of the Faversham Town FC and Faversham Cricket Club facilities, the latter of which is a designated Local Green Space. There are individual private views from the houses which neighbour the site plus visual receptors on the Preston edge and interface with the site. There are no tourist attractions, promoted viewpoints or national trails within the site.

Landscape Value

- The site does not contain any national or local landscape designations; however it is adjacent to an Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level (south of the M2). The Kent Downs AONB is also located 250m from the south-east corner of the site.
- Recreational value includes three PRowS which cross the site (ZF21, ZF25 and ZF26) and the designation of Faversham Cricket Club as a Local Green Space. The site also has local landscape value as part of the rural landscape setting to the settlements of Faversham and Preston-next-Faversham. Salters Lane and Selling Road are locally designated Rural Lanes.
- Heritage assets include two listed buildings at Macknade – one within and one adjacent to the site boundary. One of these is an oast, which is a locally distinctive feature of this landscape. The site is also located adjacent to the Preston-next-Faversham Conservation Area to the west and 200m from the Faversham Conservation Area, to the north.

Evaluation

Key Landscape/Visual Sensitivities

- The flat to gently undulating landform that generally characterises the site is less sensitive, although local undulations and high points are more sensitive in terms of visual prominence and views that they offer.
- The blackcurrant production, apple orchards, linear shelterbelts and hedgerows along Selling Road are features of higher sensitivity. The open and partly exposed area with a simple pattern of medium-scale arable fields is less sensitive in terms of land cover and scale.
- Distinctive line of poplar/alder shelterbelts which break up the landscape.
- Small pockets of greater tranquillity and a more rural character notably along Selling Road and the footpaths are of higher sensitivity. The majority of the site is affected by road and rail noise to varying degrees, resulting in low levels of tranquillity.
- The role of the site in providing rural separation between Faversham/Preston-next-Faversham and the M2 and providing the rural/agricultural setting of Faversham.
- Important views include the long views out of the site to the scenic wooded ridgeline of the Blean to the east (Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level) and to the elevated ground of the Isle of Sheppey in the north, and views across the site to the church tower of St Mary of Charity at Faversham.
- The well vegetated London-Dover railway provides a green corridor through the intensively farmed landscape.

Summary

- 1.8 The main sensitivities of this site relate to its function as a rural landscape and setting to Faversham and specifically the Conservation Area of Preston-next-Faversham, and its relationship with the wider rural area including the Blean ridgeline backdrop and Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level south of the M2. The key sensitive attributes of the site are the remaining hedgerows along Selling Road and linear poplar and alder shelterbelts, the variety in agricultural land cover provided by blackcurrant growing and the apple orchards, and the limited isolated areas of more rural and tranquil character between the transport corridors. The area forms part of the traditional productive agricultural setting to the market town of Faversham.

Commentary on landscape evidence provided by the scheme promotor

- 1.8 This section provides an assessment of the initial landscape information and evidence provided by the developer in their submission to Swale BC (Land South of Faversham: New Garden Communities Prospectus Submission to Swale Borough Council).
- 1.9 Appendix 6 'A Preliminary Landscape and Visual Appraisal' prepared by LDA Design is a relatively detailed study for this stage, and provides a good and accurate level of landscape background and commentary on landscape character and visual impact.

