



Land to the North East of KGV Playing Fields, Cuffley

Landscape and Visual Assessment
June 2015

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Lands Improvement



LAND TO THE NORTH EAST OF KING GEORGE V PLAYING FIELDS

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

by

Hankinson Duckett Associates

for

Lands Improvement Holdings

HDA ref: 2130.19
June 2015

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Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	1
1 Introduction.....	3
1.1 Instructions	3
1.2 Methodology	3
2 Planning policy context	3
2.1 National planning policy.....	3
2.2 Local policy	4
2.3 Green Belt.....	5
3 The site context	8
3.1 Location	8
3.2 Geology	8
3.3 Landform and drainage	9
3.4 Local land use and vegetation.....	9
3.5 Landscape character	9
3.6 Designations	11
4 Site survey.....	12
4.1 Location	12
4.2 Landform and drainage	12
4.3 Land use and vegetation	13
4.4 Surrounding land uses and properties	14
4.5 Character	15
5 Visual assessment of the site	15
5.1 Methodology	15
5.2 Existing visibility of the site	16
5.3 Summary of existing site visibility	19
6 The proposed development.....	20
6.1 Description of the proposals	20
6.2 Landscape proposals	21
7 Landscape and visual appraisal of proposed development	23
7.1 Introduction	23
7.2 Landscape assessment.....	23
7.3 Visual assessment.....	24
7.4 Summary of visual impact	29
7.5 Evaluation of landscape and visual resource	29
7.4 Cumulative Impacts	30
8 Policy context	30
8.1 Green Belt	
9 Summary and conclusions.....	32

Plans

HDA 1: Location and Designations

HDA 2: Topography

HDA 3: Landscape Character

HDA 4: Site survey

HDA 5: Existing visibility

HDA 6: Landscape Proposals

HDA 7: Photolocations

Supporting photographs

APPENDIX 1 – HDA Landscape and Visual Assessment Methodology.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Landscape and visual appraisal looks at the potential effects of a development of up to 121 dwellings within a site to the immediate south of Cuffley, referred to as Site A within the report. Site A is an arable field, surrounded by vegetation, with Cuffley to the immediate north, Northaw Road to the west and a railway line to the east. Site B consists of part of an arable field, located between the southern extent of the sports ground and Northaw Road, which would be subject to a change of use from agricultural land to an extension of the King George V playing fields. Neither site contribute significantly to the landscape and visual amenity of the local landscape.

Both sites are generally well contained from their surroundings, with site vegetation filtering or screening views from most visual receptors and make a limited contribution to the openness of the surrounding landscape. Views of Site A are limited to receptors immediately adjacent to the site or a small number of receptors on higher ground to the south of the site. There are views of Site A from local properties from the north and west, but these are generally glimpses or partial views and are heavily filtered by vegetation. Visibility of Site A from public footpaths is limited to the two footpaths to the south of the site. There are no open views of Site A from local roads and views from the railway are limited to a relatively short section of the track to the south-east of the site.

Views of site B are limited to views from within the recreation ground, Cattlegate Road and Northaw Road or Cattlegate Cottages or Wells Farm.

The development of Site A would form a logical extension to development on the southern edge of Cuffley, in keeping with the settlement pattern that characterises the village. To the east, the edge of the proposed development is curved to respond to the sloping topography of the site. The landscape scheme seeks to retain and enhance the existing vegetation, including the large trees to the north and south of the site and the hedgerows along the site boundaries. The proposed landscape would include native trees and shrub planting, as well as some ornamental trees and shrubs along streets and around the proposed houses. The planting is designed to improve the screening of the development and to create an attractive place for people to live, with improved links between the existing settlement of Cuffley and the recreation ground to the south of the site. The proposed change of use on Site B would improve the local sport provision for the community.

Both sites are well contained and separated from the surrounding rural landscape to the south, east and west. Development within these sites would be possible without significant changes in character to the wider landscape or compromising the integrity of the Green Belt designation. The proposals have been designed to minimise and mitigate for any adverse visual impacts and the result would be an attractive new housing development, with a soft and green edge to the south and south-east of the development providing a transition to the playing fields and rural landscape beyond.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Instructions

1.1.1 Hankinson Duckett Associates has been appointed to undertake a landscape and visual assessment of two parcels of land to the south of Cuffley, one to the north east of King George V playing fields and the other to the south (*Plan HDA 1*). The first parcel is located to the immediate south of the existing settlement of Cuffley and will be referred to as 'Site A'. The second site lies between Northaw Road and the recreation ground (land north east of King George V playing fields), to the south of Cuffley, hereafter referred to as 'Site B'. This report assesses the likely effects of a proposed housing development of up to 121 new dwellings within Site A and a proposed change of use within Site B, from agricultural land to an extension of the King George V playing fields, on the surrounding area.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 National landscape guidance uses landscape character as a basis for policy. Natural England, updated their methodology for the character-based approach to landscape assessment (2014 – Ref 1). It describes the application of landscape character assessment at different scales: the national/regional scale, local authority scale and local scale. The third edition of the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (Ref 2), published in 2013, sets out landscape assessment methodology, which provides the basis, with adaptation, for use in project-specific landscape impact assessment.

1.2.2 The approach to this landscape and visual assessment is based upon this latest guidance, and upon HDA's extensive practical experience of assessment work.

2 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 National Planning Policy: Landscape

2.1.1 The 'National Planning Policy Framework' 2012 (NPPF - Ref 3) sets out the national planning policy for England. Relevant sections of this document are discussed below.

2.1.2 Chapter 6 – Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes.

Paragraph 49 states that:

'Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development.'

2.1.3 Chapter 7 – Requiring good design

'Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- *establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;*
- *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;*
- *respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;*
- *create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and*
- *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.'*

These are the key points relevant to the proposed development.

2.1.4 Chapter 11 – Conserving the Natural Environment

The aim of new developments should be to conserve and enhance biodiversity and that new developments should look for opportunities to incorporate biodiversity where possible.

2.1.5 Paragraph 113 requires that *"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 ..."*.

2.2 Local policy

2.2.1 Local policy is set out within the saved policies of Welwyn Hatfield District Plan (Ref 4).

Key landscape policies relevant to this application include:

2.2.2 Policy R17 - Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

The Council will seek to protect existing trees, hedgerows and woodland. Any new development will be required to incorporate new planting which includes locally native species where possible.

2.2.3 Policy D1: Quality of Design

'The Council will require the standard of design in all new development to be of a high quality.'

2.2.4 Policy D2: Character and Context

'The Council will require all new development to respect and relate to the character and context of the area in which it is proposed. Development proposals should as a minimum maintain, and where possible, should enhance or improve the character of the existing area.'

2.2.5 Policy D8: Landscaping

Landscape should form an integral part of the overall design for new development proposals. Landscaping schemes should; respect the character of the area, include the planting of trees, hedgerows and shrubs and provide details of future maintenance. The policy also states that: *'The retention and enhancement of existing key landscape features such as trees and shrubs, ponds and watercourses will be expected where feasible; where this is not possible, replacement planting should be carried out.'*

2.2.6 Policy RA10 - Landscape Regions and Character Areas

'Proposals for development in the rural areas will be expected to contribute, as appropriate, to the conservation, maintenance and enhancement of the local landscape character of the area in which they are located, as defined in the Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment.'

2.2.7 The Council are working on 'The Local Plan', which will replace the District Plan and will set out the planning framework for the borough for the period up to 2031. The council had commenced work on the Core Strategy but has now decided to combine the strategic policies set out in the Emerging Core Strategy with the Site Allocations and Development Management documents so that we will have a single local plan. A consultation document for the emerging Local Plan has yet to be issued.

