

LAND ADJACENT TO HIGHWORTH ROAD • FARINGDON

Application Reference: P13/V1366/O
Appeal Reference: APP/V3120/A/13/2210891

Document Reference: 2013.30-LD0-01A

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4D Landscape Design
on behalf of The Vale of the White Horse District Council



Project Title	Land adjacent to Highworth Road • Faringdon
Document Title:	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
Document Reference:	2013.30-LD0-01
Date	May 2014

Revision	Date	Notes
A	31/05/2014	Minor changes to wording and minor corrections



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is prepared on behalf of The Vale of The White Horse District Council by 4D Landscape Design.
- 1.2. The LVIA relates to a proposed residential development by Gladman, submitted for Outline Planning approval, application number P13/V1366/O.
- 1.3. The proposed scheme involves development of 94 residential units together with associated infrastructure on a green-field site adjacent to the western boundary of Faringdon, Oxfordshire.
- 1.4. The main objectives of the LVIA are:
 - 1.4.1. To identify and assess the potential significance of the effects of change resulting from development on the landscape as an environmental resource in it's own right (the Landscape Effects).
 - 1.4.2. To identify and assess the likely significance of the effects of change resulting from development on people's views and visual amenity (the Visual Effects).
- 1.5. This report has been undertaken in accordance with guidelines as set out in Guidelines For Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd edition April 2013).
- 1.6. Desktop studies and photographic and field surveys were undertaken during early 2014. Studies include both the physical aspects of the study area, and the planning policy context in which any proposed development is considered.
- 1.7. A detailed methodology is outlined in Appendix 1.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1.1. Development occurs within a context of planning policy, designations and legal frameworks.
- 2.1.2. The full planning implications are dealt with elsewhere, but the issues regarding the landscape and character of the site and its context are set out below:

2.2. International Designations

- 2.2.1. The site is not subject to any special international designations with regard to development.

2.3. European Policies

- 2.3.1. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is the over-arching guidance regarding landscape for member states of the European Union and came into force in the UK on 1 March 2007
- 2.3.2. The ELC provides guidance on the importance of the landscape as a resource for all users and receptors. The convention identifies the importance of all landscape, not just the 'special' or 'protected' landscapes that are usually protected by specific designations and policy instruments.
- 2.3.3. Application and integration of the ELC in the UK is the remit of Natural England in partnership with DEFRA and English Heritage.
- 2.3.4. The ELC definition is short, yet comprehensive:
"landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors".
- 2.3.5. The definition applies to the whole territory of states including all urban and peri-urban landscapes, towns, villages and rural areas, the coast and inland areas. It applies to ordinary or even degraded landscape as well as those areas that are outstanding or protected. Furthermore the ELC argues that the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe is a task not just for governments but for all sectors of civil society, entailing 'rights and responsibilities for everyone'.

2.4. National Policy and Designations

2.4.1. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 2.4.2. The site is not currently subject to any national landscape designations. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) lie to the north west (The

Cotswolds) and the south east (North Wessex Downs); both are outside the study area.

2.4.3. Sites of Special Scientific Interest

2.4.4. Nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) exist within the study area at four locations but are not related to the site or contiguous with it.

2.4.5. The National Planning Policy Framework

2.4.6. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published March 27th 2012 sets out the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policies for England, and their vision for sustainable development.

2.4.7. The NPPF contains a number of clauses relevant to consideration of the site in its landscape context, especially "Section 8 Promoting healthy communities":

2.4.8. *"69: The planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities.*

2.4.9. *70: To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should: ... guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs; ...*

2.4.10. *74: Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:*

- *an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- *the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- *the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.*

2.4.11. *75: Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.*

2.4.12. *76: Local communities through local and neighbourhood plans should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will*

be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. Identifying land as Local Green Space should therefore be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.

- 2.4.13. 77: *The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:*
- where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
 - where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
 - where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*
- 2.4.14. 109: *The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*
- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;*
 - recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;*
 - minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
 - preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and*
 - remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.*
- 2.4.15. 113: *Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks."*

- 2.4.16. The NPPF does not define what is meant by 'valued landscapes', however the value of a landscape is explored in the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland, page 53 where the following is noted:

"Landscape Value is concerned with the relative value that is attached to different landscapes. In a policy context the usual basis for recognising certain highly valued landscapes is through the application of a local or national landscape designation. Yet a landscape may be valued by different communities of interest for many different reasons without any formal designation, recognising, for example, perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness; special cultural associations; the influence and presence of other conservation interests; or the existence of a consensus about importance either nationally or locally".

- 2.4.17. This definition is broadly in line with that provided by the ELC, and is an over-arching baseline for consideration of all landscapes, regardless of their legislative status.

2.5. Local Planning Context

- 2.5.1. Locally there are three tiers to planning policy:
- County level guidance, as provided by Oxfordshire County Council;
 - District policy, as set by the Vale of the White Horse District Council, and
 - Local guidance as defined by Faringdon Town Council.

2.6. Oxfordshire County Council

- 2.6.1. Historically, the site was designated as within the 'Area of High Landscape Value' as defined in the 1987 Oxfordshire Structure Plan. This is now integrated into the Local (not County) Plan as "North Vale Corallian Ridge".
- 2.6.2. The Oxfordshire Structure Plans (2011 and 2016) now seek to ensure that the local landscape character should not be damaged.
- 2.6.3. Currently the site, the surrounding countryside, and the town of Faringdon all fall within the Great Western Community Forest which covers an area of 168 square miles stretching from Wootton Bassett to Faringdon and the North Wessex Downs to the Thames.
- 2.6.4. Comprehensive studies of the landscape and ecology of the whole of Oxfordshire have been mapped and are available as part of the Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study

2.7. Vale of The White Horse District Council

- 2.7.1. The principle planning policies and assessments relating to the proposed site are generated by the Vale of The White Horse District Council (VoWHDC). These are now judged in the context of the NPPF and emerging policies.

2.7.2. Local Plan 2011

- 2.7.3. The Local Plan 2011 was adopted in July 2006.

- 2.7.4. The site lies within an area deemed important in landscape terms which is described in the Plan as:

"7.61 The Oxfordshire Structure Plans (2011 and 2016) seek to ensure that the local landscape character should not be damaged. The Council has identified the Corallian limestone and sandstone ridge and the adjoining Thames Valley between Buscot and Wytham as an area requiring special care in assessing the visual impact of proposals for development. The Council remains committed to protecting the North Vale Corallian Ridge from development which would harm its special character and when considering applications will pay particular regard to the siting, mass, scale and appearance of the proposed development, the external materials that are to be used, any proposals for external lighting and the nature and extent of any associated landscaping proposals."

