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*Expert Landscape Consultancy*

## Landscape and Visual Appraisal

*for*  
Residential Development  
*at*  
Highfield Road, Halfway,  
Isle of Sheppey

*Prepared for*  
New Homes and Land

*LPA*  
Swale Borough Council

December 2020



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File name: 1156 R01 Highfield Road LVA Final.docx

Date issued: 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Status: FINAL

Revision: 1

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## 1 Executive Summary

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- 1.1 The development that is the subject of this Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) is an outline planning application for 19 residential dwellings on land off Highfield Road, Halfway, Isle of Sheppey (the site).
- 1.2 The site is located on the southern edge of Halfway on the north eastern facing slope of an unnamed ridge. It lies within an area designated in the Local Plan as an Important Local Countryside Gap (ILCG). The site is an irregular shape with a western extension ('western area') located close to the summit of the ridge. The remainder of the site is located at lower levels as the slope falls toward the north east. A number of tree groups, found along the site's perimeter and at the southern end, enclose the site.
- 1.3 The site lies within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 13 Central Sheppey Farmlands, an area identified as having moderate sensitivity to development due in part to the visual prominence of the hills across the area. The Swale Urban Extension Landscape Capacity (Landscape Capacity Study) identifies the key potential issue with development in this area as visibility from the sensitive marshland that lies to the south. The Study notes that development located north of the ridge would not be visible from the south and consequently areas located to the north of the ridge are identified as having greater capacity to accommodate change. The Study also identifies views from Furze Hill as sensitive.
- 1.4 To inform the extent of development and height limits within the Parameters Plan, a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis has been undertaken. The analysis illustrates that two-storey development which did not extend beyond the start of the western area would not be visible from the south or from Furze Hill. The results of the ZTV analysis have been reflected in the Parameters Plan and as a result development has been restricted to the northern part of the site where it would meet the guidelines for development established in the Landscape Capacity Study. Development would be situated '*behind*' the ridgeline so that it was not visible from the south, and it would '*utilise and strengthen the existing vegetation structure*', as shown in the Landscape Strategy (Figure 14), which would screen development from the south. The development would not impact upon the wider character of the Central Sheppey Farmlands or disrupt the undeveloped character of the unnamed ridge which itself is a defining feature of the Farmlands. It would achieve the relevant guidelines for the Central Sheppey Farmlands and strengthen one of its key characteristics via the planting of a new orchard.

- 1.5 Development on the site would be adjacent to the western side of the Oasis Academy and, along with a housing allocation/development north west of the Academy, which is nearing completion, would consolidate the existing connection between Minster and Halfway. As demonstrated in the ZTV analysis, development would not be visible from the south of the unnamed ridge and the integrity of the treed horizon which currently separates Halfway from Minister in views from the south would be unaffected. The degree to which Minster and Halfway are perceived as having separate identities would not be affected as it would not be possible to appreciate any reduction in the separation between the two settlements.
- 1.6 The local landscape character has **medium/low susceptibility** to the scheme proposed as it can be accommodated without harm to local landscape policies or strategies. The site is located in a landscape with **medium value**. Sensitivity is **medium**.
- 1.7 The magnitude of change to the local landscape character overall would be **low** and the effect would be **minor adverse**. This is primarily as a result of the loss of some vegetation within the site and the replacement of views of this vegetation with new houses from a short section of Highfield Road. The proposed orchard and tree planting within the site are positive landscape changes and provide mitigation for the loss of the undeveloped farmland and vegetation within the site.
- 1.8 Members of the public who would notice a change to views and visual amenity are people driving and walking along Highfield Road. The replacement of views of vegetation and an informal track with a larger formal entrance, access and new houses represents a **low** magnitude of change in the context of existing development along Highfield Rd. The effect on the visual amenity for people using Highfield Road would be **minor adverse**.
- 1.9 As required by Policy DM 24 the development would minimise and mitigate adverse landscape impacts; and has been informed by the Council's Urban Extension Landscape Capacity Study and Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal SPD.
- 1.10 The separate identities and character of settlements would be maintained as is required by the purposes of the ILCG (Policy DM 25). The proposal would result in the loss of a small area of open and undeveloped land which currently has a rural character. However due to the contained nature of the site and the location of the proposed houses within it, harm to the open and rural character across the wider ILCG has been avoided.
- 1.11 Overall, the development is considered to be consistent with National and Development Plan polices relating to landscape matters.

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## 2 Introduction

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### *Introduction*

- 2.1 The development that is the subject of this Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) is an outline planning application for 19 residential dwellings on land off Highfield Road, Halfway, Isle of Sheppey.
- 2.2 The key drawings and documents on which this LVA is based are:
- Site Location, Drwg No. 1602.001, 29/11/2020 prepared by JB Planning (submitted for approval).
  - Parameter Plan, Drwg No. 1602.002, 29/11/2020 prepared by JB Planning (submitted for approval).
  - Illustrative Site Layout Plan, Drwg No. 1602.003, 29/11/2020 prepared by JB Planning.
  - Arboricultural Survey Impact Assessment & Method Statement (AIA) prepared by Owen Allpress.

### *Landscape and Visual Appraisal Methodology*

- 2.3 The methodology used in the preparation of this LVA is attached as **Appendix 3**. The methodology is based on the principles set out by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management Assessment in the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment 2013 (GLVIA3)*, and guidance from Natural England in *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014*. As a standalone assessment, i.e. an assessment that does not form part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), this report is described as a Landscape and Visual Appraisal, in accordance with GLVIA3.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> GLVIA3 Paragraph 3.2

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### 3 Landscape Policy Context

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#### *Introduction*

- 3.1 This section identifies and summarises policy of relevance to the assessment of potential landscape and visual effects associated with the proposed development.