2.3 National Planning Policy: Green Belt

2.3.1 The whole area surrounding Cuffley is designated as Green Belt. *'The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.'* (Paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework – Ref 3)

2.3.2 The aim of Green Belt designation is to '*prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open*' (paragraph 79 of NPPF – Ref 3).

Paragraph 80 lists the five purposes of the Green Belt. These are:

- 1. '*To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas*';**
- 2. To prevent the coalescence of settlements;**
- 3. To help safeguard the countryside from encroachment;**
- 4. To '*preserve the setting and special character of historic towns*';** and
- 5. To encourage the recycling of derelict or other urban land, to assist in urban regeneration.**

2.3.3 Paragraphs 84 and 85 of the NPPF (Ref 3) provide guidance to Councils for the review of Green Belt boundaries. It states that local authorities should:

- Channel new development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary.
- Be consistent with the Local Plan strategy and identify areas of 'safeguarded land' that has the potential to meet future housing need.
- Omit land that it is unnecessary to keep permanently open.
- Define boundaries clearly using recognizable physical features.

Local Green Belt Policy

2.3.4 Local Green Belt policy is set out within the saved policies of Welwyn Hatfield District Plan (Ref 4). Within the District Plan, key Green Belt Policies include GBSP1, GBSP2 and GPSP3. These policies can be summarised as:

- GBSP1: Definition of the greenbelt – This policy states that the Green Belt will be maintained as shown on the Proposal Map.
- GBSP2: Towns and Specified Settlements – lists the towns and settlements that are not within the Green Belt. The policy states that development should be concentrated within Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, but that development within other settlement (including Cuffley) would be acceptable, but would be limited to areas within the settlement boundary that are not within the Green Belt.
- GBSP3: Area of Special Restraint and Structural Landscape Area – This policy designates the land at Panshanger Aerodrome as a potential area for future development.

Green Belt Review

- 2.3.5 Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) was employed by Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council, and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to undertake an independent Green Belt review of the Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield administrative areas (Ref 5). The purpose of the study is to inform local policy within the three Council's, particularly with regard to the future Green Belt boundary.
- 2.3.6 The Green Belt land within the 3 districts was sub-divided into strategic parcels to enable assessment against the NPPF purposes criteria (listed in paragraph 3.1.2). The land around Cuffley was divided into 3 parcels:
- GB52: Green Belt Land West of Cuffley – *'the parcel allows for the assessment of the gap between Potters Bar and Cuffley'*.
 - GB53: Green Belt Land South of Cuffley – *'the narrow parcel allows for the assessment of land at the south-east edge of the study area which is closest to London, as well as part of the gap to Goff's Oak'*.
 - GB54: Green Belt Land North of Cuffley – *'the parcel forms part of the large block of countryside in the east of the study area'*.
- 2.3.7 Each parcel was assessed against the first 4 Green Belt purposes of the NPPF, along with a 5th local objective identified by the council. The Site is located within a small portion of GB53. Parcel GB53 was assessed as having a significant contribution to purposes 1 (restricting the urban sprawl of London), 3 (safeguarding the countryside) and 5 (maintaining settlement pattern by separating Cuffley from Goff's Oak to the east and Crews Hill, to the south of the M25). The parcel was assessed as having 'limited or no' contribution towards purposes 2 (preventing neighbouring towns from merging) and purpose 4 (preserving the setting and special character of historic towns). The Green Belt Review (Ref 7) is thorough and methodical but the analysis is carried out at a strategic level, which provides a broad brush approach and analyses the landscape at a large scale.
- 2.3.8 HDA have produced a local scale 'Landscape Assessment and Green Belt Review' (Ref 6) for Cuffley, which reviewed the implications of development within 8 SHLAA sites surrounding Cuffley on the Green Belt designation. The report concluded that the countryside surrounding Cuffley is high value and that the Green Belt designation fulfils its purpose in this area. The report identified that the development of SHLAA sites Cuf4,

Cuf5, Cuf7 and Cuf8, to the south-west of Cuffley, would be inconsistent with the existing settlement pattern of the village, would harm local landscape character and would compromise the separation between Cuffley and Northaw. As a consequence it was concluded that these sites would be unsuitable for removal from the Green Belt.

2.3.9 Development within the two SHLAA sites to the east of the village, Cuf1 and Cuf 3, would affect the separation between Goff's Oak and Cuffley. SHLAA site Cuf6 (Site A within this report) was considered the most suitable site for removal from the Green Belt.

3 THE SITE CONTEXT

3.1 Location (*Plan HDA 1*)

3.1.1 The application areas are located to the south of Cuffley, which is approximately three kms east of Potters Bar and 2 kms north of the M25. The M25 cuts through the landscape in an east - west alignment, it's heavily engineered landform of cuttings and embankments having a marked effect on the character and continuity of the landscape.

3.1.2 Northaw, Cuffley and Goff's Oak are all ridgeline villages. Goff's Oak lies approximately 0.5km to the east of Cuffley and Northaw village lies approximately 1.6km to the south-west. Within Cuffley, the main road through the village 'The Ridgeway' (B157), is located along the top of the ridgeline. A string of large properties are located along the north-eastern section of this road, overlooking the valley to the south-west. The remaining built-up area of Cuffley is a nucleated settlement, contained to the west by the steep-sided valley and to the east by the railway line, which runs north from London. The only development to the east of the railway line is a small industrial area to the south of the B156 and a single residential close (The Meadway), to the north of the B156. Cuffley is contained to the north by woodland and limited by the steep valley sides to the south-west and to the south by the Northaw Brook.

3.2 Geology

3.2.1 The land around Cuffley forms part of the gently undulating South Hertfordshire Plateau with a bedrock comprised of London Clay formation. Alluvium and river terrace deposits are found along the watercourses to the east and south of the village. The ridge to the east of Cuffley is formed from superficial deposits of Lowestoft Formation whereas the ridgelines running through Cuffley and Northaw are formed from sand and gravel deposits.

3.3 Landform and Drainage (Plan HDA 2)

3.3.1 The landform of the area is characterised by spurs and associated valleys with higher ground to the north. This relief system converges on the land to south of Cuffley giving way to a main valley that carries Cuffley Brook southwards towards the New River which flows through Enfield. Cuffley Brook is located in the valley between Cuffley and Goff's Oak. Other local streams include Northaw Brook, located to the south of Northaw and Cuffley and a stream located in the valley between Cuffley and Northaw.

3.3.2 Cuffley, Northaw and Goff's Oak are all ridge top settlements, with intervisibility between the settlements across the intervening valleys. Where the villages have expanded, settlement has been located on the shallower slopes of the valley sides. Cuffley is located on the ridge top and the shallow east facing slopes of one of these spurs.

3.4 Local land use and vegetation

3.4.1 The eastern side of the Cuffley spur is almost entirely occupied by the built up area of Cuffley. To the north of Cuffley there is a wide belt of ancient woodland at Great Wood. Cuffley is largely contained, to the east, by the railway line. The landscape to the south, east and west is mainly agricultural land (predominantly arable) with associated farmsteads. Some of the farmsteads have equestrian facilities. The undulating topography and local tree lines and copses give this area of land considerable enclosure, although some of the higher areas are more widely visible.

3.5 Landscape character

National Character

3.5.1 The land around Cuffley falls within the Northern Thames Basin (NCA 111) National Character Area (Ref 7). Relevant key characteristics of this character area are:

- A diverse landscape based around a plateau landscape divided by a series of broad valleys, containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea. The valleys containing the rivers Stour and Roman are steeper sided.
- There are extensive areas of broadleaved woodland, often located on layers of thick clay. There are considerable tracts of ancient woodland.
- Remaining countryside is made up of mixed farmland, with a dominance of arable agriculture in the Hertfordshire Plateaux, Essex heathlands and parts of the London Clay lowlands.

