



Land at Common Road,
Sissinghurst

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Prepared by
CSA Environmental

on behalf of
Invicta Self & Custom Build

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CONTENTS		Page
1.0	Introduction	2
2.0	Landscape Policy context	3
3.0	Site Context	12
4.0	Site Description and Visibility	18
5.0	Ability of the Site to Accommodate Development	23
6.0	Conclusion	29

Appendices

Appendix A: Site Location Plan

Appendix B: Aerial Photograph

Appendix C: Photosheets

Appendix D: MAGIC Map Extract and Heritage Plan

Appendix E: Landscape Strategy Plan

Appendix F: Methodology and Summary Landscape & Visual Effects

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 CSA Environmental has been appointed by Invicta Self & Custom Build to undertake a landscape and visual impact assessment of the Land at Common Road, Sissinghurst ('the Site'). The report supports an outline planning application for approximately 18 dwellings and associated open space and infrastructure. A Landscape Strategy Plan is included within **Appendix E**.
- 1.2 The Site lies within the parish of Cranbrook, within the district of Tunbridge Wells, Kent.
- 1.3 The Site is approximately 1.6ha in size, and comprises a medium sized pastoral field, occupying the majority of the Site and a small piece of grassland in the south-east corner. The location and extent of the Site is shown on the Location Plan in **Appendix A** and on the Aerial Photograph in **Appendix B**.
- 1.4 This assessment describes the existing landscape character and quality of the Site and the surrounding area. The report then goes on to discuss the ability of the Site to accommodate the proposed development and the landscape and visual effects on the wider area.

Methodology

- 1.5 This assessment is based on a Site visit undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced Landscape Architect in January 2018. The weather conditions at the time were mainly fine and clear, and although views from the longer distance were hazy, this did not affect the assessment of the Site.
- 1.6 In landscape and visual impact assessment, a distinction is drawn between landscape effects (i.e. effects on the character or quality of the landscape irrespective of whether there are any views of the landscape, or viewers to see them) and visual effects (i.e. effects on people's views of the landscape from public vantage points, including public rights of way and other areas with general public access, as well as effects from any residential properties). This report therefore considers the likely impact of the development on both landscape character and visibility. The methodology utilised in this report is contained in **Appendix F**.
- 1.7 Photographs contained within this document (**Appendix C**) were taken using a digital camera with a lens focal length approximating to 50mm, to give a similar depth of vision to the human eye. In some instances images have been combined to create a panorama.

2.0 LANDSCAPE POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)

- 2.1 National policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') and those parts relevant to this assessment are summarised below.
- 2.2 Paragraphs 10 and 11 of the NPPF state that at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be applied in relation to both plan-making and decision-taking.
- 2.3 Paragraph 20 of the NPPF states that strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for, among other elements, the *'(d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.'*
- 2.4 Section 12 of the NPPF sets out that planning policies and decisions should support the creation of high quality buildings and places. Paragraph 125 states that *'... design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics.'*
- 2.5 Paragraph 127 states that planning policies and decisions, should ensure that developments, amongst others:
- *'will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
 - *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout 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...'*
- 2.6 Paragraph 130 states that development should be refused where poor design *'... fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions...'* after having taken other design guidance into account. The paragraph continues that design should not be used for a reason for refusal when proposals accord with plan policies.

- 2.7 Section 15 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 170 of the document states that the planning system should contribute to the protection and enhancement of the natural and local environment through, among other things, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, '*... (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)*'. The paragraph also outlines that the planning system should recognise 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.*'
- 2.8 Paragraph 172 notes that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The paragraph goes on to state that planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Applications for development should include an assessment of potential detrimental effects on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and should show the extent to which these could be moderated.
- 2.9 Paragraph 175 notes that in the process of determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply several principles. Among these, the paragraph notes that, '*(c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists*'.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 2.10 The Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG') is in the process of being updated to reflect the changes following the publication of the revised NPPF. Any PPG paragraphs which have not been updated remain relevant until they are updated, insofar as they are consistent with the Revised NPPF 2019. The guidance as relevant to this assessment covers landscape and the natural environment and the design of new developments.
- 2.11 Paragraph 001 (ID 26-001-20191001) of the Design: process and tools section sets out the purpose of the guidance, which aims to explain the process and tools that can be employed to achieve well-designed places. The guidance refers to paragraph 130 of the NPPF which relates to ensuring good design, and states that the section should be read in

conjunction with the National Design Guide (published Oct, 2019), which it notes should be used in both plan-making and decision making. Ten good design characteristics are identified in the National Design Guide, and these are set out as follows in the PPG:

- Context
- Identity
- Built form
- Movement
- Nature
- Public places
- Uses
- Homes and buildings
- Resources
- Lifespan.