#### *National Planning Policy*

- 3.2 National Planning Policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (Revised February 2019) (NPPF) and is a material consideration in decision making.
- 3.3 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out the three overarching objectives of the planning system. These include an environmental objective to *'contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment...'* Paragraph 9 sets out that *'Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area'*.
- 3.3.1 The overarching objective to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment is reflected in specific policies about: achieving well-designed places (Section 12); conserving and enhancing the natural environment (Section 15); and conserving and enhancing the historic environment (Section 16). A number of the most relevant policies are set out below.
- 3.4 Paragraph 127 in Section 12 states that *'policies and decisions should ensure that developments (inter alia):*
- *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
  - *are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
  - *establish or maintain a strong sense of place'*
- 3.5 Paragraph 170 in Section 15 sets out that *'planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by' (inter alia):*

- *'protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*

### *The Development Plan*

3.6 The Development Plan comprises Bearing Fruits 2031: The Swale Borough Local Plan 2017. Policies most relevant to the determination of this application are set out in the Planning Statement. With regard to local landscape policy objectives, the development should:

- Minimise and mitigate adverse landscape impacts (DM 24)
- Be informed by the Council's Urban Extension Landscape Capacity Study and Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), (DM 24)
- Support the purposes of the Important Local Countryside Gap (DM 25) by:
  - maintaining the separate identities and character of settlements by preventing their merging;
  - safeguarding the open and undeveloped character of the areas; and
  - preventing encroachment and piecemeal erosion by built development or changes to the rural open character.

### *Summary*

3.7 The NPPF and the Development Plan require development to respond to local character including that within the built environment and the countryside and establish or maintain a strong sense of place and identity including by preventing merging of settlements.



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## 4 Landscape Baseline

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### *Site & Study Area*

- 4.1 Figures prepared in order to illustrate the landscape and visual context of the site are attached in **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2 The site covers 1.47ha of land which is currently used for grazing by horses. The wider study area is shown on **Figure 1**. This area was chosen to illustrate the context of the site within the wider landscape. The landscape and visual influence of the site is considerably more limited, and Viewpoint D shown on Figure 1, represents the only publicly accessible location from where the development would be both visible and noticeable (Highfield Rd).

### *National Character Area (Appendix 4)*

- 4.3 The site is located within NCA 81; Greater Thames Estuary. NCA 81 forms the eastern edge of the London basin and encompasses the South Essex and North Kent coastline. The NCA Summary description notes that *'There is a marked contrast between the wild and remote coastal marshes, and the industrial and urban developments which are highly visible in the low-lying landscape. A key challenge is to accommodate increasing development pressure in the area with the protection and enhancement of the natural landscape and its internationally important coastal habitats and species, and nationally important open mosaic habitat.'*<sup>2</sup>
- 4.4 The fourth Statement of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) is: *'Encourage a strategic approach to development that is informed by and makes a positive contribution to local character, incorporates green infrastructure which provides ecosystem services where they are needed most, and promotes recreation and addresses climate change, while maintaining important open mosaic and coastal habitats, and historic and geological features.'*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> NCA 81; Greater Thames Estuary Page 3

<sup>3</sup> NCA 81; Greater Thames Estuary Page 4

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*County Assessment (Appendix 5)*

- 4.5 The Landscape Assessment of Kent was published in 2004 (Kent Assessment). The Kent Assessment divides the Island of Sheppey into two landscape character areas, North Sheppey LCA and Swale Marshes LCA. The site is located within North Sheppey LCA which encompasses most of the low clay hills. Despite their low elevation they are '*prominent hills and cliffs*'<sup>4</sup> because of their location above alluvial marshes. Prior to the draining of the marshes Sheppey was known as the Isles of Sheppey with the principal isle formed by the line of hills on which the site is located.
- 4.6 North Sheppey LCA is described as having a distinctive character on account of being an island, which results in a sense of remoteness and exposure. Within North Sheppey LCA the '*ground rises quite rapidly from the marshes to the south and west and forms an area of complex topography before dropping steeply to the sea on its northern side.*' The current exposed and open character is identified as the result of loss of hedgerows and orchards due to arable cultivation, Dutch elm disease and coastal exposure.
- 4.7 Urban and industrial development to the north-west is described as '*visually exposed and poorly integrated*' and some residential and holiday development is also poorly integrated and intrusive.
- 4.8 North Sheppey LCA is assessed as having moderate sensitivity but being in very poor condition due to:
- poor survival of rural heritage features;
  - lack of hedgerows and trees;
  - exposed and open character; and
  - overwhelmingly recent settlement.
- 4.9 The landscape recommendation is to '*restore and create*'. Recommended actions include:
- Restore woodland to ridge tops;
  - Restore mature standards and hedgerow to the highway;
  - Encourage urban planting within built development;

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<sup>4</sup> The Landscape Assessment of Kent (no page numbers)

- Create urban edges which promote intermittent views of built development beyond; and
- Restore the prominence of heritage features in the view.<sup>5</sup>

*District Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix 6)*

- 4.10 The district assessment, Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in 2011 and is referred to in Policy DM24. It is a finer grain assessment than the Kent Assessment. The site is located within the Clay Farmlands LT and LCA 13 Central Sheppey Farmlands. (Figure 3)
- 4.11 Key Characteristics for LCA 13 Central Sheppey Farmlands include:
- *‘Ridge of London clay rising steeply to north;*
  - *Coastal views of estuary and windfarm;*
  - *Large-scale open predominantly arable landscape, with infrequent isolated orchards;*
  - *Remnant shelterbelts and fragments of over-mature hedgerows; and*
  - *Poor quality urban fringe developments including holiday parks.’<sup>6</sup>*
- 4.12 The assessment notes that *‘The Central Sheppey Farmlands are part of the London clay ridge that runs across the northern half of the Isle of Sheppey. It provides the area with a distinctive elevated relief.’<sup>7</sup>* The description notes that *‘At its western end the character area is punctuated by the prominent Furze and Barrow Hills.’<sup>8</sup>* The description reiterates the Kent Assessment with regard to land use and exposure but notes that there are smaller fields to the north and east with larger ones to the south and west *‘associated with former drove roads from the higher, drier land out onto the summer grazing of the marshland’.<sup>9</sup>*
- 4.13 The condition is described as poor, in particular due to the exposed and denuded character but it is noted that *‘Woodland planting in association with recent housing development on the periphery of Minster helps to soften the urban edge.’<sup>10</sup>* The landscape is described as