Landscape

- 1.10 The preliminary appraisal correctly identifies the site's relationship to the Kent Downs AONB and Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level south of the M2, and the presence of designated Rural Lanes and Local Green Space. The study places the site within the Faversham and Ospringe Fruit Belt (LCA 20) and correctly records its condition as 'Good' and sensitivity as 'Moderate'.
- 1.11 The framework plans (page 23 and 24 of the principal submission document) include a network of roads and green corridors, linking the site to Faversham along existing pedestrian and cycle routes and into the countryside to the south. One green corridor is centred along the existing route of footpath ZF21. It is unclear what would happen to footpaths ZF25 and ZF26 which are currently within the site. Improved access will be needed for the pedestrian and cycle access south of the M2 into the Kent Downs AONB and Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level.
- 1.12 Further green infrastructure is shown in the framework plan, which indicates that greens, squares, pocket parks, allotments and orchards will be integrated throughout the development. A linear park is proposed immediately adjacent to the M2, which will act as a buffer visually, aurally and for air quality. Salters Lane and Selling Road Rural Lanes will be retained and enhanced. It is unclear at this stage how the increased volumes of traffic generated by the proposal would be controlled along the lanes and how their rural character would be retained.
- 1.13 There is a positive section on the relationship between the new development and Faversham. This includes improving pedestrian and cycling connectivity between Faversham and the surrounding countryside, through the new development. It is envisaged that Faversham and the new development will be 'mutually supportive'. The submission document does not provide detail on the envisaged relationship between the site and the Kent Downs AONB, apart from improved access (presumably pedestrian/cycling rather than vehicular). The cited aims on page 32 to reduce noise from the M2 may also benefit the AONB. The LDA Design report makes reference to the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement. These documents should be further referred to in more detailed master planning.
- 1.14 It is noted that there have been discussions with the developers of the proposed development at Preston Fields, and it is important that the landscape proposals are compatible, as well as proposed infrastructure, particularly in the treatment of designated Rural Lane Salters Lane. Consideration should be given to the cumulative impact of this development in relation to consented developments at Perry Court and Orchard Cottage, and the proposed North Street garden community south of the M2.
- 1.15 'Interventions to tame' the A2 are referenced throughout the proposal, but little detail is given on what these would be in practice. It is acknowledged that the proposals are still in development however more information is required on what this would comprise. The area north of the A2 is proposed to be a main square or street which will create the primary entrance to the development. This would work well to slow traffic along the A2, however further details are required as to the relationship between this main square/street and the existing housing to the west on the A2. Improvements to the A2 are also sited on page 32 as part of the work to improve air quality. Page 31 of the main submission proposal states that a 'key objective of the master planning process will be to avoid exacerbating air quality issues', especially in relation to the Ospringe AQMA, which is 1.4km west of the site. The impact of this development on the whole of the A2 around Faversham should be considered, not just the length which adjoins the site.
- 1.16 The railway line results in significant severance between the eastern and central parts of the site. Consideration of how this area will be integrated into the whole site is lacking at this stage. One

issue is whether the site can practically be developed east of the rail line which would potentially be an isolated area of land next to the motorway junction and could be more successfully used to create the sense of a rural approach to the town along the A2.

- 1.17 The appraisal concludes that there are no significant landscape constraints to prevent development of the site. It also concludes that the landscape proposals could mitigate adverse landscape effects and enhance local landscape character.

Visual

- 1.18 Viewpoints both within the site and outside the site are considered within the appraisal, which emphasises the importance of topography and shelterbelts in providing screening and filtering of views to the site.
- 1.19 The London-Dover railway is currently well screened via cutting and vegetated embankments, and the development should aim to continue this.
- 1.20 The appraisal concludes that there is no significant visual constraint to prevent development of the site, and that the landscape proposals could mitigate adverse visual effects.