- 2.12 Paragraph 003 sets out that a plan's vision, objectives and strategic policies can be used to shape the types of places it aims to achieve, in order to contribute to sustainable development and to guide development expectations including design. It goes on to note that strategic policies can be used to set out design expectations, including for strategic site allocations.
- 2.13 Paragraph 004 deals with the role of non-strategic policies and their use in guiding more local or detailed design principles, which it notes would be most effective when the historic, landscape or townscape character is evidenced.
- 2.14 Paragraphs 006 and 007 deal with masterplans, stating that they should be site specific and should '*... set the vision and implementation strategy for a development...*'. Paragraph 006 notes that they may need to be accompanied by other technical reports including landscape assessment and proposals for securing biodiversity net gain.
- 2.15 The Natural environment section of the guidance aims to explain the key issues to consider in relation to the implementation of policies to protect and enhance the natural environment, including local requirements.
- 2.16 Paragraph 004 defines green infrastructure, while in paragraph 005 it explains its importance as a natural capital asset that provides multiple benefits, including enhanced biodiversity, landscapes and urban cooling. In paragraph 006 the guidance sets out the planning goals green infrastructure can assist in achieving, and these are:

- *Building a strong, competitive economy;*
- *Achieving well-designed places;*
- *Promoting healthy and safe communities;*
- *Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change;*
- *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.*

2.17 The final paragraph (008) in the green infrastructure sub-section notes that:

'Green infrastructure opportunities and requirements need to be considered at the earliest stages of development proposals, as an integral part of development and infrastructure provision, and taking into account existing natural assets and the most suitable locations and types of new provision.'

2.18 Within the Biodiversity, geodiversity and ecosystems section, the topic of net gain has been included. Paragraph 020 describes net gain as *'... an approach to development that leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. Net gain is an umbrella term for both biodiversity net gain and wider environmental net gain.'*

2.19 In the Landscape section of the guidance, paragraph 036 refers to that part of paragraph 170 of the NPPF which deals with the recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside in local plans, and the need for strategic policies to *'... provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally-designated landscapes but also the wider countryside.'* Paragraph 036 goes on to note that:

'Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.'

2.20 Paragraph 041 of the Landscape section deals with the approach to development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It notes that their status as landscapes of the highest quality has to be reflected in the design and location of all development in these areas, and refers to the considerations for

development as set out in paragraph 172 of the NPPF. Development in the setting of one of these protected landscapes is covered in paragraph 042, which states that, where important long views from or to the designated landscapes are identified, or where the land within and adjoining the designated area is complementary, a sensitive approach which takes potential impacts into account will be needed to avoid significant harm.

National Design Guide

2.21 The National Design Guide (2019) provides guidance to illustrate '*... how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice.*'

2.22 The guidance identifies ten good design characteristics and the following are of most relevance to landscape and visual assessment (our emphasis):

- Context is described as '*... the location of the development and the attributes of its immediate, local and regional surroundings.*' The Guide goes on to state that,

'An understanding of the context, history and cultural characteristics of a site, neighbourhood and region influences the location, siting and design of new developments. It means they are well grounded in their locality and more likely to be acceptable to existing communities. Creating a positive sense of place helps to foster a sense of belonging and contributes to well-being, inclusion and community cohesion.'

- The identity or character of a place comes from the way that buildings, streets and spaces, landscape and infrastructure combine together and how people experience them. It is not just about the buildings and how a place looks, but how it engages with all of the senses. Local character makes places distinctive. Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods.
- Nature contributes to the quality of a place, and to people's quality of life, and it is a critical component of well-designed places. Natural features are integrated into well-designed development. They include natural and designed landscapes, high quality public open spaces, street trees, and other trees, grass, planting and water.'

Local Policy Context

- 2.23 Planning policy within Tunbridge Wells Borough is led by a suite of documents which include saved policies from the 2006 Local Plan, a Core Strategy (2010) and a Site Allocations Local Plan (2016). Neither the Site nor land within the surrounding area are included in the Site Allocations Local Plan.
- 2.24 Work has commenced on an emerging Local Plan which will guide development within the Borough up to 2033. The Draft Local Plan (Consultation Draft) was published and was out for consultation between 20th September – 1st November 2019. For reference, the draft policies within the plan are summarised below. Until such a time as the emerging Local Plan is formally adopted, the saved policies within the above plans remain relevant insofar as they are consistent with the NPPF.