- Large towns within Hertfordshire, major motorways (including the M25 and M1), railway line and other infrastructure including pylons are a major influence on the landscape character. A medieval pattern on small villages and dispersed farming settlement remain characteristic in parts of Hertfordshire and Essex.
- Brick is the predominant building material. Older traditional buildings are timber built with weatherboarding.

Local Character (*Plan HDA3*)

3.5.2 Local landscape character is defined by Hertfordshire County Council in the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (2000-2005 - Ref 8). Both Sites lie within character Area 55, Theobalds Estate.

3.5.3 **Area 55. Theobalds Estate:**

Located to the south and south-east of Cuffley, to the east of Cattlegate Road. Key features are:

- *'Discrete woodlands and estate farmland.*
- *Geometric field pattern.*
- *Undulating landform*
- *Horse grazing*
- *Mansions and isolated farms.*
- *Transport infrastructure.*
- *Long straight boundaries.(to rights of ways and fields)'*

3.5.4 The landscape is characterised by mixed farmland and parkland with a strong pattern of discrete woodland blocks and medium to large open arable fields on an undulating landform. A network of streams are located within the Character Area. Many feed into the New River in the east, whereas Northaw Brook is located to the west of the Character Area and flows east, linking to Cuffley Brook. There are long views across the arable slopes to the M25 in the south over the low, managed hedgerows. Small farms are scattered across the estate, with settlement generally confined to higher ground. The area is rich in historic interest, although the historic links are not obvious within the existing landscape. Sowell's viaduct is a distinctive feature within the local landscape. There are extensive pedestrian routes and bridleways which cross the character area.

3.5.5 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council produced a 'Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study' in 2012 (Ref 9), which looked at the capacity for land surrounding existing settlement in the borough to accommodate future growth in the Green Belt. Site A is referred to as WSW Cuff4 and was assessed as having medium sensitivity and medium capacity. The report went on to state that this site '*could accommodate change but with some degradation of character that mitigation measures might be able to address*'. Only one other site in Cuffley was assessed as having a medium capacity (Cuf1), the remaining sites were assessed as having low capacity. None of the sites surrounding Cuffley were identified as having high capacity. Site B lies within area WSW Cuff5, which was assessed as having a medium sensitivity and low capacity. The low capacity was attributed to the more open character of the area and its location on an Area of Archaeological Significance.

3.6 Designations (Plan HDA 1)

3.6.1 The application areas are not covered by national or local landscape designations, however, the whole district of Welwyn Hatfield, including the area surrounding Cuffley, is designated as Green Belt. The potential impacts and their significance on this designation are discussed later in this report.

3.6.2 A large area of Great Wood Country Park, to the north-west of Cuffley is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), conserved for its wildlife or geology. This area is also designated as Ancient Woodland. A further area of Ancient woodland is located to the south of Cuffley at Cattlegate.

3.6.3 There are no listed buildings within Cuffley. The nearest listed buildings to the application area are Cattlegate farmhouse (to the south), Nyn Manor Farm (to the north-west), Park farm (to the south-west) and Burnt Farm and Burnt Cottages (to the south-east). A Scheduled Monument is located to the south of Goff's Oak.

3.6.4 Local designations are discussed within Local Planning policy and are shown on the Local Plan Map. Relevant policy designations include 'Wildlife Site Areas' and 'Area of Archaeological Significance'. The woodland blocks to the north-west of Cuffley are designated as Wildlife Site Areas. There are two Area of Archaeological Significance – one is to the south of Cuffley, beyond the Hertfordshire Way footpath, and the other lies to the west of Cuffley, to the south of Thorntons Farm. Site B lies within one of the Areas of Archaeological Importance.

- 3.6.5 The area has some significant public rights of way, including the Hertfordshire Way (which runs to the south of Site A), forming a convoluted route between Cheshunt and Hereford, and Chain Walk. The landscape to the south-east of Cuffley is better served by public rights of way than the landscape to the immediate east and west.
- 3.6.6 Of these designations, the only ones pertinent to the sites are their location within Green Belt and the presence of the Hertfordshire Way to the south of Site A. The remaining designations listed above would be unaffected by the proposed development.

4 SITE SURVEY

(Plan HDA 4)

4.1 Location

Site A

- 4.1.1 Site A is located to the south of Cuffley and is bound by the urban settlement of Cuffley to the north and north-west, the railway to the east and a mature hedgerow and tree belt lining the Hertfordshire Way footpath to the south (photographs 1 - 4). King George V Playing Fields (photograph 14), lie to the south and west of the Site and agricultural land lies to the south-east, west and to the east beyond the railway line. The site has an area of 4.90 hectares.

Site B

- 4.1.2 Site B is 0.79 hectares and lies between the southern part of the sports ground to the east and Northaw Road to the west (photographs 11 - 13). A hedgerow with hedgerow trees lie between Site B and the road. The tennis courts of the recreation ground lie to the immediate north and the bowls club and sports pavilion lie to the east. An open field lies to the south with Northaw Brook at its southern boundary and Cattlegate Cottages beyond.

4.2 Landform and drainage

Site A

- 4.2.1 The site has a varied topography. The land falls away from the western boundary on Northaw Road, from approximately 65m AOD to 58m AOD, and then rises again to form a localised high point located to the south of Cuffley School at approximately 69m AOD.

From this high point, the ground slopes away again to the south and east. The low point of the site is approximately 55m AOD and is located in the south-eastern corner of the site.

Site B

- 4.2.2 This site is located on a south-east facing slope that leads down to Northaw Brook. The highest point is the north-western corner at approximately 59m AOD, falling to approximately 52.6m AOD in the south-eastern corner.

4.3 Land use and vegetation (Plan HDA 4)

Site A

(Photographs 1-4)

- 4.3.1 Site A comprises of a single arable field with mature boundary vegetation. The eastern boundary is a mixture of native scrub, up to 8m high and containing Hawthorn, Goat willow, Blackthorn, Field maple, Elm and Oak. The southern boundary consists of a mature tree belt to the west transitioning to a hedgerow in the east. Footpath 5 (part of the Hertfordshire Way) runs through the centre of the tree belt and between two parallel hedgerows, one of which (the northern hedgerow) is the site boundary. The hedgerow is approximately 5m high and is predominantly Hawthorn with Blackthorn, Goat willow, Hazel, Ash, Oak and rose. The tree belt to the south of the Site is a mixture of mature and immature trees, with outgrown hedgerow scrub. The mature trees are dominated by Oak and Ash and are up to 19m high. The smaller trees are between 6 and 10m high and consist of immature Ash trees and outgrown Hawthorn with some Field maple and Oak.
- 4.3.2 A 2m high hedgerow lines the western boundary, adjacent to Northaw Road. The hedgerow is at grade with the road. Within the Site the land banks down from the hedgerow. The hedgerow is predominantly Hawthorn with Blackthorn, Ash, Lime, Rose and plum. A single 12m high Horse chestnut tree is located within the hedgerow at the northern end of the boundary.
- 4.3.3 The northern boundary is also vegetated with a mixture of trees and scrub species located to the north-west of the Site, to the south of Greenfields. Further to the east and to the south of the school is a line of mature poplar trees, which form a distinctive landscape feature at the high point of the Site. The north-eastern edge of the northern

boundary reverts back to mixed native scrub, consisting of Hawthorn, Field maple, Blackthorn, Ash, Whitebeam, Hazel and Oak.

Site B

(Photographs 11 - 13)

- 4.3.4 Site B comprises a small part of the arable field, currently lying fallow, which surrounds the recreation ground to the south and east. A newly planted hedgerow separates the car park and field and the southern boundary is undefined. A mature hedge, approximately 5m high, with mature Lime, Oak and Horse Chestnut trees, lies between Site B and Northaw Road. A 3m high hawthorn hedge separates the site from the remaining recreation area to the south-east. A line of telegraph poles crosses the Site.