Guidance

- 1.21 If this site proposal was to be progressed through the planning process a detailed landscape masterplan would need to be developed, accompanied by an LVIA. The LDA Preliminary Landscape and Visual Appraisal is a good foundation. From our understanding of the landscape and visual sensitivities the following opportunities are noted:
- SuDS should form one of the underpinning elements guiding the development of the site-wide green infrastructure network, with each individual block of development served by and designed around naturalistic swales, attenuation and retention ponds. Comments are made regarding the provision of sustainable drainage infrastructure throughout the framework plan, although this is not particularly apparent at the scale of the existing framework plan.
 - Careful consideration should be given to the treatment of the current landform, to ensure the subtle undulations are not lost within the development. Landform can be used to focus views either being left open where views can be appreciated or marked by appropriate landmarks.
 - Maintain, restore and extend the hedgerow and shelterbelt network, including planning for the next generation of hedgerow trees, and the poplar and alder shelterbelts.
 - Integrate designated Rural Lanes into the new settlements, ensuring their special rural qualities are conserved and enhanced. Utilise the character and qualities of existing rural lanes in designing new roads within the site, to contribute to maintaining their local distinctiveness and a sense of rurality.
 - The provision of edible streets, community orchards and allotments as part of the GI network is to be welcomed, particularly in light of the existing and historical prevalence of fruit-growing within this landscape. The emerging masterplan should consider opportunities to retain or partially retain and integrate the existing apple orchard in the west of the site.
 - The layout of green space provided throughout the development should also be designed for net biodiversity gain. The well vegetated railway corridor should be maintained and enhanced.
 - Aim to maintain existing relatively dark night skies by carefully considering the site-wide lighting strategy (both adopted and non-adopted roads and footways), utilising the latest technology to minimise light spill and glare, including on the Rural Lanes. This is particularly important in relation to the proposed development at Preston Fields.
 - Consider incorporating important and locally distinctive skyline features and views within the general layout and design of key vistas e.g. maintain the open views to the Blean wooded ridgeline to the east, and to the Isle of Sheppey to the north; maintain and focus views to St Mary of Charity, Faversham.

- Consider opportunities for the area east of the rail line and options for maintaining the rural approach to Faversham along the A2.

Conclusion

- 1.22 It is considered that overall landscape sensitivity of this area is moderate/low-moderate. It does not contain any national or local landscape designations, although is in proximity to the AONB to the south of the M2. Should the above opportunities be implemented, it could potentially be possible to mitigate many of the landscape and visual impacts of a development in this location, although there may remain some significant impacts on the local landscape features and views. Nevertheless, a development of this size would significantly alter the relationship of Faversham with its rural setting and potentially impinge on the setting of the AONB. The site would function more as an urban extension than a discrete garden settlement (albeit that it is capable of being planned on 'garden' principles). The impact on the character of the historic market town of Faversham has not been considered as part of this study. The cumulative impact of this new settlement with other developments on the south and east edges of the town would be a key issue to be considered in developing the proposal.