<sup>5</sup> The Landscape Assessment of Kent (no page numbers)

<sup>6</sup> Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal Page 51

<sup>7</sup> Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal Page 51

<sup>8</sup> Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal Page 51

<sup>9</sup> Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal Page 51

<sup>10</sup> Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal Page 51

moderately sensitive. The prominent hills are considered to be important and highly sensitive landscape features that cannot easily absorb development. Elsewhere the *‘undulating landform of some areas provides a more intimate and enclosed character. Further limited development could be absorbed but should be well integrated and make a positive contribution to the coherence of the landscape.’*

- 4.14 An overarching approach (guidelines) to the management of each LCA based upon its condition and sensitivity is provided in the assessment. The guidelines for the Central Sheppey Farmlands LCA are ‘Restore and Create’ and include the following:
- *‘Maintain remaining landscape features and look for opportunities to restore or create a stronger landscape structure (trees, shelterbelts, hedgerows, drains, ponds, traditional orchards and woodlands) within denuded areas.*
  - *Look for opportunities to integrate development, including harsh edges and road corridors, through planting.*
  - *Avoid proposals that would be unduly prominent in highly visible locations, such as undeveloped south, east and west facing slopes and limit ribbon development<sup>11</sup>.*

#### *Local Landscape Character & Application Site*

- 4.15 The site is located on the southern edge of Halfway on the north eastern facing slope of an unnamed ridge (summit, 41m AOD) (**Figure 2**). Development within Halfway sits to the north of, and lower than the ridge and is therefore not visible from the south. The ridge forms a treed horizon when looking towards it from the A2500 (**Viewpoints A & B**). Two telecommunications masts are located on the ridge and these, together with some low-level activity (including sheds and vehicles), detract from the overall impression of an otherwise undeveloped, wooded skyline. The unnamed ridge extends south west, falling slightly before rising to Furze Hill (42m AOD); a local landmark and one of very few undeveloped hills on Sheppey crossed by a PRoW.
- 4.16 The site sits just off the summit of the unnamed ridge and slopes from a high point of 40m AOD in the south western corner to 30m AOD on the eastern boundary in the northern part of the site. The site is an irregular shape with the main body of the site orientated north south. There is a western extension, perpendicular, to the main body of the site which is the most elevated part of the site. This ‘western area’ (**Figure 4**) has an elevation of

<sup>11</sup> Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal Page 51

between 36-40m AOD. The north south body of the site extends south of the western area but is generally lower, the highest point at the south western corner is 37.5m AOD.

- 4.17 The majority of the site is used for horse grazing and a couple of dilapidated sheds associated with this use are found along the eastern boundary. The site includes an existing vehicle access track, which connects the site with Highfield Road. A small part of number 37 Highfield Rd is also. Included in order to accommodate the proposed vehicle access which is wider than the existing access track. (**Figure 4**)
- 4.18 Across the site are a number of tree groups and some individual Category B trees, notably in the centre, where a mature eucalyptus and a number of semi-mature horse chestnut trees are found. These trees are not visible beyond the site. The larger tree groups are mostly found along the site's perimeter, where they enclose the site. The largest tree group (G3) (**Figure 4**) is comprised of mostly hawthorn trees (<6m in height) and is found in the southern part of the site. Trees within this group and the hedgerow on the southern boundary are seen as part of the overall treed horizon in views from the A2550 (**Viewpoints A & B**). The effect of the site's enclosure by perimeter vegetation on the potential visibility of development within the site is discussed in section 6 below.
- 4.19 The eastern boundary of the site adjoins the Oasis Academy. Inside the Academy grounds, alongside the site boundary is a dense tree belt. This belt runs north south and extends beyond the site to the south (**Figure 4**). The Academy buildings sit on land that slopes to the east. Although visible from the south on the skyline they are not prominent. (**Viewpoint A**)
- 4.20 The western site boundary adjoins the Southdown Reservoir (underground) and west of that are residential properties along Southdown Road. South west of the reservoir, and immediately northwest of the 'western area' is one of the telecommunications masts. Immediately south of the site are a number of grazing paddocks. A cluster of small sheds, vehicles, and what appears to be a stable block lie immediately next to the site's south western corner. (labelled as 'stables' on **Figure 4**)
- 4.21 South east of the site is land with consent for residential development of 700 dwellings, Application 18/503135/OUT, (the consented scheme). (**Figure 1**) Between the consented scheme and the site, tree belts and hedgerows add to the treed character of the unnamed ridge (**Viewpoints A & B**).