4.4 Surrounding land uses and properties

- 4.4.1 Footpath 5 (the Hertfordshire Way) lies to the immediate south of the southern Site boundary vegetation of Site A (photographs 5 and 6). Beyond the footpath to the south-west is King George V Playing Fields which contains three sports pavilions, a recreation area with hard surfaced play area and tennis courts, sports pitches and a small area of formal play equipment (photograph 14). The recreation ground has car parking provision and lighting for some of the pitches and tennis courts. To the south-east of the footpath is a large agricultural field and a railway runs parallel to the eastern boundary of Site A. Site B lies to the south-west of the recreation ground.
- 4.4.2 Cuffley Primary School is located to the north-east of the Site A, beyond the line of poplar trees and a 2m high weldmesh fence (photographs 1 and 4). To the west of the school is the retirement development of Greenfields, which lies to the north-west of Site A (photograph 4). This development is a mix of bungalows, two storey houses and blocks of flats, 2 stories high. Only the eastern houses and flats face the site. The remaining houses and bungalows face east and west, with only occasional side windows overlooking the site.
- 4.4.3 To the west of Site A, beyond Northaw Road, is Colesdale. This road ascends the hill to the west of the Site with rows of housing facing east towards the Site. The dwellings at Greenfields and Colesdale form the southern development edge of Cuffley.
- 4.4.4 Cattlegate cottages are a line of north-east facing dwellings, located on Cattlegate Road to the south-west of both Sites. Aside from these cottages and the settlement of Cuffley

itself, the only other properties in the vicinity of the sites are isolated farmsteads including Cattlegate Farm to the south, Wells Farm and Colesdale Farm to the south-west and Burnt Farm on Cuffley Hill, to the east of the Site.

4.5 Character

4.5.1 Both Sites are located within Theobalds Estate Character Area and share some of the key characteristics of the character area including a geometric field pattern, undulating landform and blocks of vegetation and woodland to the east and south. Both Sites are smaller in size than the arable fields to the east, south and west. Site A is physically and visually separated from the surrounding rural landscape and has urban influences from the settlement edge of Cuffley to the north, the recreation area to the south and from the pylons that cross the south-eastern corner of the Site. Site B is closely associated with the recreation ground, although there are visual links to the rural agricultural landscape to the south.

5 VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SITE

5.1 Methodology

5.1.1 A visual assessment of the Site was carried out from public roads and footpaths. Views were assessed on the basis of 1) existing visibility 2) visibility of proposed development. Views of the proposed development were estimated by visualising the scale and form of the buildings and landscaped areas with the aid of the illustrative Masterplan (see plan HDA 6). Views from properties could not be assessed from the houses themselves; in most cases the likely extent of the view could be adequately estimated from adjacent roads or paths. Views from some properties were identified using a reverse view, i.e. an assessment of the extent to which a property was visible in views from within the Site looking outwards.

5.1.2 The visual assessment is based on a grading of degrees of visibility. There is, in any visual assessment, a continuity of degrees of visibility from not visible to fully open in the view. To indicate the degree of visibility of the Site from selected locations, that continuum has been divided into 4 categories, as follows:

1. **Open view:** a clear view of a significant proportion of the Site within the wider landscape.
2. **Partial view:** a clear view of part of the Site: a partial view of the Site; or a distant view in which the Site forms a relatively small proportion of the wider view.

3. **Glimpse:** a transient view, of a distant view in which the Site forms a small proportion of the view in the wider landscape.
4. **No view:** no view or the Site is difficult to perceive.

5.2 Existing visibility of the site

Site A

(Plan HDA5)

- 5.2.1 Site A is well contained from the majority of Cuffley village and the wider landscape. Views from the settlement of Cuffley are restricted to the roads and properties to the immediate north and west of the Site, including Cuffley Primary School, Greenfields and Colesdale. There are only three roads and two public rights of way that have any visual links with the Site. The railway line and its associated earthworks and tree planting block views of the Site from the landscape to the east.
- 5.2.2 **Properties:** Views of Site A are limited to the properties on the southern edge of Cuffley. This includes the retirement bungalows and flats within Greenfields to the north of the Site and from the properties on Colesdale, to the north-west of the Site. The south-facing windows of number 33 Greenfields and flats 35 – 41 Greenfields have open and partial views of Site A through and over the site boundary vegetation (reverse view in photograph 4). There are also open views from the two south facing windows at the southern end of the block of flats numbered 43 – 53. The remaining 4 properties that are adjacent to the northern site boundary have only glimpsed or partial views of Site A, due to the intervening vegetation. Views are likely to increase in winter when vegetation is not in leaf. These views represent the current visual amenity of the Greenfields residents living within these properties.
- 5.2.3 There are open views of Site A from Cuffley School, to the north (see reverse view in photograph 4). These views would contain boundary vegetation and trees in the foreground, with an arable field (the Site) in the mid-ground and the tree belt to the south of the Site blocking any wider views. These views would be experienced by schoolchildren and teachers within the southern-most classrooms and southern part of the school grounds. The view would not be a focus for the receptor group and they would have a low sensitivity to a change in view.
- 5.2.4 There are glimpsed and partial views from upper floor windows of some of the east facing properties on Colesdale (see reverse view in photographs 1 and 2). Views would

include boundary vegetation, with glimpses of the higher ground within the Site beyond. The visibility of the Site is likely to increase in winter months when the boundary vegetation is not in leaf.

- 5.2.5 Views from the listed property Cattlegate Farm include distant views of the higher ground within Site A (see reverse view in photograph 2) from north facing windows. From this viewpoint, the Site is a small part of a wider view and will be seen in the context of the southern edge of Cuffley and the recreation ground to the south of the Site. The majority of the Site is screened from view by intervening vegetation.
- 5.2.6 At the time of the field survey, there were no views from any other properties, including Cattlegate Cottages, Woodhurst Farm Cottages, Wells Farm, Colesdale Farm or Burnt Farm. No views are possible from either Goff's Oak or Northaw. Intervening tree belts and vegetation block any views of Site A in summer, however glimpses of the Site may be possible in winter months, from Cattlegate Cottages and the first floor windows of Woodhurst Farm Cottages.
- 5.2.7 **Rights of way:** The Hertfordshire Way (footpath number 6) runs to the immediate south of Site A. The footpath is lined to either side by trees and vegetation (see photographs 5 - 7), which blocks any open views of the Site. Gaps in the vegetation along the western section of the footpath allow pedestrians occasional partial views of the Site, but the majority of the route has either glimpses or no views of the Site. The only open view is from the existing field gateway into the Site. Where views are possible they are of an arable field, with the development of Greenfields visible beyond. The visibility of Site A from this footpath will increase in winter when vegetation is not in leaf.
- 5.2.8 Two sections of footpath 15 have views of Site A (photographs 22-24). The northern section of the public footpath has been widened to provide a vehicular access route to the recently constructed anaerobic digestion (AD) plant. The rural experience and tranquillity of the public footpath has been adversely affected by the AD plant and associated lorry traffic. Site A is visible from the northern section of the footpath, between Soper's Viaduct and the AD plant (photograph 22). The site is seen as a small section of an arable field, contained by mature hedgerows and a tree belt. The backdrop to the view, is the northern boundary vegetation, which along with the school building forms the skyline. Rooftops of dwellings within Cuffley village are visible amongst vegetation to the

west of the site. In summer the western end of the site is not visible, however glimpses of the site are likely to be seen in winter when the intervening vegetation is not in leaf.