And

"7.62 The North Vale Corallian Ridge has a striking landform with a steep north facing scarp slope separating the clay vale from the Thames valley. In the west the ridge has been dissected by streams, which have eroded steep slopes to hills such as Badbury Hill and Faringdon Folly. The ridge is characterised by woodland, including a significant proportion of ancient woodland, country houses designed to look out over the scarp, villages built of the local coral ragstone, and expansive views."

- 2.7.5. These observations and descriptions informed the key policy **NE7** in the Local Plan, which states:

- 2.7.6. *"NE7. Development which would harm the prevailing character and appearance of the North Vale Corallian Ridge, as shown on the proposals map, will not be permitted unless there is an overriding need for the development and all steps will be taken to minimise the impact on the landscape."*

- 2.7.7. NE7 is a saved policy which VoWHDC consider consistent with the NPPF.

2.7.8. Inspector's Comments

2.7.9. Prior to adoption, the Local Plan was subject to consideration by a Public Inquiry. The independent inspector produced a detailed report in February 2006 and commented specifically on the proposed site (and others) as follows:

2.7.10. *"8.10.20 In that context, I therefore also agree with the Council's overall conclusion that, in landscape terms, these objection sites are not a preferable alternative. In my opinion, both would involve development beyond the natural landscape and visual limits of the town and be prominent from public viewpoints, including the layby on the Highworth Road and from further away on the A417 and Thames Valley. **Once the present edge of the urban area is extended into the open countryside in this direction, there is no clear landscape or visual containment feature available to form a new western boundary, apart from field hedges. Thus, further development might follow, "spilling down the escarpment" to the further detriment of the landscape setting of the town. In contrast, the A420 would help to define the extended limits of the built up area on the eastern side of Faringdon.**"*

2.7.11. Vale Of White Horse Landscape Assessment (2008)

2.7.12. In preparation for the Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2026, the VoWHDC commissioned a study of the landscape impact of further development at Faringdon which considered a number of potential development sites from a landscape perspective. These site are illustrated in Appendix 3, Diagram D-20.

2.7.13. The proposed site is identified in this Assessment as the north-eastern parcel of area LCA8.

2.7.14. The detailed landscape sensitivity of this site, and the others are described as:

2.7.15. *13.1 Landscape Sensitivity*

The west Faringdon landscape character areas are generally strong representatives of the wider local landscape character areas. LCA 6 has a high level of sensitivity to accommodating major change, while LCA 7 and LCA 8 have a very high level of sensitivity. LCA 5 and part of LCA 6 west of Fernham Road have a moderate level of sensitivity to accommodating major change.

2.7.16. *13.2 Landscape Capacity*

The amount of change that the west Faringdon LCA 6 can accept without an

adverse effect on its landscape character is low, while LCA 7 and LCA 8 have a very low capacity to accept change. LCA 5 and part of LCA 6 west of Fernham Road have a moderate capacity to accept change. If residential development were to occur then the generally open landscape would be lost and Faringdon would have grown beyond its natural boundary of landscape containment. If residential development were to occur in LCA 8 then the changes would also impact on the upper River Thames landscape.

2.7.17. 13.3 Landscape Robustness

Combining LCA 5's and part of LCA 6's moderate landscape sensitivity with a moderate capacity for change, they have a moderate level of robustness. Combining LCA 6's high landscape sensitivity with a low capacity for change, it has a low level at robustness.

Combining LCA 7's and LCA 8's very high landscape sensitivity with a very low capacity for change, they have a very low level of robustness."

2.7.18. In summary, therefore, the site is described as "not robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if large scale residential development were to take place."

2.7.19. Vale Landscape Capacity Study Final Report February 2014

2.7.20. Further consideration of potential sites was considered and re-examined in 2014, where it is re-iterated that LCA 8 is considered to have a medium to low landscape capacity for development.

2.7.21. As a result, the site is not considered suitable for allocation and is not a subject of the emerging 2031 Local Plan.

2.8. Faringdon Town Council

2.8.1. The draft consultation for the Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan was published in March 2013. It is yet to be adopted.

3. BASELINE STUDIES

3.1. Landscape Baseline

- 3.1.1. The baseline study area includes the site, and also the wider landscape in which it sits. For the purposes of this assessment an area with a radius of 5km from the site centre is considered to provide the wider context.
- 3.1.2. The study area for the assessment of landscape and visual effects of the proposed development is shown on Diagram D 01 (Site Context) in Appendix 3 and covers an area extending five kilometres from the proposed site, which is considered to be the maximum extent within which significant visual effects could occur for the type of development proposed. In order to establish the baseline conditions for the assessment a brief description of the study area is provided below.
- 3.1.3. It should be noted that the proposed development is unlikely to be visible from viewpoints outside the five kilometre radius of the study area. At these distances (greater than 5 km) impact will be indistinct, and apparent only within the existing context of the wider landscape with its existing structures, where they exist.
- 3.1.4. For the most part, the site is not visually apparent from much of the study area, which is based on a site-centred model, typical of most LVIA's. However, the context in which the site lies is important within the broader definition of both 'Landscape' and 'Landscape Character', and is therefore pertinent to this study, especially as the site is on the boundary of two distinct landscape character typologies (The Corallian Ridge and the adjacent Vales). The land uses are also pertinent in the wider context.
- 3.1.5. The landscape baseline study provides an assessment and understanding of the landscape in the area that may be affected by the proposal, and the wider landscape in which any development would lie. This includes the existing landscape's constituent elements, its characters and the way in which they vary spatially, its geographic and topographical extent and influences, the historical setting, its condition and any significant interventions, the way the landscape is experienced, and the (human and natural) value attached to it.

3.2. Site Context

- 3.2.1. The site lies in existing open countryside, at the western boundary of Faringdon.

- 3.2.2. The Town of Faringdon has an historic core, and occupies a prominent position above the surrounding Thames valley on the Corallian Ridge. Faringdon reflects the typical growth patterns of similar settlements and contains a variety of urban and suburban typologies. The edges to the town are fairly distinctly defined by both the natural settlement boundaries, the topography, and the established road network within the area. The major man-made boundary to the town is the A420 by-pass, which defines a finite edge to the town to the south east; whilst the natural landform and topography have confined development within the town boundaries to reasonably level areas, above the adjacent Thames Clay plain, away from the steeper scarp faces of the west and northern fringes.
- 3.2.3. There is a degree of typical 'rurban' fringe in some areas, with land uses such as allotments, light industry and mineral extraction which characterise the human landscape between the town and the (agricultural) countryside.
- 3.2.4. Much of the town's surrounding landscape has historic connotations, including country houses and historic landscape features. The National Trust is a major land owner in the area, especially to the west of Faringdon (See diagram D-10, Appendix 3). Indeed, in addition to the estates it holds and manages, it also owns land close to the town, such as the majority of the allotments to the north of the proposed site.
- 3.2.5. Dominating the town, and visible from far, especially when viewed from the north and west, is Folly Hill, which rises above Faringdon to the east, with its 100ft high Folly Tower, constructed in 1935 by Lord Berners. This monument is open to the public at regular times from April to October.
- 3.2.6. The proposed site is visible, at least in part, from both Folly Hill, and the tower itself, whilst the Folly Hill features as a focal point for the views of the town when seen from vantage points such as the lay-by on the Highworth Road (B4019 Coleshill Road).