### *Landscape Value*

- 4.22 The site is not located within any national or local designations but is within an Important Local Countryside Gap (ILCG) (Policy DM25) (Figure 1). 450m to the north, beyond housing within Halfway, is the Swale Level Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV). 1.1km to the south, south of Lower Road, is the Kent Level AHLV (as identified in The Swale Borough Local Plan 2017, Policy DM24) (Figure 1).
- 4.23 The assessment of value recommended in GLVIA3 Box 5.1 is useful in determining which aspects of a site /landscape are important to protect or enhance.
- **Landscape Quality (condition):** The county landscape assessment identified the condition of the landscape to be very poor and the district assessment identified it as poor. The site is mostly unmanaged save for occasional grazing activity but does contain some Cat B vegetation. **Medium/low**
  - **Scenic Quality:** The unnamed ridge upon which the site is located gives the impression of a mostly undeveloped, wooded skyline which is an attractive feature of views, particularly from the south (A2500). The expansive open marshes south of Lower Road, and, in the far distance, the North Downs are attractive features in the elevated views looking out from within southern parts of the site. Together, these attractive features contribute to the **Medium/High** scenic quality of the local landscape in which the site is located.
  - **Representativeness:** The site and the surrounding landscape are representative of the local landscape character. **Medium**
  - **Rarity:** This is not a rare landscape within Sheppey. **Low**
  - **Conservation Interests:** There are no known areas or features of conservation interest within the site or its local context. **Low**
  - **Recreation Value:** There is no public access to the site and little public access to the surrounding landscape. **Low**
  - **Perceptual Aspects:** The long views from the unnamed ridge (including from within the southern part of the site) of the marshes and beyond to the North Downs, adds to the positive perceptual qualities of the site. **Medium**
  - **Associations:** No known associations with the site and its immediate landscape.
- 4.24 Overall, the value of the landscape comprising the site and its local context is considered to be **medium**.

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## 5 Landscape Capacity Study

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- 5.1 The Swale Urban Extension Landscape Capacity Study, 2010 (Landscape Capacity Study) was undertaken to support the preparation of the Local Plan. It includes the site within Study Area 24 South of Minster. (Appendix 7) This area also includes the aforementioned consented site.
- 5.2 The conclusion of the Landscape Capacity Study was that the key issue for Study Area 24 was visibility *'from the highly sensitive marshland to the south'* and therefore to *'avoid proposals that would be unduly prominent in highly visible locations'*. The study also references Furze Hill as a distinct feature and one which is *'visually prominent and therefore highly sensitive'*. Although not mentioned in the study the wider ridge, which includes the unnamed ridge alongside the site, is also visually prominent. Land north of the ridge and Furze Hill is not visible from the south.
- 5.3 Within Study Area 24 some capacity to accommodate change is identified on land which is *'visually contained to the north of Furze Hill'*. The Landscape Capacity Study states that it would *'perhaps be acceptable to extend the southern residential edge of Minster/Halfway slightly where the land is physically and visually contained to the north of Furze Hill'*. The study recommends that any further residential development in this area is:
- Situated behind the ridgeline and is not visible in views from the south;
  - A maximum of two storeys, and;
  - That it utilises existing vegetation structure for development to sit within.

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## 6 Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis

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- 6.1 For the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis refer **Appendix 2**.
- 6.2 To inform the Parameters Plan, a ZTV analysis was undertaken. Initially, the analysis was used in order to understand the potential visibility of single (4.5m) and two-storey (7.5m) development across different parts of the site. The ZTV used a digital surface model (DSM) which included buildings, structures and vegetation within the site and up to 1,500m from it. **Figure A** in Appendix 2 shows the location of eight ‘test locations’ used to run the analysis. These were evenly distributed within the site, across open areas. No test locations were used for the western area, as this area was deemed unsuitable for residential development at the outset, being too close to the ridge summit.
- 6.3 The results of the initial ZTV analysis are shown on **Figures B-I**. Areas shaded in red on these figures show where a single storey dwelling, or the lower levels of a two-storey dwelling, are likely to be visible. Areas shaded in blue show where only the upper parts of a two-storey building (above 4.5 m so predominantly roofs) are likely to be visible. The visibility shown on each of the figures relates to a building located at each of the test locations identified on Figure A.
- 6.4 The analysis illustrates that two-storey development which did not extend beyond the start of the western area (Test Location 3A) would not be visible from the south or from Furze Hill. (**Figure E**) The lack of visibility to the south and west is as a result of the slope within the site, which falls to the north east, and existing vegetation within and outside the site. This conclusion is supported by our visit to the site and the surrounding area. Although some visibility is shown across the A2500 for the upper parts of a two-storey building located at Test Location 3A, this visibility is very patchy, and is likely to be the result of narrow gaps in existing vegetation (which is proposed to be strengthened as per the Landscape Strategy (**Figure 14**)). It is highly unlikely that it would represent noticeable views of any development. The results of the ZTV analysis have been reflected in the Parameters Plan (and Illustrative Layout) and there are no dwellings located south of Test Location 3A.



6.5 In order to refine the maximum height of two storey dwellings within the Parameters Plan, a further ZTV analysis was undertaken. This analysis, which is also included in Appendix 2 (Figures J-N) tested whether there would be an increase in visibility to the south of the site if the maximum building heights were increased from 7.5m to either 8m or 9m at test locations 3A to 7 (i.e., covering the extent of development defined). The results show that buildings up to 8m tall within the southern part of the proposed development area and up to 9m elsewhere would not noticeably increase visibility to the south. The results of this ZTV analysis have been reflected in the Parameters Plan which includes a building height restriction of 8m within the southern part of the site and a 9m maximum height elsewhere. A 7m height restriction in the north western corner of the site is also shown, but this relates to the avoidance of potential overshadowing effects on the neighbouring properties, as discussed in section 7 below.



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## 7 Landscape and Visual Effects

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### *Introduction*

7.1 This section describes the changes that would result from the proposed development and its effects on the following landscape and visual receptors:

- Landscape fabric of the site
- Character of Highfield Road
- Central Sheppey Farmlands LCA
- Important Local Countryside Gap
- People who will see the development (visual amenity effects).

### *Proposed Development & Impacts on Landscape Fabric*

7.2 The development would result in the development of two paddocks currently used for grazing with 19 new dwellings, their gardens and parking. The existing vehicle track to the paddocks would be upgraded to accommodate vehicle access into the development.

7.3 The western area within the site is the most elevated part of the site and development would be avoided in this area. In addition to providing an attractive location for public open space (due to the views available), this area is proposed to be planted to create a new orchard (see the illustrative Landscape Strategy (**Figure 14**)). As highlighted in section 4 above, orchards are one of the key characteristics of LCA 13 Central Sheppey Farmlands and taking opportunities to restore or create new orchards is a guideline for change within this LCA.