- 5.2.9 Views from the southern section of footpath 15, immediately north of Cattlegate Farm include distant views of the higher ground within Site A (photograph 24). The remainder of the Site is contained by boundary vegetation. Site A forms a small part of the wider view and is seen in the context of the existing settlement of Cuffley. The visibility of Site A from this section of the footpath would increase to partial views in winter, when vegetation is not in leaf. Views from the central section of the footpath are screened by intervening vegetation.
- 5.2.10 Intervening vegetation blocks any views of Site A from footpaths to the west of the Site and the railway line and associated mounding and vegetation screen views from the footpath network to the east of the Site (photographs 19, 20, 25 & 26).
- 5.2.11 No views of Site A are possible from the recreation ground to the south-west of the Site (photograph 14).
- 5.2.12 **Roads:** There are no open views of Site A from any local roads. There are occasional glimpses from the section of Northaw Road immediately adjacent to the western Site boundary (photograph 8), from Colesdale (photograph 15), South Drive (photograph 18) and from the roads leading off from the Greenfields development to the north of the site (photograph 17). The existing field gate, at the southern end of South Drive, provides partial views into Site. There are distant glimpses of Site A from gaps in the vegetation along Northaw Road West (photograph 28). There are views of the recreation ground and Site boundary vegetation from the northern end of Cattlegate Road (photograph 27). Further south, hedgerows lining the road, block views from the higher ground. Distant glimpses are only possible through gaps in the hedgerow, which are infrequent. The visibility of Site A from local roads will increase in winter months when the vegetation is not in leaf, however there will continue to be no open views of the Site and any views will be seen in context with the existing settlement of Cuffley.
- 5.2.13 **Railway:** The railway line runs to the immediate east of Site A. The railway track is raised above the level of the Site on an embankment, approximately 1.5m above the ground level in the north-east corner of Site A. The eastern part of the Site is visible from the section of the railway line between Soper's viaduct and the north-eastern corner of

the Site. Views from passing trains will be transient and will be seen in the context of the settlement located to the north and west of the Site. Views of the western part of the Site are blocked by vegetation and the higher ground within the Site.

Site B

(Plan HDA5)

- 5.2.14 Due to its location between the recreation ground and Northaw Road, Site B is extremely well contained when viewed from the surrounding landscape. Views are only possible from the recreation area, Northaw Road, Wells Farm, Cattlegate Cottages and Cattlegate Road. Rising ground and intervening vegetation blocks any views from the north. The hedgerow to the west of the Site screens views from Northaw Road and Wells Farm, with only occasional glimpses of the Site through intervening vegetation (reverse view in photograph 11). Similarly the majority of views from the recreation ground are blocked by the south-eastern hedgerow (photograph 14). There are open views of the Site from the car park within the recreation ground that forms the northern part of Site B and from the access road to the north of this car park (photographs 11 and 12). Visibility from the south is more open due to the lack of boundary vegetation. There are glimpses and partial views of Site B from the northern section of Cattlegate Road and from Cattlegate Cottages, which face the Site (photograph 27). Vegetation lining Cattlegate Road prevents any open views.

Night-time visibility

- 5.2.15 The proposed site currently comprises agricultural land which is unlit. Site A lies to the immediate south of the existing southern edge of Cuffley. The street lights and lights from dwellings are apparent from viewpoints to the south of the site, from which the site is visible during the day. Northaw Road is also lit between the village and the entrance to the car park at King George V (KGV) playing fields. Within KGV the tennis courts, to the north of Site B, are floodlit. The floodlighting is located to the south of the Site A and is apparent from the surrounding landscape. The street lighting and floodlighting within the playing fields has a marked effect on the rurality of the sites at night.

5.3 Summary of existing site visibility

(Plan HDA5)

- 5.3.1 Site A is generally well contained from its surroundings, with site vegetation filtering or screening views from most visual receptors. Views are limited to receptors immediately adjacent to the Site or a small number of receptors to the south of the Site. There are

views of Site A from local properties from the north and west, but these are generally glimpses or partial views and are heavily filtered by vegetation. Only number 33 Greenfields and flats 35 – 41 Greenfields have open views of the Site. Visibility of Site A from Public footpaths is limited to the two footpaths to the south of the Site (footpath numbers 6 and 15) and the only open view from a public right of way is at the entrance to Site A on footpath 6 (Hertfordshire Way). There are no open views of Site A from local roads and views from the railway are limited to a relatively short section of the track to the south-east of the Site.

- 5.3.2 Site B is more contained with views only possible from visual receptors within the recreation ground, on Cattlegate Road or within Cattlegate Cottages. There are occasional glimpses of Site B from the first floor windows of Wells Farm and from the section of Northaw Road immediately adjacent to the Site. These glimpses will be more apparent in winter when vegetation is not in leaf.

6 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Description of the proposals (Plan HDA 6)

- 6.1.1 The application is for a proposed housing development of up to 121 dwellings within Site A and a change of use from agricultural land to an extension of the King George V Playing Fields within Site B. The assessment of the proposals is based on the parameters plans submitted with the planning application, along with the illustrative landscape plans HDA6 and HDA7.
- 6.1.2 The proposed housing within Site A would continue the grain of the existing settlement along Greenfields, to the north-west of the Site. To the east, the proposed edge of development is curved to respond to the sloping topography of the Site. Dwellings are predominantly two storeys high, with allowance for up to 2.5 storey dwellings. Two storeys would be the maximum building height for the northern edge of the site (Storey heights parameters plan).
- 6.1.3 The proposed open space is located to the south-east of the Site and forms a treed and soft transition between the proposed development and the rural agricultural landscape to the south and east of the Site A. Other areas of planting and open space include an area on the highest part of the site, which would form part of the visual mitigation for the proposals, and the north-south green corridor, which runs through the centre of the site.

6.1.3 The proposed change of use within Site B would not include any development and expands the area of playing field available within the recreation ground.

6.2 Landscape Proposals and Mitigation

6.2.1 For the purposes of this assessment mitigation refers to the landscape proposals shown within the Illustrative Landscape plans (HDA6 & 7), designed to respond to the constraints of the site and mitigate the landscape and visual impacts that arise from the proposed development. Aside from the change of use, there are no proposed changes within Site B, as a result no landscape mitigation has been proposed for Site B. The following paragraphs focus on proposals for Site A. This report discusses both primary and secondary mitigation.

- Primary mitigation – the iterative process of masterplanning
- Secondary mitigation – additions or changes to the landscape proposals as a direct response to the results and comments obtained through public consultation.

6.2.2 Issues and constraints identified within the baseline include:

- Changes to landscape character caused by development on a Green Field site.
- Sloping topography within the site
- The sensitivity of the Hertfordshire Way and the existing trees and vegetation that line the footpath.
- Visual sensitivity of the site from residences to the north and public footpaths to the south.
- Overhead power lines crossing the south-eastern corner of Site A.
- Noise levels from the railway line to the east of the site.

6.2.3 The proposed scheme seeks to address the constraints identified above. This would be achieved by retaining the majority of the existing landscape features and building upon the existing landscape structure along the Site boundaries. The proposed internal landscape would include native trees and shrub planting, located to visually contain the Site and to minimise the impacts of the proposed development on surrounding landscape character.