Tunbridge Wells Core Strategy (Adopted June 2010)

- 2.25 The Tunbridge Wells Core Strategy was adopted in June 2010 and covers the period up until 2026. The Core Strategy draws on the objectives and core policies of a wide range of plans, programmes and strategies to achieve the development needed in the local area. The objectives which are relevant to the Site are as follows:
- **Objective SD1:** To ensure that development aims to enhance and conserve locally important wildlife and habitats and takes account of the value and role of biodiversity;
 - **Objective SD5:** To ensure good design principles are given full consideration in the development;
 - **Objective SO4:** To facilitate the provision of enhanced green infrastructure to support new and existing development; and
 - **Objective SO6:** To ensure the provision of local, accessible, well managed and high quality open space.
- 2.26 Those Core Policies which are relevant to the Site are detailed below:
- 2.27 **Core Policy 4 Environment** states that the locally distinctive sense of place and character will be conserved and enhanced through the Borough's urban and rural landscapes, including the designated High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 2.28 **Core Policy 5 Sustainable Design and Construction** states that the Borough will apply and encourage sustainable design to conserve the unique urban and rural heritage characteristics.

- 2.29 **Core Policy 14 Development in the Villages and Rural Areas** states that new development will be restricted to sites within the Limits to Built Development of the villages highlighted in Core Policy 1. Designated buildings and areas of historic or environmental importance will be conserved and enhanced to ensure the special character of the villages is maintained. The countryside shall also be protected in order to maintain its landscape character and quality.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (Adopted March 2006)

- 2.30 The Tunbridge Wells Local Plan was adopted in March 2006. The Local Plan policies which are of relevance to the Site are set out below. The Local Plan categorises the settlement of Sissinghurst as a village. The plan states that villages will only be suitable for minor development, such as infilling.

- 2.31 A set of strategic objectives have been set out within the Local Plan to promote sustainable development which is the key aim for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The Strategic Objectives which are relevant to the Site and this assessment are as follows:

- **Strategic Objective 1:** To protect the unique, high quality environmental character of the area and to promote enhancement by encouraging excellence in the quality of all development.

- 2.32 **Policy EN1** states that new development should not cause significant harm to the amenities or character of the area. Additionally, proposals should not result in the loss of features which are important to the character of the built up area or landscape, and the design of new buildings should blend in with the existing landscape.

- 2.33 **Policy EN25** states that where proposals are situated outside of the Limits to Built Development, they will be required to satisfy criteria including ensuring:

- That they will have minimal impact on local landscape character;
- That there will be no detrimental impact on the local settlements' landscape setting; and
- That proposed buildings are well screened by existing vegetation.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan – Consultation Draft 2019

- 2.34 The emerging policies within this draft document, as relevant to the Site, are summarised below.

- 2.35 **Draft Policy STR/CRS1 The Strategy for Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish** sets out the development strategy for the parish areas. This outlines, amongst other things, that sites outside the AONB but within the High Weald National Character Area, or close to the boundary with the AONB landscape, are likely to share similar characteristics to the designated landscape and contribute to the setting of it. In these instances, it states that the AONB Management Plan will be a material consideration for these sites. The Management Plan includes various policies relating to development design including requirements for planting proposals and materials. The policy also states that all development proposals should ensure that landscape gaps between individual areas of the parish are retained to prevent coalescence of development.
- 2.36 **Draft Policy AL/CRS 17 Land adjacent to Orchard Cottage, Frittenden Road, and land at junction of Common Road and Frittenden Road** allocates an area of land located at the junction of Common Road and Frittenden Road as safeguarded land for future school expansion. The Site covers the majority of the land identified within this policy.
- 2.37 **Draft Policy EN 1 Design and other development management criteria** sets out the requirements for development proposals relating to different areas of design. Under the section on character and site context, the policy requires developments to consider, amongst other things, the siting, layout, density, and landscaping with respect to the characteristics of the site and its relationship with the surroundings. In addition, they should consider such elements as the scale, height and massing of buildings as well as the landscape and treescape. Under the section on landscaping, trees and amenity, the policy requires proposals to retain existing trees and groups of trees that contribute positively to the area. Hard and soft landscape proposals are also required to contribute to, and where possible, enhance the natural and local environment.
- 2.38 **Draft Policy EN 14 Trees, Woodlands, Hedges, and Development** states that planning permission will not normally be permitted where proposals adversely affect important trees, woodland, and hedgerows, especially those covered by (including but not limited to) a Tree Preservation Order (TPO); ancient woodlands or ancient and veteran trees; and/or important landscape or townscape trees. Where there is unavoidable losses of trees on site, an appropriate number of suitable replacement trees will be required to be planted on site.
- 2.39 **Draft Policy EN 15 Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees** sets out that the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland,

resulting from development proposals will not be permitted unless there are wholly exceptional reasons. The policy also outlines principles which should be used in regard to design of development in regard to such trees. These principles include: avoidance of harm; implementation of appropriate and adequate mitigation; provision of adequate buffers; and provision of adequate evidence to support development proposals.