7.4 The most important tree groups, those around the perimeter of the site, and within Group G3, which enclose the site visually, would be protected, managed and, where required, strengthened with new planting. Younger trees, particularly the young hawthorn within Group G3 at the southern end of the site, would be thinned out to create a public open space without harming its effectiveness in screening the site from the south. Additional tree planting along the southern boundary and within the western area of the site would increase the appearance of a treed horizon along the unnamed ridge.

7.5 Development of the site would inevitably mean the loss of some of the trees within the centre of the site (as identified in the AIA and **Figure 14**). However, replacement tree

planting would occur within the proposed public open space, the streetscape, and around the perimeter of the site to strengthen the existing vegetation framework. The tree loss within the centre of the site would not affect the appearance of a treed horizon.

### *Impacts on Character of Highfield Road*

- 7.6 Highfield Road is currently characterised by mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century residential development along both sides of the road. East of the site access, the properties are mostly single storey and views between the properties include playing fields and buildings within the Oasis Academy. Around the site access there are a number of two and one and a half storey properties. Views south towards the site around the existing access track/ proposed vehicle entrance include trees within the gardens of No 37 and No 47 and within the site. This vegetation gives these views an attractive leafy character.
- 7.7 The development would result in a spur of development south off Highfield Road, not dissimilar to the pattern and density of development along Southdown Road (**Figures 4 & 5**). The new vehicle entrance and access into the development would be wider than the existing track. It would have a more formal character and would clearly read as an entrance into a housing development, with new dwellings visible down the access from Highfield Road. These views would be residential in character as some of the vegetation currently visible would be replaced with new houses and the grassy access track would be sealed and widened. Although the character of views south from a short section of the road would change, the change would be in keeping with the overall residential character of Highfield Road.

### *Impacts on Central Sheppey Farmlands*

- 7.8 The site lies within the Central Sheppey Farmlands, an area identified as having moderate sensitivity to development due in part to the visual prominence of the hills across the area. The Landscape Capacity Study identifies the key potential issue with development in this area as visibility from the sensitive marshland that lies to the south. The Study notes that development located north of the ridge would not be visible from the south and consequently areas located to the north of the ridge are identified as having greater capacity to accommodate change. The Study also identifies views from Furze Hill as sensitive.
- 7.9 The ZTV analysis supports the findings of the Landscape Capacity Study. The analysis illustrates that two-storey development will not be visible from the south or Furze Hill if it does not extend beyond the start of the western area (Test Location 3A) and is limited to

8m in height within the southern part of the development. Lack of visibility from the south is as a result of the slope within the site, which falls to the north east, and existing vegetation within and outside the site. Development on the northern part of the site would meet the guidelines for development established in the Landscape Capacity Study. Development would be situated '*behind*' the ridgeline so that it was not visible from the south, and it would '*utilise and strengthen the existing vegetation structure*' for the development to sit within, as shown in the Landscape Strategy (Figure 14). The development would not impact upon the wider character of the Central Sheppey Farmlands or disrupt the undeveloped character of the unnamed ridge which itself is a defining feature of the Farmlands.

7.10 The development would achieve relevant guidelines for the Central Sheppey Farmlands LCA, as it would:

- Establish a new orchard and therefore also strengthen one of the LCA's key characteristics.
- Utilise existing vegetation within the southern part of the site, and around its perimeter, to integrate the development into its local landscape context.
- Avoid development within the southern and western parts (western area) of the site which if developed could result in development that was unduly prominent in views from the south.

#### *Impacts on Important Local Countryside Gap*

7.11 The site is located within an area currently identified as an ILCG in Policy DM 25 of the Local Plan. (Figure 1) The gap is described as separating '*settlements on Western Sheppey*' and the settlements in question are identified as Queenborough, Sheerness, Minster and Halfway. The purposes of the ILCG are:

- To maintain separate settlement identities and character,
- Safeguard open and undeveloped areas, and
- Prevent encroachment and piecemeal erosion of built development, and changes to the rural open character of the area.

7.12 To the east of the site, development along the B2008 together with the Oasis Academy has already connected the settlements of Halfway and Minster. The Academy is included within the ILCG although it is not one of the forms of acceptable development within

ILCGs, as set out in paragraph 7.7.35 of the Local Plan<sup>12</sup>, and, as a substantial built development, it does not support the purposes of the ILCG (Figure 1). West of the Academy, the unnamed ridge separates Halfway, both physically and visually, from the western part of Minster.

- 7.13 Development on the site would be adjacent to the western side of the Oasis Academy and, along with a housing allocation/development north west of the Academy, which is nearing completion, would consolidate the existing connection between Minster and Halfway. As demonstrated in the ZTV analysis, development would not be visible from the south of the unnamed ridge and the integrity of the treed horizon which currently separates Halfway from Minister in views from the south would be unaffected. The degree to which Minster and Halfway are perceived as having separate identities would not be affected as it would not be possible to appreciate any reduction in the separation between the two settlements.
- 7.14 The fact that the two settlements have already joined appears to have been reflected in the Local Plan, which refers to Minster & Halfway as a single settlement.<sup>13</sup> If Minister / Halfway is considered as a single settlement the development would not impact upon the sense of separation between Minister / Halfway and the other settlements nearby, namely, Queenborough / Rushenden, and Sheerness. The identities of those settlements, as being separate from Minister / Halfway would be unchanged by the proposals.
- 7.15 Impacts on the ILCG of a nearby application for 17 dwellings at land on the south east side of Bartletts Close (Figure 1) were discussed in a recent appeal decision (Appeal Ref: W/4001086; Allowed). A number of the general principles considered by the Inspector are also relevant to this application. The Inspector found that *'The topography of the appeal site is such that any visibility of the development proposed would be limited from distant views and it would not appear as a prominent addition to the landscape'*<sup>14</sup> and *'having regard to paragraph 7.7.30 of the LP, the modest scale of the development proposed would have a reasonably cohesive relationship with the adjacent urban area and would maintain the separation of settlements. There would be no significant reduction to the value, landscape setting and beauty of the countryside, such that it would result in*

<sup>12</sup> Examples of uses which could be conducted provided that their purpose are not undermined or the need to protect the countryside compromised are agriculture, waste management and mineral recycling facilities, public open space, community woodland, nature reserves, recreation, allotments and burial grounds.