6.2.4

The main features of the landscape strategy include:

- Protecting and enhancing the existing landscape features including the perimeter tree belts and hedgerows. Additional tree and hedgerow planting would be undertaken to gap-up and reinforce the boundary vegetation, particularly where proposed housing backs on to the boundary vegetation. This would maintain and build upon the enclosure and screening of the site.
- Planting new mixed native hedgerows at the northern and eastern Site boundaries, to improve the containment of the Site and improve the connectivity of the hedgerow network for wildlife.
- A naturalistic approach to planting within the open space to the south-east of the Site including woodland and scrub planting, meadow planting in more open areas of the open space, wetland and marginal planting around the proposed SuDS feature, which would improve the wildlife potential of the Site. The proposed tree planting along the south-eastern boundary and along the northern edge of this open space would mitigate for views from the south-east, particularly once planting has established. Care has been taken to avoid service wayleaves for underground services and overhead pylons.
- The provision of a green pedestrian link to run across the Site north/south between the recreation ground and the school. The link would be located adjacent to open space and would be overlooked by proposed housing to improve the perception of safety for footpath users. The footpath would provide 'a safer route to school' from the existing car park in the recreation ground.
- The entrance route into the proposed development would be a boulevard with tree planted verges to either side, providing a green and attractive entry into the Site.
- An area of open space is proposed on the higher ground. This would include structural tree planting to soften and screen views of the development from the south. Planting on higher ground would prevent the proposed development from skylining when viewed from footpath 15 to the south.
- The proposed development would also include street trees and ornamental planting, which would provide colour, texture and seasonal interest.
- The change of use at Site B provides the opportunity to improve the local recreational and sporting resource.
- Potential to broaden the connectivity of existing public rights of way with new permissive routes as shown on plan HDA6.

- 6.2.5 Following various consultation events including a public exhibition and meetings with the residents of Greenfields, additional landscape planting has been proposed which would include the underplanting of the existing northern boundary vegetation within Site A with holly, which would aid the screening of views in winter and deter trespass. Further design work to improve the entrance of Site A has been proposed to develop a gateway feature at the entrance to the village. Access onto South Drive, from the site, would be restricted to pedestrians and cyclists.

7 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 This section analyses the proposed development for Site A and the proposed change of use within Site B in order to identify their likely affects.

7.2 Landscape assessment

Features

Site A

- 7.2.1 The Site's main landscape features would be retained and protected through the course of the development. The only losses to existing features would be the removal of 28m of existing hedgerow to allow for the Site access and visibility splay. In addition 3m of overgrown hedgerow, a proportion of which dead Elm, would be removed from the southern site boundary to allow pedestrian access onto the Hertfordshire Way footpath. Approximately 250m of new mixed native hedgerow would be introduced around the Site perimeter and at locations within the Site (see landscape proposals plan HDA 7). Areas of native woodland planting would be introduced within the open space to the south-east of the Site and new native wetland and marginal habitats would be created in connection with the proposed SuDS ponds. In addition the proposed Site would benefit from numerous street trees and native and ornamental shrub planting, which would provide additional habitat and seasonal interest for residents, as well as creating an attractive place to live.
- 7.2.2 There would be a net increase in landscape features, although an area of productive arable land would be lost. There would be minor impacts on the landscape features on the site, as a result of the development, however the establishment of open space with

new tree and shrub planting would have a moderate beneficial effect at completion (the definitions of the degree of change are set out in Appendix 1).

Site B

- 7.2.3 All existing landscape features would be retained. The only change in landscape features would be the conversion of the existing set aside land to mown grass pitches. This would have a negligible adverse effect on landscape features. .

Landscape Character

- 7.2.4 Both Sites are located within Theobalds Estate Character Area. The settlement edge to the north of Site A, the urban edge land uses to the south of the Site and the railway line to the east, have a containing and urbanizing influence on this Site such that it is not typical of the surrounding rural landscapes of the Theobalds Estate Character Area. The high level of containment provided by the mature hedgerow and trees to the south of Site A, prevent the long distance views that are characteristic of the agricultural landscape to the south. Long distance views of Site A are filtered by the sports pavilions and mature vegetation and are seen in the context of the existing settlement of Cuffley. The proposed development within Site A would change the character of Site A itself, but would not impact on the wider landscape character.

- 7.2.5 Site B has some of the characteristics of Theobalds Estate Character Area. Site B is contained to the north and east by the recreation ground and by hedgerows to the west and south. The Site makes a very limited contribution to the wider rural landscape. The change in character from a small part of an agricultural field to amenity grassland within the recreational area would have little effect on the character of the immediate area and a negligible effect on the surrounding landscape character.

- 7.2.6 Neither Site contributes significantly to the landscape and visual amenity of the local landscape. Both sites make a limited contribution to the openness of the surrounding landscape. It is predicted that the overall impact of the proposed development on landscape character would be minor.

7.3 Visual assessment

Site A

- 7.3.1 The visibility of the proposed development within Site A will be limited to visual receptors immediately adjacent to the Site, views from footpath 15, to the south-east of the site and

distant glimpses from visual receptors on high ground to the south. At construction, the visibility of the Site would increase from its baseline state. This would be a short term effect and the visibility of the proposals would reduce again following the establishment of the proposed landscape scheme. Plans HDA 8 and HDA9 illustrate the differences in visibility of the site at construction and 15 years post completion.

7.3.2 **Properties:** The residents of number 33 Greenfields and flats 35 – 41 Greenfields would continue to have open and partial views of Site A from south-facing windows through and over the site boundary vegetation. Due to their visual sensitivity, the design has incorporated an area of open space to the immediate south of these properties. Views would include the open space and planting, with the built development visible beyond. The new housing would be most apparent at construction, with views softening over time with the establishment of intervening vegetation. The visibility of the proposed dwellings would also be more extensive in winter when vegetation is not in leaf. The proposed development would also be visible from the two south facing windows at the southern end of the block of flats numbered 43 – 53 and glimpsed or partial views would be possible from within the remaining 4 properties adjacent to the northern site boundary. The northern boundary vegetation would be strengthened as part of the proposed development, which would increase the screening between the existing and proposed housing. Views from these northern properties would be of the back gardens, access roads and buildings of the proposed development. Views of the development would be partial views or glimpses most noticeable following construction, and in the winter months. The proposed infill planting along the northern boundary would be predominantly Holly, which would provide a year-round screen to the development from ground floor windows and gardens.

7.3.3 The proposed fencing and hedgerow along the boundary between the Site and the school, would screen views into the Site from the school. The rooftops of the nearest row of houses would be visible over the fence line, although these views would be filtered by the existing boundary trees within the school Site.

7.3.4 There would be glimpsed and partial views of the proposed development from the upper floor windows of some of the east facing properties on Colesdale. Upper floor windows do not represent the primary living space of these properties and are assessed as less sensitive to change than from the bungalows and flats at Greenfield. These views would include the existing vegetation along Northaw Road, and the retained western site

boundary vegetation, with partial views of the proposed housing beyond. Views of the development would soften over time as the boundary vegetation and structural planting within the site matures. Views of the proposals would have the highest magnitude of effect at construction, before the planting within the proposed development has become established. Over time the maturing structural planting will soften and filter views of the development.

- 7.3.5 The residents of the listed property Cattlegate Farm would have distant views of the proposed development, however the housing development would be seen in the context of the southern edge of Cuffley, the recreation ground to the south of the site and the settlement of Goffs Oak to the east. The majority of the Site is screened from view by intervening vegetation, including vegetation surrounding Cattlegate Farm. At construction there would be partial views of the rooftops of the proposed housing within Site A, particularly housing located on the high ground to the east of the site. Views of the development would soften as the proposed vegetation within the south-eastern open space and the open space on the hill top matures, reducing the visibility of the proposals to glimpses of rooftops set amongst trees. The proposed housing development would be more visible in winter, when the intervening vegetation is not in leaf, however the proposals would be seen in the context of the existing village and would form a logical and characteristic extension to the settlement pattern.
- 7.3.6 Views of the proposals from other local properties will be extremely limited. Glimpses of the proposals may be possible in winter from Cattlegate Cottages and the first floor windows of Woodhurst Farm Cottages these glimpses will reduce as the vegetation within Site A establishes.
- 7.3.7 **Rights of way:** There would be partial and glimpsed views of the proposed development from the Hertfordshire Way (footpath number 6), which runs to the immediate south of Site A. The footpath is contained by vegetation to either side and the vegetation would be gapped up where it backs onto the backs of proposed dwellings. The proposed planting and boundary fencing of the proposed development would reduce the extent of views as the planting matured. The existing enclosed nature of the route would be maintained. An existing break in the vegetation would be utilised to allow access across the Site to the school. Views from this part of the Hertfordshire Way would be of the green link to the school and would contain open space in the foreground, with dwelling fronting onto the space to provide surveillance.