Land at Ashford Road, North Street, Sheldwich



View south-east across site from Plumford Road

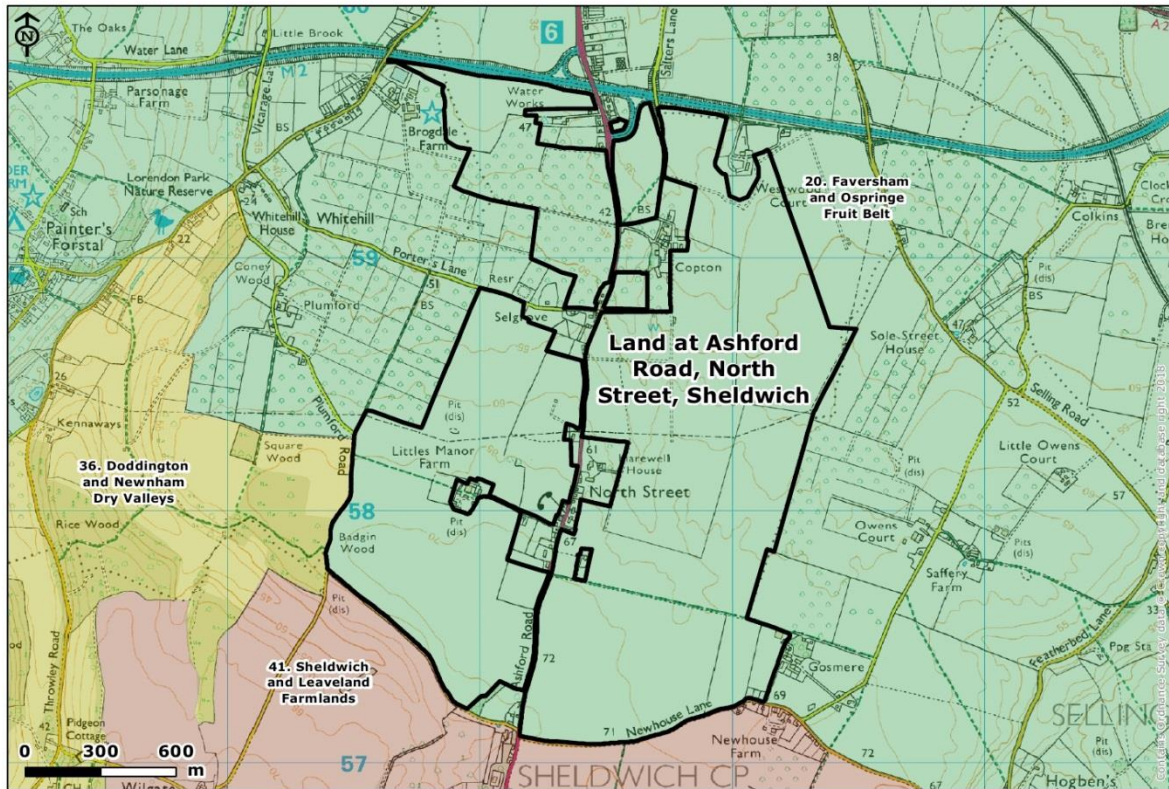


View north-west towards North Street/A251

- 1.1 This short report provides an overview of the landscape context and sensitivities of the land at Ashford Road, North Street, Sheldwich which is being promoted by Gladman Developments as a new Garden Village for Swale in response to the New Garden Communities Prospectus.
- 1.2 The proposals for the site comprise c. 5,000 residential dwellings, business/commercial land and community facilities (education and leisure). New 'spine roads' on either side of the existing A251 are proposed, with a new roundabout junction onto the M2 west of J6. Greenspace provision would comprise public open space, linked green spaces, allotments and a community orchard. A new country park would connect the south of the site to the Kent Downs AONB providing a rural edge along Newhouse Lane. The construction would be phased. The boundaries of the site are constrained by the M2 and AONB to the north and south, and by orchards / National Fruit Collection to the east and west.
- 1.3 This is a preliminary assessment based on a site visit and understanding of the landscape character context. Further detailed landscape and visual appraisal will be required should the proposal move forward within the planning process.
- 1.4 The report covers:
 - Landscape and visual context/baseline
 - Evaluation - Key landscape and visual sensitivities
 - Commentary on initial landscape evidence provided by the developer
 - Outline landscape and visual guidance
 - Conclusion

Landscape and Visual Context/ Baseline

- 1.5 The site comprises 317 ha of predominately open arable farmland, extending south from the M2 to Newhouse Lane, surrounding the small settlements of Copton and North Street. The A251 runs through the centre of the site. The site is within an Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level and is enclosed to the west, south and east by the Kent Downs AONB and its characteristic landform of rolling downland and woodland, cut by dry valleys.
- 1.6 The site falls within a single landscape character area: Faversham and Ospringe Fruit Belt (No.20).



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating landscape, comprising the lower dip slope of the Kent Downs, with a steady incline from around 35m AOD in the north rising to 72m AOD in the south of the site. The southern part of the site is generally flatter than the north, with less pronounced undulation.
- Large open fields, some of which have never been enclosed, in predominantly arable use with some areas of commercial fruit growing/orchards, plus occasional remnant poplar shelterbelts and gappy hedgerows.
- Mature hedgerows and trees line the A251.
- Long views south to Sheldwich church and its wooded backdrop (within the AONB). Views of parkland at Copton immediately south of the M2.
- Open and rural character, although transport corridors including the M2 and A251 reduce the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
- The openness allows long and expansive views from parts of the site to the Thames Estuary/Isle of Sheppey to the north and the wooded ridgeline of the Kent Downs AONB (notably Perrywood) to the south-east.
- Local areas of small scale residential development including the linear development of North Street and sporadic housing along the rural lanes. A general absence of woodland, apart from occasional tree groups around larger houses.
- Some edges of the site, notably along Plumford Road, have a strong visual relationship with the surrounding Kent Downs AONB.