3.3. The Site

- 3.3.1. The proposed site is located in an elevated position on agricultural land to the west of the existing Faringdon town boundary, and north of the AB019 Highworth Road.
- 3.3.2. The site occupies a rectangular parcel of land, approximately 5.5 hectares in size, which falls from roughly 120m at its the south east corner towards the north west at about 90m, encompassing a change in level of approximately 30 metres; an average slope of 1 in 13.

- 3.3.3. Currently the land is set to grass (pasture), with evidence of hay cropping. The western side of the field is poorly drained, with a spring and an area of boggy land, especially to the north west corner. The vegetation reflects this, with areas of sedge grass where the land is permanently wet.
- 3.3.4. The site is mostly defined as Agricultural Land Grade 3b, although there is a significant proportion of Grade 2 land to the north east corner.
- 3.3.5. The site is enclosed by hedgerows on all sides, which include some substantial vegetation and mature trees. The southern boundary fronts the B4019 Highworth Road and is densely vegetated with indigenous hedgerow species and trees. The eastern boundary is also vegetated, and abuts the existing housing area which forms the town boundary. To the north, the site is separated from adjacent fields and a large area of allotments by an area of wooded hedgerow and a public footpath. The western boundary of the site adjoins an arable field, separated by a hedgerow with occasional trees.
- 3.3.6. An above-ground high voltage electricity line crosses the site from west to east (in its northern quarter), which is then routed underground, presumably to the electricity sub-station in Orchard Hill just outside the site, to the south.
- 3.3.7. Pedestrian access to the site is currently via kissing gates at the north eastern and south eastern corners. A public footpath runs through the site, 7-9 metres inside its eastern edge, from south to north, connecting into the larger local network of public rights of way through the surrounding agricultural and historic countryside, and with the town.
- 3.3.8. Although in private ownership, the entire site is well used by the public for recreation and dog-exercising, with established walking routes evident in the pasture. These permissive footpaths, and the Public Right of Way which runs through the site, are clearly visible from available satellite images dating back to at least 1999.
- 3.3.9. Known locally as 'Humpty Hill' because of its topography, the character of the site and its functions change throughout the year, and it accommodates ad-hoc community uses such as sledging during the winter and kite flying and other events during other seasons.

3.4. Visual Baseline

3.4.1. Generally

- 3.4.2. The character of the site and the study area in which it sits is defined in a variety of levels, from very general national designations, based on generic topology and geological characteristics, to more local, contextual, definitions.
- 3.4.3. The study area itself can be further broken down into discrete character areas, where the impact of the proposed development can be judged based on the nature of the topography, vegetation, infrastructure, land use, and built forms.
- 3.4.4. The diagrams that accompany this chapter (Appendix 3) illustrate the various aspects of the landscape which combine to define the landscape in which the proposed site sits, and include illustrations of the Topography (Diagram D-02), Hydrology (Diagram D-03), Green Infrastructure (Diagram D-07), Major Structures, such as pylons and masts (Diagram D-05) and the surrounding Transport Infrastructure (Diagram D-04).
- 3.4.5. The study area consists of a largely agricultural landscape, dominated by the Corallian Ridge which bisects the landscape from east to west.
- 3.4.6. The major settlement within the area is the town of Faringdon, although there are smaller settlements, such as Great and Little Coxwell, Fernham, Longcot and Colehill. The study area includes the edge of Watchfield, to the west, where (just outside the study area) there is a significant community wind farm with an array of five turbines. The nature of the landform within the study area is such that vertical elements such as these are generally only apparent locally or from the higher ground of the Ridge. Similar visibilities apply to the line of pylons in the north, and the large, low lying, buildings north of the Thames (again outside the study area).
- 3.4.7. The agricultural field patterns within the study area are relatively homogeneous and fairly uniform in size, typified by hedgerow boundaries with trees. Large areas of woodland or plantations are evident, but these are confined mostly to the north and west of the area.
- 3.4.8. The principle road through the area is the A420 Swindon to Oxford road, which bypasses Faringdon to the south, forming a natural boundary to the town. Additionally, from North West to South East, the A417 is a significant route connecting Wantage with Cirencester which passes through Faringdon.

- 3.4.9. The agricultural landscape is punctuated by occasional pockets of mineral extraction, close to Faringdon, and also at Shellingford. There is little in terms of industrial land use within the area (although there are recent developments next to the A417 in Faringdon itself).
- 3.4.10. In the broadest terms the Study Area can be described as two landscape qualities based purely on land uses and infrastructure (see supplementary diagram D-11 in Appendix 3).
- 3.4.11. Zone 1 is a rural landscape, focused towards the Thames Valley, uninterrupted by significant development, infrastructure or modern interventions. This landscape is both agricultural and historic, includes woodland and country houses, and lacks settlements other than farmsteads and isolated buildings.
- 3.4.12. Zone 2 is generally still rural, but includes settlements (such as Faringdon), major infrastructure (roads and Pylons) and elements of industry and extraction (quarries). Although Zone 2 is predominantly rural it has been degraded by elements such as the A420 Faringdon by-pass, and the power transmission lines.
- 3.4.13. These zones span both the Natural England NCA landscape character areas 108 and 109 (see Appendix 4), and the more detailed landscape character areas of the study area as identified below.
- 3.4.14. At a detailed level, the study area can be broadly broken into reasonably distinct, but overlapping character areas, as described below. Diagram D-08 (Appendix 3) illustrates the broad, generic areas described below:

3.5. Faringdon Town

- 3.5.1. Faringdon is an historic market town on the Corallian Ridge.
- 3.5.2. The town is a nucleated settlement, characteristic of the area, where development, until the 20th century, was generally based around a central core or along a primary transport corridor.
- 3.5.3. It has a core of historic buildings, and has expanded during the 20th century to its current form, mostly with new housing, but also a number of employment sites. Although occupying a prominent and elevated position in it's own right the town is dominated by Folly Hill, with it's Tower. Development, post war, has occurred mostly on a field based pattern, with each new development area consisting of a particular style and density.