- 2.40 **Draft Policy EN 20 Rural Landscape** lists requirements of development within the rural landscape, which is defined as any area of the borough outside of the defined Limits to Built Development. The requirements include: conservation and enhancement of the borough's landscape and features that contribute to local sense of place; not to cause significant harm to the landscape setting of settlements; restore landscape character where it has been eroded; and preserve intrinsically dark landscapes.

3.0 SITE CONTEXT

Site Context

- 3.1 The Site, which occupies a medium sized field and a small area of grassland, is located immediately within the northern part of Sissinghurst. The Site is located in the eastern part of the Tunbridge Wells Borough, approximately 20km to the east of Tunbridge Wells. The Site location and its immediate context are illustrated on the Site Location Plan and Aerial Photograph in **Appendices A** and **B**, and on the photographs contained within **Appendix C**.
- 3.2 To the east the Site is bound by Common Road, which leads southwards through Sissinghurst and northwards towards Cranbrook Common. On the eastern edge of Common Road, immediately opposite the north-east corner of the Site, are numbers 1 and 2 Carpenter's Cottages, set back from the road behind a mature hedgerow. Wrapping around the cottages and their gardens, and continuing south along Common Road is the consented development 17/00451/REM which was under construction at the time of the site visit (as shown on the Site Location Plan in **Appendix A**) and is now largely built out, as shown on the Aerial Photograph (**Appendix B**). This development is for up to 60 new homes. Continuing eastwards from here is a large area of orchard, interspersed with blocks of woodland.
- 3.3 Sissinghurst Castle and Gardens, which are managed by the National Trust is located approximately 1.15km east of the Site.
- 3.4 The Site is bound to the south by the grounds and buildings of Sissinghurst Church of England Primary School. 21st century development at Cobnut Close, Skinner Gardens and Cleavers (road) are situated to the south of the school, with further housing development and the grounds of the Sissinghurst Cricket Club beyond development along Sissinghurst Road (A262 The Street), marks the southern edge of Sissinghurst village. Beyond the village, to the south, are agricultural fields interspersed with blocks of woodland and occasional villages.
- 3.5 To the west, the Site is bound by the property and garden of Collingwood and the garden of Orchard Cottage. West of these, are the gardens and properties of a number of houses which face onto the A229. Linear development extends along the route of the A229 between Wisley Pound to the south and Cranbrook Common to the north. Beyond this to the west, are agricultural fields interspersed with blocks of woodland and occasional groups of properties.

- 3.6 The Site is bound to the north by Frittenden Road, beyond which is a triangle of land enclosed by the A229 to the west and Common Road to the east. At the junction of Frittenden Road and Common Road is the detached property and gardens of The Crossways, which faces on to the eastern part of the Site. Opposite this, on the eastern side of Common Road is the detached property of Pinecroft. Frittenden Road continues to the north-east, with a number of properties located at the junction with Spongs Lane. At the junction Frittenden Road and the A229 is the detached property and gardens of Mouse Hall. Continuing northwards is the linear settlement of Cranbrook Common, with agricultural land, woodland blocks and a number of individual and groups of properties, surrounding it.

National Landscape Character

- 3.7 Natural England has produced profiles for England's National Character Areas ('NCA'), which divides England into 159 distinct natural areas, defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, cultural and economic activity. The Site lies towards the north eastern edge of the High Weald National Character Area (NCA 122). The boundary with the Low Weald (NCA 121) is located a short distance, north of the Site.
- 3.8 The key characteristics of the High Weald NCA are noted as being a faulted landform, deeply incised with numerous headwater streams leading to major rivers which flow in broad river valleys. The area has a dispersed settlement pattern of medieval villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads, with a notably high survival rate of 17th century (or earlier) farm buildings. The area includes and is bordered by several large towns, including Tunbridge Wells. There is a sense of an intimate, small-scale landscape, with glimpses of far-reaching views, networks of narrow and winding lanes, droveways and ancient routeways which are enclosed by high hedgerows or trees. This gives a sense of remoteness and tranquillity which is further enhanced by extensive broadleaf woodland cover and a predominantly medieval smaller-medium sized field pattern, which is enclosed by hedgerows and woodland shaws. The agricultural land is predominantly pastoral and there are remnants of the former Wealden iron industry. The High Weald AONB covers 78% of the NCA.