<sup>13</sup> For example at Table 4.3.4

<sup>14</sup> Appeal Decision W/4001086 Paragraph 12

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*significant erosion of the countryside gap*'.<sup>15</sup> A modest scale and lack of wider visibility due to landform are similarities between this application and the appeal development.

### *Landscape Effects*

- 7.16 The susceptibility of the landscape to the proposed change is determined by considering the key changes that are likely to take place and how they will affect the key characteristics and elements within the existing landscape.
- 7.17 As outlined above the development enhances a key characteristic of the LCA and supports relevant landscape guidelines. The local landscape character has **medium/low susceptibility** to the scheme proposed as it can be accommodated without harm to the local landscape policies or strategies. The site is located in a landscape with **medium value**. The overall **sensitivity is medium**.
- 7.18 The development would result in the loss of some vegetation within the site and the replacement of views of this vegetation with new houses from a short section of Highfield Road. Impacts of the development are not expected beyond Highfield Road due to the controls set by the Parameters Plan, and the site's visual containment by existing mature vegetation and topography. Additional tree planting to the south and within the western area of the site would increase the appearance of a treed horizon along the unnamed ridge and the new orchard would strengthen one of the key characteristics of the Central Sheppey Farmlands. The degree to which Minster and Halfway are perceived as having separate identities would not be affected.
- 7.19 The magnitude of change to the local landscape character overall would be **low** and the effect would be **minor adverse**. The orchard and tree planting within the site are positive landscape changes which provide mitigation for the loss of the undeveloped farmland and vegetation within the site and would be of significant amenity value to new residents in the area.

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<sup>15</sup> Appeal Decision W/4001086 Paragraph 13

### *Visual Effects*

- 7.20 This section is concerned with the visual receptors who will experience the landscape changes described above. Visual effects are a result of the sensitivity of visual receptors to the proposed development and the magnitude of changes to existing views.
- 7.21 GLVIA3 provides guidance on the relative sensitivity of different visual receptors (Page 113-114). Visual receptors who would be affected by this development are:
- People using Highfield Road (**medium/low sensitivity**). (Vp D)
  - Pupils and staff using the playing fields within Oasis Academy (**low sensitivity**).
  - Residents overlooking the site in dwellings along Highfield Road (**high sensitivity**).
- 7.22 **Figure 1** shows the location of 4 viewpoints (A-D). Viewpoint D is representative of the views from Highfield Road. Viewpoints A, B and D are included as illustrative views from key/ sensitive locations, however for the reasons described above, the development would not be visible from these locations. The photographs are presented as single frame images in accordance with the latest guidance on visualisations from the Landscape Institute.<sup>16</sup> If printed at A3 they present an image that is close, in terms of the impression of distance and scale, to the one that you would experience when standing at the viewpoint.
- 7.23 People driving and walking along Highfield Road would be aware that a new access road for development had been constructed in place of the existing track and that a new development was located at the rear of No. 37. The replacement of views of vegetation and an informal track with a larger formal entrance, access and new houses represents a **low** magnitude of change in the context of existing development along Highfield Rd. The effect on the visual amenity for people using Highfield Road would be **minor adverse**.
- 7.24 Pupils and staff using the playing fields at the Oasis Academy are likely to see parts of the new development, albeit any views would be filtered heavily by the mature vegetation along the common boundary. Restricted visibility of a limited number of new dwellings from a playing field represents a **low** magnitude of change. The effect on the visual amenity for pupils and staff would be **minor** and is considered to be **neutral**.
- 7.25 Residents in properties which back onto the site along the southern side of Highfield Road are unlikely to welcome the loss of vegetation and undeveloped land behind their

<sup>16</sup> TGN 06/19 Visual Representation of development proposals September 2019

properties and a change to residential development. To mitigate any potential risk of overlooking or overshadowing of the existing houses or their gardens, the Parameters Plan limits buildings heights in the north western corner of the site to a lower height than the rest of the development (1.5 storey, max 7m).





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## 8 Compliance with Landscape Related Policies and Guidance

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### *Introduction*

- 8.1 The following section considers whether the proposals are compliant with policies and guidance with respect to landscape and visual issues only. Other policy considerations are addressed in the Planning Statement.

### *Development Plan Policies*

- 8.2 As required by Policy DM 24 the development:
- Would minimise and mitigate adverse landscape impacts; and
  - Has been informed by the Council's Urban Extension Landscape Capacity Study and Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal SPD.
- 8.3 The separate identities and character of settlements would be maintained as is required by the purposes of the ILCG (Policy DM 25). The proposal would result in the loss of a small area of open and undeveloped land which currently has a rural character. However due to the contained nature of the site and the location of the proposed houses within it, harm to the open and rural character across the wider ILCG has been avoided.