3.5.4. The town was once served by a railway, but the route of the line has since become (at least in part) the re-aligned A417 to the A420 by-pass (completed in 1979). The original railway station still exists.

3.5.5. IMPACTS: The landscape significance of the site from and within this character area is mixed, with impacts ranging from none to highly significant according to the receptor. The western edge of the town is particularly susceptible to landscape change on its boundary, where the adjacent landscape is not sufficiently robust to accommodate change.

3.5.6. The Corallian Ridge

3.5.7. This character area is defined by its elevated position in the wider landscape, and the relative steepness of the ridge hill-sides and escarpments, especially to the east.

3.5.8. The area is described in the Vale of the White Horse Planning Advisory Notes 2006 as:

3.5.9. *"the [Midvale] ridge (sometimes called the Golden Ridge) has been dissected by streams, which have eroded steep slopes to hills such as Badbury Hill and Faringdon Folly. The ridge is characterised by woodland, including a significant proportion of ancient woodland; country houses in gardens designed to look out over the north-facing scarp; limestone villages built of local coral ragstone' and expansive views to north, south and, at the Oxford Heights, to the east. The soils tend to be light and sandy, with large arable farms to the west."*

3.5.10. In contrast to the Wooded Ridge, the area is predominately agricultural, with fairly constant field sizes, generally given to arable use, although livestock are farmed in the area.

3.5.11. IMPACTS: Development would impact adversely on the integrity of the scarp, allowing the town to spill from the ridge into the open vale to the north without any natural, landscape or topographical features to interrupt or contain the landscape change.

3.5.12. The Historic Wooded Ridge

3.5.13. This landscape character area is essentially a sub-division of the Corallian Ridge, with many of the same characteristics, overlaid with the greatest concentration of plantations and woodlands in the study area.

3.5.14. The wooded ridge includes sites of historic interest, such as Badbury Hill, Badbury Forest and Buscot House, and is predominately a well-treed and managed landscape associated with an historic land ownership pattern.

- 3.5.15. Much of this land is in National Trust ownership, with varying degrees of public access through the different land holdings (see diagram D-10 in Appendix 3).
- 3.5.16. At its highest point within the area the landform rises to approximately 165m at Badbury Hill, the site of an Iron Age fort (Badbury Camp).
- 3.5.17. The character area does not contain any settlements, few roads, and although publicly accessible, contains few Public Rights of Way.
- 3.5.18. IMPACTS: The wooded areas are generally publicly accessible, although development of the site would be mostly screened by the plantations themselves. However, there are large areas of unwooded land, often at higher altitudes, which command views towards Faringdon and the site. If developed, the site will appear an extension of the urban area towards the historic landscape, which will itself become the new natural boundary to further development in the absence of other intrinsic landscape features.

3.5.19. The Thames Valley Lowland

- 3.5.20. The Thames Valley is generally low-lying land associated with the flood plain and its associated topography. It is agricultural in nature with a cohesive field pattern defined mostly by hedgerows. The area lacks the woodland and plantations seen in the ridge areas, and has no settlements, only isolated farms and other dwellings.
- 3.5.21. The major infrastructure elements within this character area are the Radcot Road, and the line of pylons at its northern edge which run from west to east, close to the river. The mid-vale ridge is apparent from the whole of the character area forming the visual and topographical boundary to the area.
- 3.5.22. IMPACTS: The proposed development site is located above this landscape, on the ridge side, and will be visible and prominent from many receptors. When seen from a distance, any development would be perceived as an extension of Faringdon into the wider countryside. From closer receptors, development would dominate the hillside and effectively allow the town to spill into the open countryside. This would be highly significant within the existing landscape context and would extend the visual envelope of the town into an agricultural landscape. This landscape is not sufficiently robust to absorb a development of this magnitude as it will dominate the view of the hillside and effectively allow the town to breach its natural hill-top boundary and spill out into open countryside. If permitted, this would set a precedent for further development on and below the ridge slopes (as noted in the Local Plan Inspector's comments).

3.5.23. The White Horse Vale Lowland

3.5.24. Dominating the southern third of the study area, this is an undulating agricultural landscape without major features or significant landforms. It contains the settlements of Longcot, Fernham and Shellingford.

3.5.25. IMPACTS: The proposed site is not visible from this character area, although it abuts the Corallian (Midvale) Ridge. The effects of the proposed development on the landscape character of The White Horse Vale Lowland would be none in significance as the landform and vegetation mitigate against views of the site.

4. DEVELOPMENT EFFECTS

4.1. Description of the Site

- 4.1.1. The site and its context are described in detail in the Landscape Baseline.
- 4.1.2. In summary, however, the 5.6 hectare site is a single field unit located on the the edge of the Corallian Ridge face, sloping down from Highworth Road towards the north. It is currently open pasture, bounded by hedgerows on all sides, with varying qualities of tree cover and densities. The southern boundary is most densely vegetated, forming a tree belt along the perimeter of the site. There are no trees or distinct areas of shrub vegetation within the site.
- 4.1.3. The site is bounded by open countryside (arable land) to the west, Highworth Road and Highden Farm to the south, residential development to the east (the edge of Faringdon), and the Faringdon Wet Meadow Local Wildlife Site to the immediate north¹.
- 4.1.4. A Public Right of Way follows the eastern boundary, inside the site, from north to south. Other tracks are evident across the site as a result of frequent pedestrian (dog-walking) use.
- 4.1.5. The site has no specific designations, other than forming part of the Corallian Ridge landscape, and does not have any Tree Preservation Orders on any of the specimens. The site does not contain any known historic features.
- 4.1.6. A separate Ecological assessment of the site has been undertaken.

4.2. The Proposed Development

- 4.2.1. A detailed description of the proposed development is provided in the application documents.
- 4.2.2. For the purposes of this landscape and visual impact assessment it is assumed the general development and massing will be broadly as indicated on the submitted Landscape Framework Plan, and as described

¹ Faringdon Wet Meadow

This wet meadow near Faringdon is a steeply sloping field with a line of springs across the slope. The grassland has a good range of wildflowers and has not been agriculturally improved through the use of herbicides or fertilizers. The wildflowers include pepper saxifrage and colourful species such as cowslip, cuckooflower and common knapweed. Such grassland is a national priority for nature conservation. The wet areas where the springs rise have many sedges and wetland wildflowers such as meadowsweet and hemp agrimony.

in the application and Design and Access Statement and would consist of two storey housing (including detached, semi-detached and terraced properties) with associated infrastructure and landscape features.