County Landscape Character

- 3.9 The 'Landscape Assessment of Kent' was undertaken in 2004 on behalf of Kent County Council by Jacobs Babbie.
- 3.10 The Site and settlement of Sissinghurst lie within the Sissinghurst Wooded Farmlands area, which is described as gently undulating, with a varied

topography. There are some open views northwards in the western part of the area, however, these become less frequent towards the east. The upper slopes tend to be formed of small-medium sized pastoral fields, enclosed by areas of woodland. Remains of some remnant hop production and traditional orchards are also present within these fields. On the lower slopes are larger and more open fields, predominantly in arable use. There are extensive areas of broadleaf woodland and while most internal field boundaries are post and wire, mature hedgerows along the road sides, and shelterbelts around former and remaining hop fields are common features. Settlements are predominantly scattered with dispersed individual properties.

- 3.11 The sensitivity of the area within the study was identified as moderate. The condition of the area has been identified as very good, as there is a strongly unified landscape with a small scale patchwork of hedged fields, combined with a heavily wooded backdrop on the undulating landform. The area also has a strong functional integrity, with a strong network of ecologically important woodland corridors, streams and only a moderate intensity of land use. The hedgerows form a strong network and heritage features include Sissinghurst Castle and Garden, manor houses, mills and barns which have a positive impact on the character and landscape of the area.

District Landscape Character

Tunbridge Wells Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2017)

- 3.12 The Tunbridge Wells Borough Landscape Character Area Assessment was adopted in December 2017 as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The document provides an update to the previous 2011 document, reflecting among other things recent changes within the area, as well as including additional information on valued features and qualities of the landscape and a proposed landscape strategy for each LCA.
- 3.13 The landscape of the Borough has been assessed and divided into nineteen Character Areas. The Site lies within Local Character Area 7: Sissinghurst Wooded Farmland. The key characteristics include:
- *'An upland hilly plateau that falls rapidly in the north where dramatic open views across the Low Weald occur;*
 - *Localised gentle undulations in the landscape, brought about by presence of streams, introducing pockets of enclosure and shelter;*

- *A high proportion of woodland cover creating a framework of larger coniferous plantations, mixed natural / plantation woodland blocks, small farm woods and linear ghyll woodlands in narrow valleys creating a strong framework;*
- *Attractive winding rural lanes with localised intimacy and picturesque appeal, created by wooded sides, green corridors and shady banks of colourful wildflowers;*
- *Traditional orchards and hop gardens accentuate the topographic variation and reminiscent of Kent Fruit Belt but some are in decline;*
- *Medium fields of pasture and arable introduce variety and result in an overall medium scale landscape pattern;*
- *Hedgerows and trees providing interest and landscape structure alongside rural roads and dividing agricultural fields; and*
- *A small scale and dispersed settlement pattern of isolated farmhouses and hamlets.'*

3.14 The assessment goes on to outline Landscape Strategy objectives for LCA7, stating that it should be considered in the context of the High Weald AONB, including the role it plays in its setting. The objectives include, among others:

- *'Wherever possible ensure that the visual diversity and landscape pattern is maintained, in particular the traditional woodland, coppice, orchard, arable and pasture farmland. Poor and inappropriate management of various elements could potentially lead to a decline in intimacy and enclosure; and*
- *Ensure new development is appropriate in scale and character to the landscape context. New buildings should avoid visually prominent locations and new development should be well-integrated (e.g. with locally appropriate planting) and maintain the valued features and qualities of the character area.'*

3.15 From our own assessment of the Site and its surroundings, we would note that whilst it exhibits some characteristics of the Sissinghurst Wooded Farmland Local Character Area, comprising a medium sized pastoral field and small area of grassland with a high amount of tree cover, it has an overall enclosed character and does not directly contribute to the setting of the High Weald AONB.