- 7.3.8 At construction, the rooftops of the proposed development would be visible over the existing hedgerow that contains the Hertfordshire Way to the east of the Site, before the footpath goes under the railway line. These glimpses will be more apparent for footpath users travelling west, facing the proposed development. Over time the proposed woodland planting to the south-east of the Site (adjacent to the footpath) will screen these views and the footpath will continue to have a contained and rural character.
- 7.3.9 Partial views of the proposed development would be visible from the northern section of footpath 15, between Soper's viaduct and the new AD plant. At construction views would be of the existing field to the south of the site in the foreground, with the proposed development in the mid-ground, surrounded by vegetation. The tall poplar trees on the site's northern boundary would continue to form the skyline in the view, although they would be less prominent in winter and the new housing would be more open to view. The activity and development contained within the AD plant reduces the sensitivity of this view to change, as users of the footpath would not be experiencing a quiet rural landscape. Over time, the proposed vegetation to the east and south of the site would mature, softening and filtering the north-facing views from this stretch of the footpath.
- 7.3.10 The southern section of footpath 15 to the immediate north of Cattlegate Farm would have distant views of the proposed housing to the east of the Site as part of a wider view that spans across to Goffs Oak in the east. Views of the proposed housing will soften over time as the proposed woodland planting to the south of the Site and the structural tree planting on the higher ground within the Site matures. The central section of the footpath would not include views of the development.
- 7.3.11 Occasional glimpses of the proposed development would be possible from footpaths 7 and 15, to the east of the railway. These views will consist of occasional glimpses of rooftops over the railway and existing vegetation. These will reduce as the vegetation within the Site matures. There would be no views of the proposed development from the footpaths to the west of the Site.
- 7.3.12 Glimpses of part of the proposed development would be possible from locations within the recreation ground where access has been improved to the school across Site A. There will continue to be no view of the Site or proposed development from the majority of King George V playing fields (the recreation ground).

7.3.13 **Roads:** There would be open views into the site at the proposed site access off Northaw Road. These views would be more apparent for pedestrians using the pavement than for vehicular traffic. Views through the entrance would be of the proposed development located either side of the main access street, which would be lined with an avenue of trees. With the exception of views into the site entrance there would be no open views of the site from Northaw Road. The proposed housing will be visible as glimpses over the retained boundary hedge from adjacent sections of Northaw Road. Occasional glimpses of the proposed development will be visible from Colesdale and from the roads leading off from the Greenfields development to the north of the Site. These views will consist of the rooftops of housing over intervening vegetation and are seen in the context of existing housing development. Distant glimpses of the rooftops of the proposed development within Site A would be possible through gaps in the hedgerow on the higher sections of Cattlegate Road. These views will be screened when the woodland planting within the Site matures.

7.3.14 **Railway:** The railway line runs to the immediate east of Site A. The railway track is raised above the level of the Site on an embankment, approximately 1.5m above the ground level in the north-east corner of Site A. There would be open views of the proposed development as trains pass along the short section of track that forms the Site boundary. The settlement of Cuffley is visible within the existing view at this point. Partial views of the Site would be visible from the section of the railway line between Soper's viaduct and the south-eastern corner of the Site. Views will be transient and will be seen in the context of the settlement located to the north and west of the Site. Visibility of the proposed development will reduce as the proposed woodland and structural planting within the Site matures.

Site B

7.3.15 Due to its location between the recreation ground and Northaw Road the proposals within Site B would be extremely well contained from the surrounding landscape. Views would only be possible from the recreation area, Northaw Road, Wells Farm, Cattlegate Cottages and Cattlegate Road. Views would be substantially the same as the baseline situation, but with a change within the site from set aside to amenity grassland, which would be seen within the context of the existing recreation area.

7.4 Summary of Visual Impact

7.4.1 Both Sites are well contained and the changes within the sites would only be visible from the immediate Site surroundings and from isolated receptor groups to the south of the Site. There would be no views of the proposed development from the surrounding villages of Goffs Oak and Northaw, or from the majority of Cuffley. Open views of Site A would only be possible from a short section of Northaw Road adjacent to the Site access, the south facing windows of number 33 Greenfields and flats 35 – 41 Greenfields and the small gaps in the vegetation along the Hertfordshire Way. There would also be views from the short section of railway line to the immediate east of the Site boundary.

7.4.2 Open views of the changes within Site B would only be possible from the recreation ground. The changes in use would complement, and be visually consistent with, the existing facilities on the King George V playing Fields.

7.5 Evaluation of landscape and visual resource

7.5.1 There is a gradation of the sensitivity of the landscape to development from a low level adjacent to Cuffley village up to a high level in the wider landscape. The degree of sensitivity is influenced by landscape character, designations and the general appreciation of the landscape as viewed from public vantage points. Site A is physically and visually contained by vegetation, which separates the site from the wider landscape. The site also has urban influences from Cuffley village to the north and from the formal recreation land uses of the KGV playing fields to the south. Changes to the character of the site and visual amenity, as a result of development, would be localised in effect and largely accommodated within the existing landscape structure. The site has therefore been assessed as having a low sensitivity.

7.5.2 The landscape to the south of the Hertfordshire Way is more rural, but still contains non-agricultural land uses including the KGV playing fields and the AD plant associated with Cattlegate Farm. The land to the west of Northaw Road, is wholly rural and performs a key function in the perceived separation between Cuffley and Northaw. The landscape to the east of the railway line is also rural in character and displays many of the key characteristics of the 'Theobolds Estate' local character area. The landscape to the east of the railway and west of Northaw Road are the most sensitive to change.

7.5.3 At construction, and within the curtilage of the application area, the proposed development would significantly change the character and appearance of Site A.

However the changes to the urban edge would be consistent with the existing settlement pattern of Cuffley and would have only minor visual impacts on the landscape to the south. While the development would be visible from some receptors to the south, the views would not be extensive or prominent, overall views of the development would not have a significant effect on the character or visual amenity of the surrounding landscape. There would be no significant change to the transition from the urban character of the village to the rural character of the wider countryside, in visual terms the status quo would be maintained. The proposed development would have no impact on the sensitive rural landscapes to the east of the railway line or to the west of Northaw Road.

7.5.4 The proposed changes in land use within Site B would be consistent with existing land uses in the area and would have negligible impacts on landscape features, landscape character and visual amenity of the local area

7.5.5 10 – 15 years after completion of the proposal the landscape scheme would have established. The housing development within Site A would be further screened from the wider landscape, particularly from footpath 15 to the south and from residential dwelling to the immediate north and west of the site. The settlement edge of Cuffley village would be defined by the strong vegetated edge alongside the Hertfordshire Way footpath. The residual effect of the development on the landscape would be low to negligible.

7.6 Cumulative Impacts

7.6.1 The cumulative impacts for this development would be the assessed impacts of the proposed development in combination with the potential impacts of any other committed development, including permitted development, similar projects under construction and allocations within an adopted Local Plan. The local plan has yet to be adopted and there are no other developments within the assessment area that are permitted or under construction. No cumulative impacts therefore arise as a result of this development.

8 POLICY CONTEXT

8.1 Green Belt

Site A

8.1.1 Development within this Site would be consistent with the existing settlement pattern and could be achieved without affecting the character and openness of the wider landscape. Constraints including the railway line, power lines and the rising landform have been

addressed through the design of the development proposals and a landscape strategy has been developed to extend the existing treed character around the Site and further reinforce the separation between Cuffley and the rural agricultural landscape to the south and east.