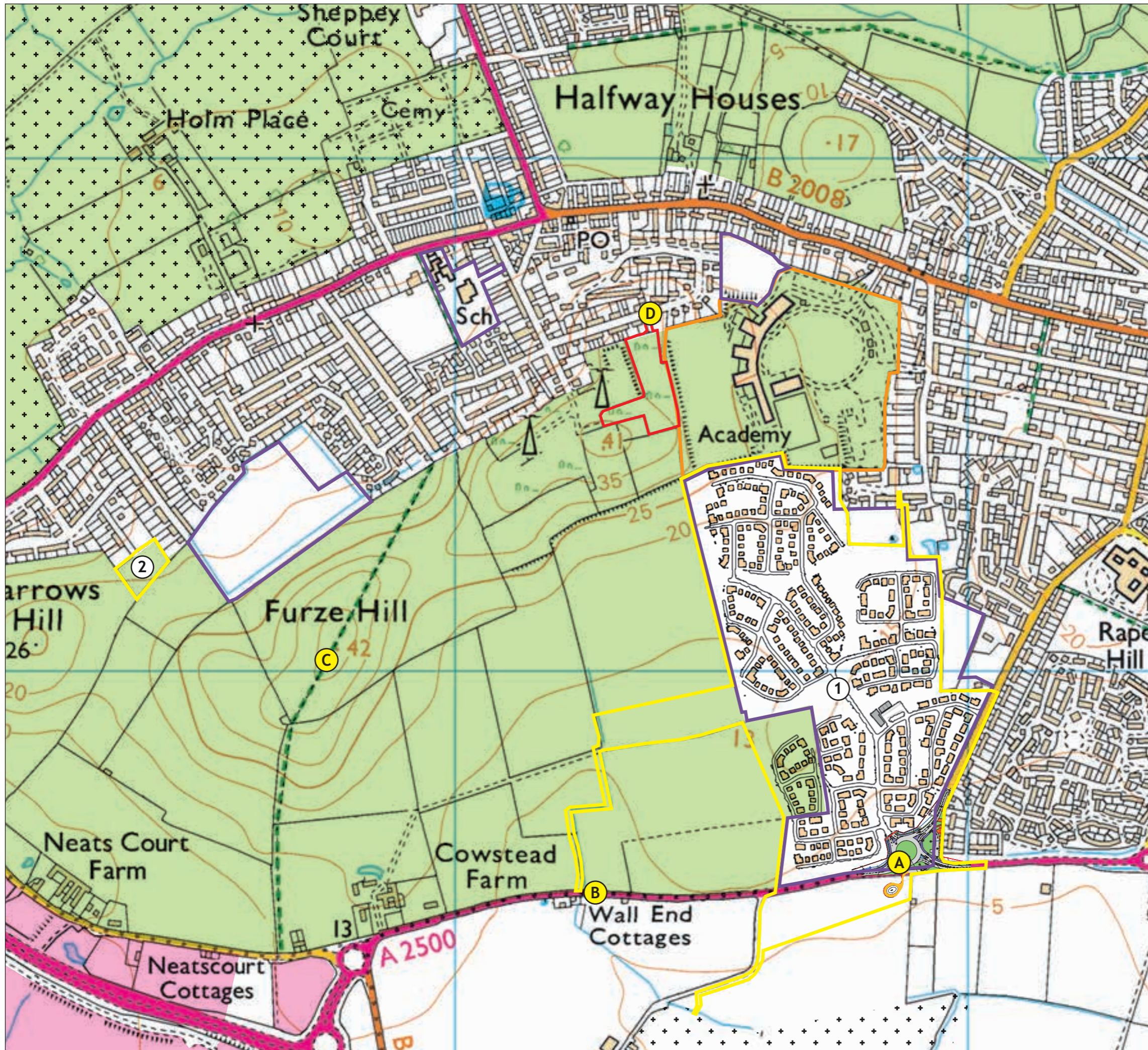
### *NPPF*

- 8.4 In accordance with the NPPF the development:
- Takes local circumstances into account and reflects the character, needs and opportunities of the area (paragraph 9);
  - Is sympathetic to local character (paragraph 127);
  - Is sympathetic to the intrinsic character and beauty of the wider countryside surrounding the site and recognises the benefit of trees within the site (paragraph 170).
- 8.5 Overall, the development is considered to be consistent with National and Development Plan policies relating to landscape matters.

## Appendix 1

### Figures





**FIGURE 1**  
Site Location & Context



PROJECT  
1156  
Highfield Road

CLIENT  
New Homes and Land

DATE  
December 2020

**Legend**

- Site
  
- Policy / Designations Context**
- Housing Allocations
- Employment Allocations within Queenborough and Rushenden Regeneration Area
- Important Local Countryside Gaps (ILCG) (Policy DM25)
- + Areas of High Landscape Value (AHLV) as designated in Bearing Fruits 2031: The Swale Borough Local Plan 2017
- Oasis Academy - within ILCG but not consistent with the purposes of including land in the ILCG.
- Planning applications allowed at appeal
- ① Land west of Barton Hill Drive (LPA Ref 18/503135/OUT; PINS Ref: 323817) (Base map has been updated to reflect consent for residential development of 700 dwellings & the new roundabout along the A2500.
- ② Land on the south east side of Bartletts Close (LPA Ref 19/503810/OUT; PINS Ref: W/4001086)
- Location of viewpoint photographs



0 125 250 500m





**FIGURE 2**  
Topography



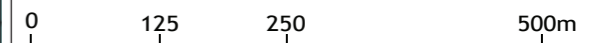
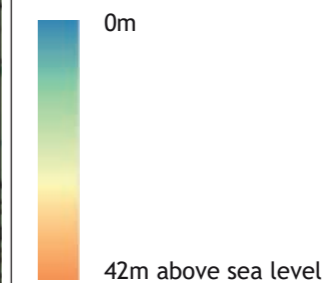
PROJECT  
1156  
Highfield Road  
CLIENT  
New Homes and Land