- 3.16 This study was published by LUC in February 2017. The purpose of the study is to provide an assessment of the extent to which the character and quality of the landscape within the study area is, in principle, susceptible to change as a result of introducing particular types of development into certain landscape character areas.
- 3.17 The Site lies within sub-area Si1 – Cranbrook, as identified within the study. This area surrounds Sissinghurst to the north of the A262 and incorporates the hamlet of Wisley Pound along the A229. Frittenden Road marks the northern extent of the area and field boundaries and the edge of Bull Wood (part of Sissinghurst Castle Estate) marks the eastern boundary.
- 3.18 The study describes that settlement form within the area is associated with ridge and plateau with the sensitivity of the landscape to development being slightly higher for areas downslope. It mentions that the modern development of of Common Road has introduced housing along closes, whereas historically the village had been linear. The fields between Sissinghurst and Wisley Pound are described as preserving the separate nature of the settlements. The Site lies to the within the northern part of Sissinghurst and thus does not lie within these identified fields. The study describes the visual character on the plateau between Sissinghurst and Wisley Pound to be largely contained by well-treed hedgerows.
- 3.19 The sensitivity conclusions within the study state that modern development has had an impact on the settlement form at Sissinghurst. It mentions that the gap between Wisley Pound and Sissinghurst has been reduced by modern development. It states that the well-hedged fields to either side of Mill Lane, and to the north of the Primary School (the Site), retain a rural character. It goes on to state that the containment of this area limits the impact that loss of these remaining open areas would have on the wider landscape character. Overall, the area was assessed within the study to have high to medium/high sensitivity to small developments. Within the study a 'small' development is defined as, *'two/two and a half-storey residential dwellings – either terraced, semi-detached and detached – with associated access roads, private gardens and garaging, and with an assumed density of approximately 30-40 dwellings per hectare.'*
- 3.20 We broadly concur with the findings of this assessment. However, the Site lies to the west of Common Road, not the east which was identified as being of higher sensitivity within the study, and is surrounded by existing built development on all four sides and is well contained in views from the wider landscape. As such we consider that the Site has a lower

sensitivity to small scale development than the study has assessed for the wider sub-area Si1.

Statutory and Non-Statutory Designations

- 3.21 The Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside Map ('MAGIC') and the adopted Wealden District Proposals Map shows that the Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality.
- 3.22 The boundary of the High Weald AONB is approximately 383m to the south of the Site. Please refer to the MAGIC Map and Heritage Plan in **Appendix D**.

Conservation Area, Scheduled Monument and Listed Buildings

- 3.23 Approximately 400m to the south-east of the Site is the Sissinghurst Conservation Area. Wilsley Conservation Area lies approximately 600m to the south-west of the Site. There are three Grade II Listed Buildings just beyond the northern Site boundary, including the two cottages at Carpenter's Corner (which are jointly listed) and The Crossways to the immediate north-east of the Site (please refer to the MAGIC Map and Heritage Plan in **Appendix D**).

Public Rights of Way

- 3.24 Public footpath 0067/WC75/1 crosses the south-east corner of the Site and continues southward connecting Common Road and Sissinghurst Road (The Street).
- 3.25 Within the wider context of the Site, public footpath 0067/WC76/1 is located to the east, leading south from Frittenden Road to the eastern edge of Sissinghurst. Further east are a number of public footpaths and bridleways associated with the National Trust land at Sissinghurst Castle, which includes a large area of open access land.
- 3.26 There is a network of public rights of way to the south of the Site, which includes restricted byway 0067/WC106A/1 which continues south from Sissinghurst Road (The Street) close to where 0067/WC75/1 joins it.

Tree Preservation Orders ('TPO')

- 3.27 There are no TPOs covering any trees on, or within the boundaries of the Site. This was confirmed by checking the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council website on the 18th November 2019.

4.0 SITE DESCRIPTION AND VISIBILITY

Site Description

- 4.1 The majority of the Site comprises a medium sized pastoral field, and a small piece of grassland in the south-east corner. A line of trees separates the two pieces of land, with public footpath 0067/WC75/1 running along the field boundary. The Site and its immediate context are shown on the Aerial Photograph at **Appendix B**. The main field is laid to grass and does not contain any landscape features other than the vegetated field boundaries. The south-eastern area has vegetated boundaries and contains some scrub vegetation.
- 4.2 The northern Site boundary comprises a post and wire mesh fence, which is in disrepair in places, backed by a mature hedgerow containing mature hedgerow trees with a notable amount of holly present. An existing field entrance is situated at the western end of this boundary.
- 4.3 The eastern Site boundary comprises a post and wire mesh fence, which is also in disrepair in places, backed by a mature hedgerow containing some hedgerow trees. A stile is located at the approximate centre of this boundary to provide access into the Site for the public footpath.
- 4.4 The southern Site boundary is formed of a hedgerow backed ditch. This in turn is backed by the school boundary fencing. There are a number of mature trees and hedgerow plants within this stretch. There is a footpath entrance which is formed of a small bridge over the ditch and a stile over the southern Site boundary.
- 4.5 The western Site boundary comprises a post and wire mesh fence, which is also in disrepair in places, backed by a hedgerow containing some mature trees. The hedgerow becomes sparse towards the south of the Site and there are some larger gaps here.
- 4.6 The internal hedgerow predominantly contains hazel and hawthorn with a number of mature trees. The vegetation within the hedgerow encroaches into the south-eastern area of grassland. The north-eastern edge is marked by a post and wire mesh fence, which is in disrepair in places.