- 4.2.3. The number of proposed dwellings is 94, which produces a site density of approximately 17 dwellings per hectare.
- 4.2.4. Vehicle access is proposed from the B4019 Highworth Road (to the south), through the existing hedgerow / tree belt.
- 4.2.5. The existing public footpath accesses at the north-east and south-east will be retained, as will the Public Right of Way.
- 4.2.6. A further pedestrian access is proposed to the bottom north-west of the site which would link to the existing Public Right of Way which runs east-west to the north of the site, and connects, to the west, with the bridle path leading to Step Farm.

4.3. Landscape Effects

4.3.1. Topography

- 4.3.2. The existing site slope will necessarily dictate the form of any proposals. An aggregate slope of approximately 1 in 13 will result in significant re-modelling of the site topography, and will probably necessitate retaining structures in association with both buildings and access ways (roads and footpaths) to achieve the anticipated development density.
- 4.3.3. The areas of open space, and the proposed drainage attenuation pond reduce the land available that would allow new buildings to following the natural contours of the landform.

4.3.4. Trees and Vegetation

- 4.3.5. The existing vegetation is confined to the perimeter of the site. With careful design and implementation it would be possible to develop the site without adversely affecting the eastern and western boundaries to any significant extent.
- 4.3.6. The northern boundary, however, is currently well-treed (on and off site) and benefits from a substantial belt of off-site vegetation to the north of the adjacent footpath.
- 4.3.7. The southern boundary is also sensitive to change, and the proposal suggests that there will be a thinning of the tree belt inside the site to minimise the width of the hedgerow. In addition, any new highway access

will result in the loss of a large portion of the boundary vegetation in order to ensure the correct sight lines out of the site.

- 4.3.8. The effect on the boundary vegetation is unlikely to be limited to the proposals as constructed, as erosion of the existing vegetation is likely to occur as a result of occupation of the proposed houses. Evidence of this is already seen along the eastern boundary where residents of the existing (adjacent) housing prune and manage the hedgerow trees to preserve views from their properties. This is likely to occur on the western site boundary as a result of development, and may well interfere with any proposed mitigation planting within the site in the long term.

4.3.9. Hydrology

- 4.3.10. Typical of land on a scarp face, there is evidence of at least one spring in the southern third of the site. The associated water course and boggy land extends north toward the northwest corner of the site, where the land appears permanently wet, with sedge grasses dominating the ground cover. The flow of the spring continues off-site to the north.

4.3.11. Landscape Character

- 4.3.12. Development will alter the landscape character irrevocably, both of the site, and its environs. The permanency of the change from agriculture to residential built form is important, as it would not be possible to reverse the process or restore the landscape and its associated character at some time in the future. The change would therefore be unlike many other interventions in the open countryside, such as power generation or mineral extraction facilities, where restoration is either planned into the development or is an option available in the future.
- 4.3.13. The impact on the landscape character will be highly significant, and will be evident across a broad area. The built forms will be evident throughout the seasons, and associated lighting will reinforce the change in landscape character outside daylight hours.
- 4.3.14. Mitigation planting, even where effective in screening, will do little to minimise the change in landscape character of the site in its setting, and will be perceived as an urban intervention in the wider countryside.
- 4.3.15. The change to landscape quality and character would be as described in the inspector's report for the Local Plan 2011:
- 4.3.16. **"Once the present edge of the urban area is extended into the open countryside in this direction, there is no clear landscape or visual**

containment feature available to form a new western boundary, apart from field hedges. Thus, further development might follow, “spilling down the escarpment” to the further detriment of the landscape setting of the town.”

- 4.3.17. Development of the site would result in a **high** degree of change to the landscape. The extension of built forms onto the hillside would break the natural undulation of the landscape, and remove the existing distinct urban boundary to the town.
- 4.3.18. The effect on the wider landscape would result in a **high** degree of weakening of the rural character of the western edge of the town, which is not sufficiently robust to absorb the proposed changes.

4.4. Effects on Visual Amenity

- 4.4.1. A visual assessment is concerned with the potential effects that may occur due to a proposed development upon the population likely to be affected. It assesses the change in visual amenity undergone by specific receptors that would arise from any change in the nature of views experienced as a result of the proposal.

4.4.2. Principal Visual Receptors

- 4.4.3. A number of visual receptors that would experience views of the proposals have been identified (see Diagram D-09 and Appendix 2). Visual receptors can include, but are not necessarily limited to: users of the site; residents in surrounding properties; users of public rights of way and other routes; users of public roads and railways; and people at their place of work. Consideration of these receptors includes both daytime and night time effects, and also seasonal variation.

4.4.4. Site Users

- 4.4.5. The site is used throughout the year by the local community. The impact of any development of the site will be significant for this constituency.

4.4.6. Public Roads, Lay-by and Footpaths

- 4.4.7. The prominent nature of the site is such that development will be visible from many areas of public access to its west and north west, as well as locally to the east and south. The well-used network of roads, footpaths and bridle ways will all be influenced adversely by any development.

4.4.8. The lay-by on Highworth Road deserves specific mention as it is frequented by many who stop to admire the view, or use it as a location to spend relaxation time to break a journey.

4.4.9. Residential Areas

4.4.10. The proximity of the site to the boundary of Faringdon is such that any development will impact on the adjacent residential areas.

4.4.11. Workplaces

4.4.12. There are no apparent workplaces (other than farms) within the immediate visual envelope of the proposed site.

4.4.13. Historic Landscape Character/Features

4.4.14. The study area is peppered with historic landscape elements and listed buildings and structures. With the exception of The Folly, none of the listed structures in the study area are visual receptors of the site.

4.4.15. The topography of the surrounding area is detailed on Diagram D-02 in Appendix 3 which illustrates the landform surrounding the site and its wider context.

4.4.16. As noted, the proposed site lies within a landscape rich with historic features and connotations. The extent of the National Trust's land holdings within the study area are significant, especially to the north and west of the site. The Trust owned land extends, from the west, to almost adjoin the proposed site, and includes the majority of the allotments to the north of the site, south of the school (See diagram D-10 Listed Structures & National Trust Owned Land in Appendix 4). It is a landscape that has not been degraded by the intervention of unsightly man-made structures or infrastructure.

4.4.17. Lighting

4.4.18. In addition to consideration of the site and its context from specific visual receptors, the more general nature of the lit landscape is also important in considering the visual impacts of the proposed development.

4.4.19. Lighting is an existing characteristic of the night time landscape in the study area, be it the absence of light in small pockets, static night time lighting due to 24 hour places of work and road infrastructures, or the kinetic night time movement of vehicles on major transport routes.

- 4.4.20. The proposed development will include street and other lighting and will be visible at all times. This will highlight the development to the north and west especially, and will be a significant new source of light during the hours of darkness, visible even in the context of the existing light throw of Faringdon.