DATE  
December 2020

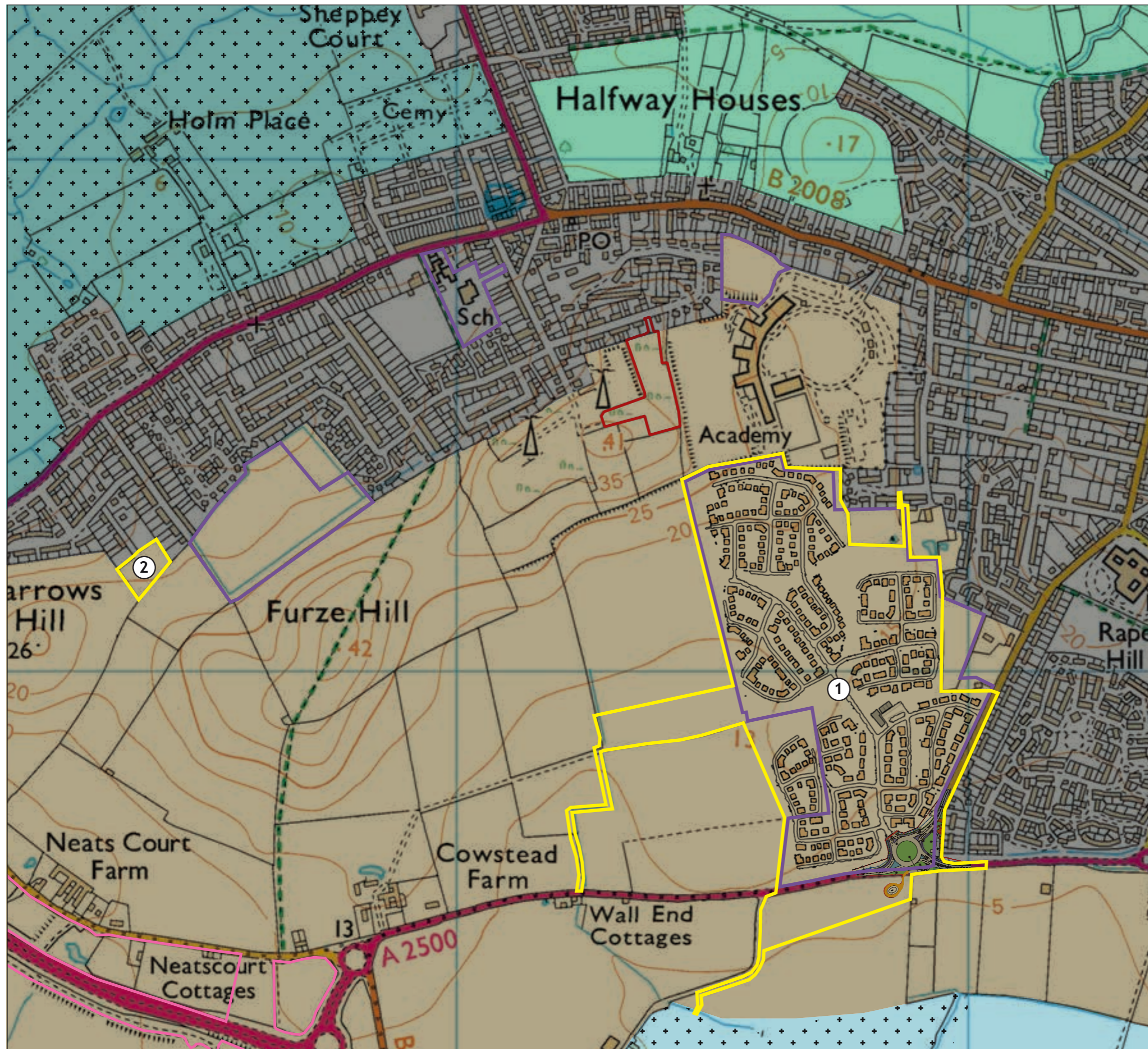
**Legend**

- Site
  - Housing Allocations
  - Employment Allocations within Queenborough and Rushenden Regeneration Area
  - Planning applications allowed at appeal
- ① Land west of Barton Hill Drive  
(LPA Ref 18/503135/OUT; PINS Ref: 323817)  
(Base map has been updated to reflect consent for residential development of 700 dwellings & the new roundabout along the A2500.
- ② Land on the south east side of Bartletts Close  
(LPA Ref 19/503810/OUT; PINS Ref: W/4001086)

Topography (colour bands represent 2m contour intervals)







**FIGURE 3**  
Landscape Character Areas



PROJECT  
1156  
Highfield Road

CLIENT  
New Homes and Land

DATE  
December 2020

**Legend**

- Site
- Housing Allocations
- Employment Allocations within Queenborough and Rushenden Regeneration Area
- Planning applications allowed at appeal

- ① Land west of Barton Hill Drive (LPA Ref 18/503135/OUT; PINS Ref: 323817)  
(Base map has been updated to reflect consent for residential development of 700 dwellings & the new roundabout along the A2500.
- ② Land on the south east side of Bartletts Close (LPA Ref 19/503810/OUT; PINS Ref: W/4001086)
- + Areas of High Landscape Value (AHLV) as designated in Bearing Fruits 2031: The Swale Borough Local Plan 2017

**Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal 2011 - Landscape Character Areas**

- 13. Central Sheppey Farmlands  
Landscape Guidelines - Restore and Create (poor condition & moderate sensitivity)
- 2. Elmley Marshes  
Landscape Guidelines - Conserve (good condition & high sensitivity)
- 10. Sheppey Court and Diggs Marshes  
Landscape Guidelines - Conserve and Create (moderate condition & moderate sensitivity)
- 9. Minster Marshes  
Landscape Guidelines - Restore and Create (poor condition & moderate sensitivity)
- Urban Areas



0 125 250 500m





**FIGURE 4**  
Aerial Photograph



PROJECT  
1156  
Highfield Road  
CLIENT  
New Homes and Land

DATE  
December 2020

**Legend**

— 2m Contours

Site of Consented Development



Photograph source: BING Maps





**FIGURE 5**  
Aerial Photograph & Proposal



PROJECT  
1156  
Highfield Road  
CLIENT  
New Homes and Land

DATE  
December 2020

**Legend**

— 2m Contours

Proposal based on Illustrative site layout plan  
Drwg No 1602.003 prepared by JB Planning (29/11/20)

Site of Consented Development



Photograph source: BING Maps