Visual receptors

- Visual receptors comprise passing views from the three public footpaths traversing the site, together with vehicular traffic along the A251 and minor lanes, including Salter's Lane, Porter's

Lane, Newhouse Lane and Plumford Road. Many individual private views are possible from the residential properties within and adjacent to the site. There are no promoted viewpoints, national trails or notable recreational areas (e.g. country parks or local public green space) within the site. Brogdale, home of the National Fruit Collection, is located on the western boundary of the proposed development. It is the focus for a number of festivals and events including visitor tours through the surrounding orchards.

Landscape value

- The site lies almost wholly within the locally designated Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level, and is adjacent to the Kent Downs AONB, which comprises the land to the south and west of Newhouse Lane and Plumford Road. The site represents some special characteristics and qualities of the surrounding AONB through its long-range views from the dip slope. It is important as part of the setting of the AONB providing rural separation/buffer from the M2 and Faversham to the north.
- The site is adjacent to the Belmont Local Wildlife Site and Badgin Wood, ancient woodland and also a Local Wildlife Site. The Plumford Road Roadside Nature Reserve is present on the southern boundary of the site. Salter's Lane and Porter's Lane, which run partially within the site, are both designated locally as Rural Lanes.
- Heritage value is represented by the adjacent Sheldwich Conservation Area and groups of listed buildings within North Street, Copton, Gosmere Farm and Newhouse Farm, including the Grade I listed Copton Manor. 330m south of the site is Lees Court Registered Park and Garden, listed at Grade II.
- The site has some recreational value, via the limited network of three PRoWs which cross the site (ZF20, ZR393 and ZR394). The site forms a rural setting to the settlements of North Street, Copton, Gosmere and Sheldwich.

Evaluation

Key Landscape/Visual Sensitivities

- The rural landscape as a whole is sensitive in providing separation and a rural setting between Faversham and the nationally designated AONB, which is of high scenic quality. It forms part of the dip slope setting of the AONB, including representation of some AONB special qualities.
- In landform terms alone the more pronounced and undulating landform in northern parts of the site (with characteristics of dry chalk valleys) is of greater inherent sensitivity than the flat to gently undulating landform that characterises the southern part of the site; however, the southern area has a stronger relationship to the surrounding AONB, forming its immediate setting.
- The predominantly open and exposed areas of large scale arable fields are less sensitive in terms of land cover and scale but also have high visibility within the surrounding landscape and local settlements at North Street and Sheldwich and the AONB
- The locally designated rural lanes within and adjacent to the site are features of higher sensitivity in terms of the contribution they make to landscape pattern and complexity, visual character and time depth.
- The ancient woodland at Badgin Wood, which is situated adjacent to the site boundary on the western side of Plumford Road, and occasional infield clumps of trees and hedgerows including mature oak and ash plus remnant orchard trees are features of higher sensitivity.
- The traditionally grazed parkland (unregistered) around Copton Manor house (Grade I listed) in the north of the site has scenic quality and significant time depth, and is consequently of higher sensitivity. The predominantly undeveloped skylines within and surrounding the site, occasionally punctuated by locally distinctive landmarks such as isolated oasthouses (e.g. Littles Manor Farm) and church towers (e.g. Church of St James, Sheldwich) are more sensitive to development because new buildings/structures may detract from these skylines as features in the landscape.

- The undeveloped rural character of the site provides a scenic backdrop and setting to the settlements of North Street and Sheldwich (also a designated Conservation Area), which increases the sensitivity of the landscape.
- A number of important views are present, including the long views north to the Isle of Sheppey and Thames Estuary, east and south-east to the wooded ridgeline of the Blean and Perrywood from the more elevated south of the site; and shorter range views to the adjacent AONB from Plumford Road.
- Areas of relative tranquillity exist within the site, predominantly away from the road noise of the M2 and A251 (e.g. along Plumford Road and Porter's Lane), which are of higher sensitivity.