5. RECEPTOR VIEWS

5.1.1. See Appendix 2 for photographs of the views referred to below.

5.2. View 1: B4019 Highworth Road Lay-by

5.2.1. The site as seen from the existing vantage point and lay-by at the western edge of Faringdon. This receptor is a popular stopping point to appreciate the panoramic views of the Thames Valley. Views towards the Folly are currently across farmland with Faringdon nestled in the middle distance.

5.2.2. This viewpoint affords excellent views to the west, north and east, with long distant views towards the Thames Valley and clear views of the town. Folly Hill, its vegetation and tower are visible across the townscape, occupying a prominent and elevated position to the east.

5.2.3. The agricultural foreground to the view is of both arable and pasture land, with the site prominent to the west of the existing town boundary. The 30m level change across the site is evident, with the land rising from north to south alongside the B4019.

5.2.4. A hedgerow separates the site (pasture) from the arable field to the west.

5.2.5. - Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View

5.2.6. The view is **highly** sensitive. The site is in the foreground, acting as a pastoral 'front garden' to the town, and providing an abrupt visual transition from countryside to townscape, reinforced by the hedgerows to the east and north of the site. The lack of built form in the foreground reinforces the perception of the town behind and provides a focus towards the high ground of Folly Hill in the east.

5.2.7. - Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect

5.2.8. Development of the site will significantly alter views from this well used and popular location.

5.2.9. - Significance/Scale/Degree of Effects on View

5.2.10. The visual effects of any development from this receptor would be profound, and the extension of the town would be significant. The development would occupy a substantial portion of the frame and would dominate the foreground view.

5.2.11. Perceptually, from this highly significant receptor, the size of the town would appear to be almost double as the foreground development will dominate the view. No amount of mitigation will reduce this in the long

term, and due to the topography even dense planting would fail to screen much of the development.

5.2.12. The visual impact on the receptor is therefore judged extremely **high**.

5.2.13. - Mitigation

5.2.14. No degree of mitigation would reduce the impact on the view, even in the longer term, as buildings and infrastructure would be evident, even after 10-15 years.

5.2.15. Mitigating planting would only partially screen any development for parts of the year, but this would also adversely affect the setting on the town in this view, and detract from the finite townscape edge which is currently a feature of this receptor.

5.3. View 2: Public Right of Way within proposed site

5.3.1. The footpath passing north to south through the site is a significant public receptor to any development of this land, and will be fundamentally affected by any change to the landscape of the area. The footpath is well-trodden and defined; used mainly by recreational dog walkers and locals. The entire field, known locally as 'Humpty Hill', is used for dog walking and other 'Indian trails' are evident in the field, visible from the footpath and the adjacent viewpoints.

5.3.2. - Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View

5.3.3. What is currently a community resource and unofficial recreation area to the west of Faringdon would be lost to use, with the exception of the retained footpath, which would change in character beyond recognition.

5.3.4. The area known as 'Humpty Hill' would cease to exist and its occasional usefulness as play space, event space, snow slide, and recreation area would be lost to community use. During winter snowfall its uniqueness in terms of topography, location and convenience, coupled with its north-facing aspect cannot be replicated elsewhere. Although seasonal and occasional this facility would be lost entirely as a result of development.

5.3.5. Along with this change, the abrupt transition between townscape and countryside, defined by the boundary to the town, would be removed. This will erode the contrast, provided by the landscape of the site, between townscape and accessible countryside. The north-south public right of way through the site is not replicated locally and will change the users experience of the landscape to a **high** degree.

5.3.6. - Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect

5.3.7. The fact that the footpath runs through the proposed site precludes any opportunity to soften the visual impact of any changes on this receptor. The visual impacts of development from this location is therefore **high**, with no potential for mitigation. The loss of the views to the west and north would be significant resulting in the complete obfuscation of the wider, low lying, landscape of the Thames Valley from the receptor. The visual linkage with the historic woodlands to the west would also be lost.

5.3.8. - Significance/Scale/Degree of Effects on View

5.3.9. Change to the landscape will be complete. The agricultural and rural setting would be transformed into a suburban extension of Faringdon. The effects are therefore **high**.

5.3.10. - Mitigation

5.3.11. Mitigation from this receptor is not possible. The entire view and character will be altered irrevocably in the short and long term.

5.4. View 3: Site seen from adjacent housing estate

5.4.1. This receptor is the housing area which was built circa 1980, and is typical of housing estate design at the time. This is not a single viewpoint, but rather an interface with the eastern edges of the proposed development. Receptors here will include users of the public highways and paths, as well as residents of the estate. Views into and over the site will therefore be available, and experienced from, ground level up to second story height.

5.4.2. The receptor sits, for the most part, above the application site, and the views to the west and north are therefore dominant across the open countryside to the west. It is apparent that the residents of the estate, especially on Orchard Hill, maintain the hedgerow at a height that retains these views, at least in part.

5.4.3. - Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View

5.4.4. The existing estate (the receptor) was built around 30 years ago and can now be considered mature.

5.4.5. The treescape associated with the receptor is minimal, and the boundary with the open countryside is managed to preserve as much of the view as practical. It is therefore likely that the same pressures to protect views (by minimising vegetation) would be applied to any development to the west, minimising the effectiveness of potential mitigation measures.

5.4.6. This receptor is not homogeneous or linear in its aspect to the site, but wraps partially around it. Views into the site therefore vary considerably, and in some instances, such as from Canada Lane, any development will become a near-view focal point despite any potential mitigation.

5.4.7. - Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect

5.4.8. The landscape effect will be to extend the existing townscape into open countryside, bring the townscape outside its current boundary and into agricultural land. The exposed and sloping nature of the site is such that this change will affect both sites, altering the landscape character of both the site and this receptor. The landscape impact will be **high**.

5.4.9. - Significance/Scale/Degree of Effects on View

5.4.10. Construction of another housing estate next to an existing, boundary estate will have **high** visual effects on this receptor. There will be an inevitable loss of views across to the west and the low-lying areas to the north.

5.4.11. There will also be the significant foreground views of new development adjacent to the receptor. Any screening of the new buildings will impact on the existing boundary condition, further reducing the visual connections with the open countryside.

5.4.12. - Mitigation

5.4.13. The only potential mitigation would be screening the development using vegetation planted along the entire boundary. This would adversely limit the views across the existing landscape, and only limited planting is suggested on the appellant's Illustrative Masterplan (D&AS Figure 31). Any night-time effects will not be possible to screen.

5.5. View 4: Site seen from Allotments and School area to north

5.5.1. The allotments and school are to the west of Canada Lane and to the north of the site. The allotments slope down from north to south over a distance of approximately 100 metres. The school occupies the higher land.