Topography

- 4.7 The Site gently slopes from approximately 85m Above Ordnance Datum ('AOD') in the north-west corner, to approximately 80m AOD in the south-eastern corner.

- 4.8 The Site lies on a relatively flat area of land between Cranbrook Common and Sissinghurst, with the wider landscape surrounding Sissinghurst having a much more varied, rolling landform. There is a high point to the north-west of Cranbrook Common of 109m AOD and a low point to the east, within the grounds of Sissinghurst Castle of 49m AOD.

Visibility

- 4.9 An assessment of the visibility of the Site was undertaken and a series of photographs taken from public vantage points, rights of way and public highways. The assessment was undertaken in January, when vegetation was out of leaf. The viewpoints are illustrated on the Location Plan and Aerial Photograph contained in **Appendices A** and **B** and on the photographs in **Appendix C**.
- 4.10 From our assessment, it is apparent that the Site is partially visible from the immediate area, both from some public vantage points and from the adjacent residential properties and school. There are limited long distance views from the ridge to the south-east. The key views of the Site are described in the tables contained in **Appendix F** and are summarised below.

Near Distance Views

- 4.11 The Site is visible from public footpath 0067/WC75/1 as it crosses the Site (**photographs 06 and 15**). Views of the Site from further south along this route quickly become filtered by the southern boundary vegetation and screened by intervening built form and dense vegetation south of this.
- 4.12 There are views towards the Site from The Crossways, the property which sits to the immediate north of the Site (**photographs 06 and 12**). These views are directed towards the eastern part of the Site, however oblique views are possible across the Site. Ground floor views are filtered by the intervening roadside and Site boundary vegetation.
- 4.13 There are views towards the Site from Carpenter's Cottages, the semi-detached properties which sit to the immediate east of the Site (**photographs 12 and 15**). These views are predominantly filtered, oblique views, although direct, heavily filtered views towards the south-eastern corner of the Site are possible. 1 Carpenters Cottages has a small, first floor window which looks towards the northern part of the Site (**photograph 08**).
- 4.14 Views towards the Site from Common Road, on the approach from the north, are screened by the intervening properties and dense roadside vegetation (**photographs 04 and 18**). The eastern Site boundary vegetation starts to become apparent in close range views. However,

views into the Site, over the eastern Site boundary vegetation are not possible until the junction with Frittenden Road, just north of the Site.

- 4.15 When adjacent to the Site on Common Road, filtered views into the Site are possible, with some small breaks in the vegetation, including at the public footpath stile access, allowing glimpsed views into the Site (**photographs 03 and 18**). As the road continues southward, it starts to sink below the ground level of the Site, preventing further views into it (**photograph 05**).
- 4.16 Views from Common Road on the approach from the south are restricted to views of the eastern and southern Site boundary vegetation, although these are only available for a limited stretch between the school entrance and Cleavers (road) (**photographs 01, 02, 03 and 05**). Views into the Site are prevented by the Site boundary vegetation and vegetation within the school grounds.
- 4.17 Views into the Site are possible from within the Sissinghurst Church of England Primary School building and playground (**photographs 07 and 10**). These views are filtered by the southern Site boundary vegetation; however this vegetation becomes gappy towards the west of the Site and more views across the Site become available.
- 4.18 There are some opportunities for heavily filtered, oblique views into the Site from properties on Cobnut Close and 8-11 Skinner Gardens to the south, across the front of the school (**photographs 02 and 10**). These are predominantly restricted to framed views through the gap in the boundary hedgerow at the public footpath entrance (**photograph 14**).
- 4.19 There are no views of the Site from the properties on Cleavers (road), the remaining properties on Skinner Gardens or other properties situated off Common Road, as views are restricted by virtue of the localised undulating topography and screening provided by intervening built form and dense vegetation (**photographs 01 and 22**).
- 4.20 There are first floor views into the Site from Collingwood, the property to the immediate west of the Site, with oblique first and filtered oblique ground floor views also possible from the rear of the property (**photographs 06, 07 and 10**). Filtered views from the garden of Orchard Cottage are also possible through the western Site boundary vegetation (**photograph 07**).
- 4.21 Views towards the Site from the remaining properties on Frittenden Road and the A229, west of the Site, are prevented by virtue of dense vegetation within the gardens, garden boundaries and the western Site boundary vegetation (**photograph 23**).

- 4.22 Views towards the Site from Mouse Hall and the wider area north of the Site, are prevented by virtue of dense intervening vegetation and relatively flat landform.