Summary

- 1.7 The main landscape and visual sensitivities relate to its function as a rural landscape (locally designated as an Area of High Landscape Value – Kent Level), part of the chalk dip slope and proximity to/as the setting for the Kent Downs AONB, which surrounds the site to the west, south and east. The key sensitive attributes are its openness and visual exposure which allow for some long views into and from the site, including to and from the AONB; isolated areas of more pronounced undulating topography and more complex landscape pattern, hedgerows and mature trees; some areas of tranquillity; proximity to ancient woodland at Badgin Wood and a number of designated heritage assets, including the Sheldwich Conservation Area. There is no precedent in Swale for development on the dip slope of the chalk downs of such a size and scale and there are few opportunities for integration of development in this relatively open and visually exposed landscape.

Commentary on landscape information provided by the developer

- 1.8 This section provides an assessment of the initial landscape information and evidence provided by the developer in their submissions to Swale BC (A Garden Village for Swale Vision Document).

Landscape

- 1.9 The relevant designations applicable to the site and its surroundings have been identified within the submission, together with a broad description of its landscape features within the Opportunities and Constraints section of the submission document. However, there are few explicit references to landscape character, and no reference to the landscape character area within which the site lies; or to the adopted Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal SPD. Further information is required on how the emerging masterplan design responds to landscape character and provides opportunities to strengthen and enhance the existing landscape resource.
- 1.10 Given the proximity of the AONB, further detail is required on how the proposal would affect or conserve the setting of the AONB and identified special characteristics and qualities. These not only relate to views and visual impacts but also the proximity and potential greater pressures and recreational use and how these would be managed. The document does not provide any information on how impacts on the AONB and AHLV would be addressed or mitigated, other than some broad areas of buffer planting around the site. A new country park is proposed to connect the south of the site to the Kent Downs AONB providing a rural edge along Newhouse Lane – this could provide some level of landscape buffer but detail on this is very sparse in existing documentation. However, the potential for providing a better wooded buffer along the southern edge of the site in relation to existing woodland within the AONB is a positive attribute.
- 1.11 A further omission within the document relates to the locally designated rural lanes, and how their particular scenic character and other attributes would be conserved and integrated within the proposed development.

Visual

- 1.12 A short high-level summary of views is included which makes a very broad conclusion that the site is visually very well contained. There is no real acknowledgement at this stage of potential visual impacts on existing residential receptors within the surrounding settlements. This would need to be supported by a more detailed LVIA to feed into design and mitigation. In our opinion, this site is not well contained visually and its openness and exposure is one of its characteristics.
- 1.13 Overall, the gently undulating landform, including some extensive flat areas, coupled with the general openness of the landscape, offers limited opportunities to screen new development via existing topography and landcover. Conversely, it is fair to say that the majority of the site is not significantly overlooked by larger settlements or from areas of higher ground. Key locations that would need further in-depth assessment as part of an LVIA would include the settlements along North Street / A251 which the proposed development would enclose; Sheldwich village, Wilgate Green and neighbouring PRowS within the AONB, and possibly Selling village as well as potential visual impacts in relation to receptors at Brogdale. The south-western corner of the site along Plumford Road is exposed and forms a prominent skyline in longer views from the edge of Wilgate Green, to the south-west.
- 1.14 Mitigation options are noted as new woodland screening planting and landscaped open space buffers around the site boundaries. This is shown to an extent on the indicative masterplan, although the new screening/buffering is limited along the eastern and western site boundaries. Further consideration is needed on how to 'fit' buffer planting into this more open landscape.