5.5.2. The allotments are in the ownership of both Faringdon Town Council (the western plots), and The National Trust (the bulk of the plots).

5.5.3. Generally, the allotments appear well frequented, used and tended.

5.5.4. - Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View

5.5.5. The allotments are, like the site, a community focus for the town. They are well used and very well frequented though out the year, with a constant flow of users and visitors for both productive and leisure purposes.

5.5.6. - Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect

5.5.7. The landscape effects of development on the receptor would transform the southern milieu from agriculture to suburban town extension. The presence of built forms in a currently undeveloped area would impact on the perception of the landscape, altering the relationship with the intervening fields, which would become an isthmus of agricultural landscape projecting into the fabric of the town. This landscape effect would be **medium** to **high**, altering the character of the receptor and its adjacent landscape.

5.5.8. - Significance/Scale/Degree of Effects on View

5.5.9. The sloping nature of the receptor means the visual impact of potential development is not consistent throughout the area. The site is evident from the higher land, and would appear as an extension of the existing town, as seen across two intervening fields (both with associated hedgerows). The extent to which development will be evident decreases at lower levels, although there would still be views into the site during winter months. Overall, the visual impact would therefore be **medium** to **high** in aggregate for this receptor, and would change according to the time of year.

5.6. View 5: Local views from surrounding footpath network

5.6.1. The immediate network of Public Rights of Way extends beyond the site and into the agricultural land to the north and west. The most prominent of these (local to the site) is the footpath which runs east to west towards Badbury Forest from the site and Canada Lane.

5.6.2. - Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View

5.6.3. The footpaths and bridleways are elements of a series of local trails and walks, promoted by the Town, to encourage exploration of the surrounding countryside. Faringdon Walkcard 6, for example, is an illustration of this, and highlights a walk from the Town through to Thrupp and towards Lechlade (see Appendix 5).

5.6.4. The nature of the field patterns and hedgerows in the low lying land to the west of the site is such that views of the site will alter according to location and season. The hedgerows are well maintained due to the agricultural

land-uses resulting in relatively few specimen trees, and virtually no continuous high-level vegetation acting as visual screens between receptors and the site.

5.6.5. - Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect

- 5.6.6. From the local footpaths the landscape effect will be **high**, effectively changing the landscape character from rural to urban fringe. The loss of the agricultural landscape buffer between the low lying countryside, and the ridge edge to the existing town will create an ill-defined townscape edge that will alter the landscape character of the area and its receptors. The rural perceptions of the receptor will be replaced with a loose and suburban interface between countryside and town, damaging the landscape typologies of both.

5.6.7. - Significance/Scale/Degree of Effects on View

- 5.6.8. Development of the site will be obvious and **significant** from the local Public Rights of Way. The site will become an extension of the townscape, breaking the existing relationship between the ridge (acting as the edge of town) and the surrounding countryside.
- 5.6.9. The boundary of the town will cease to be defined and contained within the landform and will spread into open countryside. No topographical boundaries will remain between the rural and urban edge, rather any new boundary edge will be defined by vegetation and built forms.

5.6.10. - Mitigation

- 5.6.11. The proposed layout does not allow for mitigating planting on-site to protect or soften this view.
- 5.6.12. Off-site planting to ameliorate the visual changes would not be possible due to the intervening landform.

5.7. View 6: Views from Bridleway between Smallgains Copse and Step Farm

- 5.7.1. The bridleway runs roughly north to south about a kilometre to the west of the site. The land is relatively flat, lying lower than the site, but rises up the scarp close to Badbury Hill House.
- 5.7.2. Views of the site from this Public Right of Way are evident from a number of locations as a pedestrian; the site is more apparent from horseback.

5.7.3. - Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View

- 5.7.4. This bridleway is a boundary route between the historic plantations, woods and National Trust land to the west and the higher land to the east on which Faringdon is located.
- 5.7.5. As a Public Right of Way it benefits from not having been mettled for much of its length, remaining relatively free of vehicles other than agricultural machinery.
- 5.7.6. The rural aspects on this link between the B4019 and A417 are emphasised by the current lack of obvious development, and the fact that Faringdon is not evident except as a distant settlement nestling in the ridge.

5.7.7. - Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect

- 5.7.8. Development will change the landscape significantly, and the impact on the landscape character will be **high**. The extension of the town into the countryside, and the erosion of the existing scarp with new development will change the nature of the wider landscape in a way that will not be possible to mitigate or compensate against. The 24 hour nature of the development will further change the wider landscape setting, introducing light and animation into a currently rural area.

5.7.9. - Significance/Scale/Degree of Effects on View

- 5.7.10. At present the town of Faringdon is perceived from this receptor as a semi-distant feature on the sky-line. The edge of the town is apparent along the ridge line, and is contained by the landform, which provides a clean and distinct boundary between the built forms and the agricultural landscape to the west. The slopes and level changes reinforce this abrupt differentiation in land use, further containing the townscape.
- 5.7.11. The visual effects will be **medium** to **high** from the bridleway depending on the exact viewpoint, and according to the time of day or year.

5.7.12. - Mitigation

- 5.7.13. Dense planting within the site would have some effect if reducing the impact of built forms from this viewpoint when the development is unlit. However, this is not proposed (or feasible given the layout), so new planting would be limited to boundary conditions.
- 5.7.14. Off-site planting has not been proposed, but would only be effective in the close foreground of the receptor, which will obscure the longer distance views towards the town.

- 5.7.15. Mitigation planting would only partially screen any development for parts of the year.

5.8. View 7: The perception from the A417

- 5.8.1. Whilst the B4019 borders the site to its south, the A417 is the major road to the north, connecting Faringdon with Lechlade.
- 5.8.2. The road runs north west to south east and passes through or adjacent to historic areas such as Buscot Park.
- 5.8.3. As a visual receptor it is significant for road users at all times of day, but there are also a number of points along the route that are intersected by footpaths and bridleways, primarily the route to Smallgains Copse.
- 5.8.4. The receptor is therefore important for views of the site gained both peripherally and at speed from the road, and at a more leisurely pace from the Public Rights of Way. It is not simply a fleeting, kinetic receptor.

5.8.5. - Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View

- 5.8.6. This receptor is linear and generally time limited. Perceptions of the site will be glimpsed rather than permanent, but will be pervasive and subtle.
- 5.8.7. The change to part of the Corallian Ridge scarp face, however fleetingly perceived, changes the key relationship between the town of Faringdon and the surrounding countryside.
- 5.8.8. It is important not to consider this receptor as simply a driver's view from a road, as the visual impact on the view will apply to all users (including passengers and slow moving road-users).

5.8.9. - Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect

- 5.8.10. From all western viewpoints the landscape will change significantly as the townscape spills into the open countryside. The effects will be similar to those described from the Step Farm Bridleway, albeit rather more intermittent.