Middle and Long Distance Views

- 4.23 Filtered, first floor middle-distance views are possible from the four properties on Spongs Lane at the junction with Frittenden Road. These views will be screened in places by intervening built form.
- 4.24 There are some opportunities for oblique, first floor views towards the Site from the properties on the north of Sissinghurst Road (The Street), situated between Common Road and Trinity Church, particularly from the recently built properties at Church Mews (**photographs 21 and 24**). These views are partially screened by intervening built form and filtered by intervening vegetation.
- 4.25 There are no views from the properties within Sissinghurst to the south of Sissinghurst Road (The Street) as the intervening built form screens views and the landform rapidly drops from this point southwards towards Crane Brook.
- 4.26 There are no views towards the Site from public footpath 0067/WC76/1 to the east (**photograph 20**). There are points along its route where the roadside vegetation to the east of Common Road is visible, but the landform and adjacent vegetation prevent views into the Site. Filtered views of the larger trees within the Site are however possible.
- 4.27 There are no views of the Site from the grounds of Sissinghurst Castle as they are prevented by dense intervening vegetation and localised variation in landform.
- 4.28 Long-distance views are possible from the Site looking south-east towards the edge of Chitterden Wood, which is situated on a ridge, where the land rises again south of Crane Brook, approximately 2.8km from the Site. However, there is no public access to the wood and no nearby properties are discernible at this distance.

Landscape Quality, Value and Sensitivity

- 4.29 The Site's landscape features are predominantly contained to the Site's boundaries, with the exception of the hedgerow and trees to the internal footpath boundary, which divides the two pieces of land, and some vegetation within the south-eastern area of the Site. A tree survey has been undertaken for the Site by Root3, which grades the trees and hedgerows on Site in terms of their quality and life expectancy. The Site's hedgerows and some of the trees are of relatively low landscape quality

with Category C quality oak, ash, holly and hazel. The three trees within the western Site boundary, the majority of the trees in the internal hedgerow and two of the trees on the southern Site boundary are assessed as Category B quality oak, ash and poplar. One tree in the internal hedgerow and two trees within the southern Site boundary are assessed as Category A quality oak. There are three veteran trees along the southern Site boundary. The majority of the Site comprises a grass field, which is assessed as being of **medium** landscape quality with the majority of mature trees within the Site also assessed as being of **medium** landscape quality. The veteran trees are of **very high** landscape quality.

- 4.30 The overall landscape character of the Site is fairly typical of the Sissinghurst Wooded Farmland character area, comprising a small pastoral field contained by a mature hedgerow with numerous hedgerow trees and generally low visibility. At a local level the Site forms a break in the built form along Common Road and Frittenden Road. Overall the Site is considered to be of **medium** sensitivity to small scale residential development.
- 4.31 With regards to landscape value, a public footpath runs across the south-eastern corner of the Site allowing limited access to the Site. The Site does not carry any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality, and contains no heritage assets. There are three veteran trees along the Site's southern boundary which are considered to be of **high** landscape value. Overall, the Site is considered of **medium** landscape value. It is not considered to be a 'Valued Landscape' for the purpose of paragraph 170 in the NPPF (2019).

5.0 ABILITY OF THE SITE TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 The following section assesses the ability of the Site to accommodate the proposed residential development, in terms of the landscape and visual constraints and effects.
- 5.2 The proposed development will comprise approximately 18 residential dwellings, generally of two storey construction, proposed vehicular access off Common Road and associated infrastructure.
- 5.3 The key landscape and layout principles used in developing the proposals include:
- Creation of open space in the eastern part of the Site, respecting views from the adjacent public footpath and Common Road;
 - Retention of the majority of existing vegetation, and avoiding risks to mature trees by carefully considering vehicular routes through the development;
 - All proposed built form and associated rear gardens of the new housing will be located outside of the veteran tree buffer zones. All landscape proposals within the buffer zones will complement and enhance semi-natural habitats including a mix of grassland, scrub and wetland planting;
 - Retention of the public footpath which crosses the south-eastern corner of the Site along its current alignment and integrating it into a green infrastructure corridor;
 - Two pedestrian entrances into the north of the Site and a new pedestrian route between them, allowing for safer pedestrian travel along Common and Frittenden Road;
 - Creation of open space through ecologically enhanced areas, which will augment wildlife habitats and connectivity across the Site, particularly for dormice and bats; and
 - Screen planting to areas where existing development will be impacted by the proposals, particularly along the southern Site boundary adjacent to the school.
- 5.4 The key landscape and visual effects are summarised in the tables in **Appendix F** and described in the relevant section below.