Guidance

- 1.15 If this site proposal was to be progressed through the planning process a detailed landscape masterplan would need to be developed, accompanied by an LVIA. From our understanding of the landscape and visual sensitivities the following opportunities are noted:

- The proposed primary SuDS corridor running north-south through the site, utilising the subtle natural fall in levels, represents a strong foundation from which to develop the site-wide green infrastructure network. Each individual block of development would also be expected to be served by and designed around naturalistic swales, attenuation and retention ponds.
- The landscape and open space buffering to the M2 and AONB proposed is logical. However, whilst the principle of a new country park has merit, it could be argued that an additional location further north within the site would better serve existing communities around Faversham with enhanced access to green space, in addition to the new communities to be created. In its current location the country park and proposed playing fields provide a very narrow buffer/transition to the AONB and the Sheldwich Conservation Area.
- At present, the indicative masterplan indicates a relatively hard built-up edge along some of the site boundaries, particularly in the east. This would represent a harsh contrast to the adjacent commercial orchards and farmland, and should be suitably buffered. This may require a reduced development area to allow effective landscape integration within the existing scheme boundaries and/or alternative land management/purchase surrounding the development site to allow for planting.
- The provision of community orchards and allotments as part of the GI network is to be welcomed, particularly in light of the historic fruit-growing within this landscape. However, the masterplan indicates only one discrete community orchard, relatively isolated from the main residential areas. There is an opportunity to integrate traditionally managed, low-intensity orchards much more widely within the site, connected with a new hedgerow and woodland network.
- There are opportunities to increase woodland cover, where appropriate, to limit visual impact and enhance habitat diversity and connectivity. The neighbouring ancient woodland within Badgin Wood is irreplaceable (NPPF para 175) and it is noted that a woodland and open space buffer to new development is shown on the indicative masterplan. Current Natural England and Forestry Commission standing advice states mitigation measures could include leaving an appropriate buffer zone of semi-natural habitat between the development and the ancient woodland or tree (depending on the size of the development, a minimum buffer should be at least 15 metres).
- There are opportunities to restore and extend the hedgerow network, including planning for the next generation of hedgerow trees.
- Integrate designated Rural Lanes into the new settlements, ensuring their special rural qualities are conserved and enhanced. Utilise the character and qualities of existing rural lanes in designing new roads within the site, to contribute to maintaining local distinctiveness and a sense of rurality.
- There is little commentary at this stage on how the masterplan and overall design principles would mitigate for the significant increase in vehicular traffic and associated noise that the development would likely generate, in terms of the loss of existing sense of tranquillity within this landscape. The existing road network within the site would be significantly extended by the proposal, including by new primary 'spine' roads.
- The aim should be to maintain existing relatively dark night skies by carefully considering the site-wide lighting strategy (both adopted and non-adopted roads and footways), utilising the latest technology to minimise light spill and glare. This is particularly important for the areas in closer proximity to the AONB.
- Preserve the predominantly undeveloped skyline character of the surrounding AONB by providing separation, buffering and stepped heights to new built-form in the southern part of the site (it is noted that this is proposed, to an extent). Other skyline sensitivities relate to the Church of St.James, Sheldwich and its associated Conservation Area; again, relating to the southern site boundary.
- Incorporate important and locally distinctive skyline features and views within the general layout and design of key vistas, e.g. maintain the long views north to the Thames Estuary and Isle of Sheppey, and east / south-east to the wooded high ground of the Blean and Perrywood.

Conclusion

- 1.16 This is a challenging site for a new garden village development being both in the setting of the AONB and within a local landscape designation. It is considered to be a landscape of moderate-high sensitivity, as well as being visually exposed. In Swale, there is no precedent of urban development climbing the dip slope transition between the coastal plain, fruit belt and chalk downs of the AONB. Currently urban development is limited to the North Kent Plain, relating to the Thames Estuary-Medway/Swale edge (Medway Towns, Sittingbourne and Faversham). A development of this size in this location would introduce urban features in an otherwise open, visually exposed rural landscape. Even if all the guidance outlined above was implemented, there would remain the substantive issue of the effective loss of the rural landscape separation and setting between Faversham and the AONB, and development within an area locally designated for its landscape value. It is likely that such a development would generate significant landscape impacts with relatively limited opportunities for mitigation.