5.8.11. - Significance/Scale/Degree of Effects on View

- 5.8.12. The town of Faringdon, approached from the west by the A417, is experienced very much as a sudden transition from countryside to town. The progression from fields to built environment is rapid.

- 5.8.13. The approach to the town is obvious only in a generic fashion, as the landform and setting of the town are such that much of the built environment is hidden from this receptor.
- 5.8.14. Development of the site would alter this relationship, visually pushing the presence of the town into the agricultural landscape, and weakening the abrupt transition which currently exists between country and town. At night this would be exaggerated as the site would become a new light source in the landscape.
- 5.8.15. The effect on this receptor, in visual terms, is therefore **medium to high**.

5.8.16. - Mitigation

- 5.8.17. Effective mitigation would need to consist of off-site planting close to the road, which would obscure views of the escarpment in the distance. This would close the landscape grain and change the nature of the road and the adjacent hedgerows. Such a change would not be appropriate for the landscape character of the area, which has managed, low hedgerows and a distinct field pattern.

5.9. View 8: The view from Folly Hill

- 5.9.1. Folly Hill is a prominent landmark adjacent to the eastern edge of Faringdon.
- 5.9.2. It is a well-used, publicly accessible area consisting of open, grassed hillside, with a wooded summit and vegetated boundaries.
- 5.9.3. It is fully accessible, but includes defined paths and routes throughout the area.
- 5.9.4. The brick-built Folly dominates the hill, surrounded by coniferous trees which act as a foil to the building throughout the year. The folly itself is open to the public at various times during the year.

5.9.5. - Nature and Sensitivity of Baseline View

- 5.9.6. Folly Hill is a well-used and iconic location on the edge of Faringdon. The views available are significant and extend well beyond the landscape study area associated with this LVIA.
- 5.9.7. As would be expected from any high vantage point, the views from the receptor are generic, with only significant landscape and visual elements being obvious (i.e. the Watchfield Wind Turbines some 7km distant to the south west).

5.9.8. - Nature and Magnitude of Visual Effect

5.9.9. In landscape terms, site development would result in an incremental change to the visual character of the area. Development would represent only a small increase in the urban portion of the view. The landscape effect will therefore be **low to medium** in the context of the townscape and its broader setting.

5.9.10. - Significance/Scale/Degree of Effects on View

5.9.11. The site is visible from significant portions of Folly Hill, and is seen in the backdrop of the bulk of the town of Faringdon which dominates the foreground views to the west.

5.9.12. The nature of the townscape is such that there are no significant or identifiable landmarks or buildings within the urban area, which results in a visually indistinct foreground. The site is evident within this as an area of agricultural land towards the edge of the town, although from this viewpoint it sits below the more distant ridge lines and hills. This limits the visual impact of any site changes as seen from Folly Hill in the wider landscape. The visual impact from this receptor is therefore judged **medium to low**.

5.9.13. - Mitigation

5.9.14. The already fragmented appearance of development from this receptor would not change significantly, and the proposed planting would be seen in this context.

5.9.15. The form of the development, and its setting would not be perceptibly different from its surroundings from this view, especially given the size, massing and scale of the individual buildings.

6. ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

6.1. Generally

- 6.1.1. The site is currently in agricultural use.
- 6.1.2. The site has a low landscape capacity to accommodate change, and is highly sensitive in its setting and topography.
- 6.1.3. Any development will significantly impact on the nature and character of the site and will inevitably impact on the broader landscape, affecting a multitude of receptors and significantly altering the landscape character of the area.

6.2. Development Impacts

- 6.2.1. The construction phase of any development will result in major alterations to the landscape, with temporary works, stock-piles, groundworks and infrastructure alterations phased during the construction period.
- 6.2.2. The proposals consist of 94 new dwellings with associated infrastructure. The exposed nature of the site will affect the wider landscape, and it's context. There would be an inevitable, irreversible and permanent impact on the local landscape and wider area associated with such a development, including provision of new buildings, new hardstandings, new landscape features and other associated elements.
- 6.2.3. The proposal does not affect much of Faringdon Town directly in terms of landscape or visual impact, rather the impact will be very local to specific and well-used receptors such as existing housing and local public rights of way, and, at the same time, very important in a broader context within the wider landscape and the perception of the extent of Faringdon, especially when considered from the North West.
- 6.2.4. Once construction is complete the development will be highly visible, in perpetuity, on the scarp face.

6.3. Residual Impacts

- 6.3.1. Residual landscape impacts are those that remain 15 years after completion of the development. Planting can be expected to grow and develop, providing a potential level of screening to the built forms and infrastructure. This will soften the impact on the wider landscape, but will also exaggerate the extension of the Town into the surrounding open countryside, in contrast to the open countryside and field patterns which adjoin the site.

- 6.3.2. In the longer term, the only boundary between the townscape and the open countryside would be the (existing) western site hedgerow. As a landscape feature this is insufficiently robust to form a new and definitive boundary to the town, and would be subject to further erosion by subsequent development pressures in the future.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1. In landscape terms, building on an open, sloping field on a prominent hillside will inevitably impact on both the character and fabric of the wider landscape. The degree to which this will be apparent is detailed in this document, and the intrusion of development into open countryside will significantly impact adversely on the study area, both locally, and in the wider landscape context.
- 7.1.2. No amount of new planting, in terms of mitigation, will reduce the significance or permanence of the impacts of development. Indeed, it would simply draw attention to the sub-urban extension of the town into the open countryside.
- 7.1.3. Similarly, the retention of areas of open land within the development will not alter the impact of the proposals on the wider landscape, and will be seen as incongruous pockets of manicured landscape within the current agricultural context. They will not preserve or enhance the rural setting.
- 7.1.4. The extension of the town to the west cannot be justified in landscape terms as it is alien to the existing landscape character of the area, and would be out of keeping with the evolution of the town within better defined boundaries such as the existing A420. This is important in a landscape context as much of Faringdon has evolved without much sub-urban sprawl or rural fringe development, with development generally occurring with respect to the landform. This development pattern well reflects the differentiation between the two national landscape character areas - the Corallian Ridge (on which development has generally occurred to date within the town) and the Thames Clay Vale, which is open and generally undeveloped. The boundary between these two landscape typologies is the steep hillsides and scarps of the area; these have remained undeveloped, preserving the landscape interface between the two landscape character areas. Development of this site would erode that differentiation, and weaken the contrast between the two, as well as having a detrimental impact both locally and in the wider landscape context.
- 7.1.5. In summary, the site landscape, and its landscape setting are insufficiently robust to accept development without significant and permanent adverse effects to the wider existing landscape.