- 8.1.2 Development on the Site, to the south of the village, would form a logical extension of Cuffley as the Site forms an isolated agricultural field that falls between the existing edge of settlement and the formal recreational land uses of the King George V playing fields. The Site is further separated from the wider rural landscape by existing mature vegetation and the railway line, on embankment. The existing clearly defined boundary to the site provided by the tree belt and existing hedgerow along the Hertfordshire Way would be reinforced with additional planting and would form a clearly defined boundary to the edge of settlement. This would form a robust new boundary for the Green Belt to the south of Cuffley.
- 8.1.3 The first purpose of the Green Belt is '*to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas*'. Development of Site A is limited and contained by the existing treed southern boundary of the Site. The recreational land uses of the playing fields to the south of the site would continue to provide a transitional landscape between the village and the wider landscape and provide an effective buffer which would restrict any further development. Development within the Green Belt would therefore be controlled and would not constitute urban sprawl.
- 8.1.4 Site A makes no contribution towards the prevention of settlement coalescence (purpose 2) or the preservation of the '*setting and special character of historic towns*' (purpose 4).
- 8.1.5 Greenfield development, per say, has the potential to impact on purposes 2 and 5 of the Green Belt, which are to safeguard the countryside from encroachment (2) and to encourage the recycling of derelict or other urban land (5). Site A is an isolated field, well contained by vegetation and is located on the edge of the existing settlement, which already has a degree of urban influence. The encroachment into the countryside, if the proposed development were to proceed, would be limited and would not affect the character or appearance of the wider landscape.

Site B

- 8.1.6 The proposed change of use within Site B is located adjacent to the existing facilities on the playing field and is substantially contained by existing vegetation. There would be a negligible effect on the rural character of the wider landscape and the sense of openness of the Green Belt to the south and west of Cuffley would be maintained.

9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The development of Site A would be a logical extension to development on the southern edge of Cuffley, in keeping with the settlement pattern that characterises the village. The change of use within Site B would provide improved recreational facilities for the village in close proximity to existing facilities.
- 9.2 Both Sites are well contained and separated from the surrounding rural landscape to the south, east and west. Development within these sites would be possible without significant changes in character to the wider landscape or compromising the integrity of the Green Belt designation. The proposals have been designed to minimise and mitigate for any adverse visual impacts and the result would be an attractive new housing development, with a soft and green edge to the south and south-east of the development providing a transition to the rural landscape beyond and improved recreational facilities on the edge of the village.

REFERENCES

- Ref 1 - Natural England (October 2014), '*An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*'
- Ref 2 - The Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013), '*Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*' (third edition).
- Ref 3 - Department for Communities and Local Government (March 2012), '*National Planning Policy Framework*'
- Ref 4 - Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (2005), '*saved policies of Welwyn Hatfield District Plan*'
- Ref 5 - Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) on behalf of Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council, and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (Nov 2013), '*Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment*'.
- Ref 6 – Hankinson Duckett Associates for Lands Improvement Holdings (April 2014) '*Cuffley Landscape Assessment and Green Belt Review*'
- Ref 7 - Natural England (July 2013), '*NE466: NCA Profile 111 Northern Thames Basin*'
- Ref 8 - Hertfordshire County Council (2000 – 2005), '*Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment*'
- Ref 9 - Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (October 2012); '*Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study*'

APPENDIX 1 – HDA Landscape and Visual Assessment Methodology.

Assessment Methodology and Significance Criteria

(for EIA compliant LVIA)

1.1 Guidance

- 1.1.1 The proposed development is subject to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England) Regulations (2011), which implement EC Directive 97/11/EC. The structure of this assessment accords with Schedule 4 of the Regulations (Ref 1).
- 1.1.2 The methodology used in preparing this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been developed by HDA from guidance given in the following documents:
- The Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, (2013), "Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment" (third edition);
 - Countryside Agency (now Natural England) and Scottish Natural Heritage (by Carys Swanwick and Land Use Consultants), (April 2002), "Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland".
- 1.1.3 The assessment of likely impacts is considered in two separate but inter-linked parts as follows:
- **Landscape** impacts relating to changes in the fabric, character and quality of the landscape. These could be direct impacts on specific landscape elements or features (such as loss of woodland or semi-improved grassland) or effects on landscape character and designated areas of landscape; and
 - **Visual** impacts relating to specific changes in the character of available views and the effects of those changes on visual receptors (e.g. residents, users of public rights of way or recreational facilities). Visual impacts to the setting of cultural heritage features are also considered (e.g. scheduled monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas) as these interests are protected by planning policy.

1.2 Criteria for evaluation of sensitivity of landscape resource

- 1.2.1 The evaluation of sensitivity to change, in relation to landscape features, is included in baseline summary tables in the assessment text and (together with description, quantification etc). The evaluation of sensitivity to change in relation to character units is assessed within the text of the report. It is represented as an expression of comparative sensitivity, based on a five-point scale: Very Low, Low, Medium, High and Very High as follows:

- **Very High:** Nationally recognised landscape, e.g. National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. World Heritage Sites of international importance (if landscape reason for designation);
 - Strong landscape structure, characteristic patterns and balanced combination of landform and land-cover;
 - Appropriate management with distinctive features worthy of conservation;
 - Sense of place (usually tranquil);
 - No (or occasional) detracting features;
 - Landscape not substitutable.

- **High:** National or locally recognised landscape of particularly distinctive character, e.g. AONB's or Areas of Great Landscape Value;
 - Recognisable landscape structure, characteristic patterns and combinations of landform and land-cover are still evident;
 - Appropriate management, but potential scope for improvement;
 - Some features worthy of conservation;
 - Sense of place;
 - Occasional detracting features;
 - Very limited substitutability and susceptible to relatively small changes.

- **Medium:** Locally recognised, but undesignated, landscape of moderately valued characteristics.
 - Just distinguishable landscape structure, with some characteristic patterns of landform and land-cover though often masked by mixed land use;
 - Scope to improve management (e.g. of hedgerows);
 - Frequent detracting features;
 - Landscape resource reasonably tolerant to change.

- **Low:** Ordinary undesignated countryside;
 - Weak landscape structure, without characteristic patterns of landform or land-cover;
 - Limited management which is beginning to show signs of degradation;
 - Abundance of detracting features;
 - A relatively unimportant landscape, the nature of which is potentially tolerant to substantial change.

- **Very Low:** Degraded to damaged/polluted or derelict landscape structure;
 - Single land use dominates;
 - Lack of or poor management/maintenance/intervention which has resulted in degradation;
 - Presence of disturbed or derelict land requiring treatment;
 - Extensive or dominant detracting features.

1.3 Visibility baseline methodology

- 1.3.1 The visual baseline serves to establish the type of Visual Receptor (VR), the extent and character of existing views, and the contribution that the assessment site makes to each view/local visual amenity. This usually correlates with the degree to which the site is visible from a VR.

1.3.2 All agreed VR's (Key View Points), were visited as part of the field survey and the extent, character and appearance of their views noted. Where appropriate, the existence of temporary structures or features in the landscape that vary with the seasons and that may therefore affect visibility, such as deciduous vegetation, were noted in order to evaluate the worst case situation in the assessment. The initial appraisal is based on a grading of degrees of visibility, from not visible to fully open in close views. To indicate the degree of visibility of the site from any location, that continuum has been divided into four categories:

- **None:** no view (no part of the site or proposed development is discernible);
- **Glimpse:** only a minor area of the site or proposed development is discernible and/or the view is transient or at such a distance that it is difficult to perceive in the wider view, or sequence of views;
- **Partial:** the site or proposed development forms a relatively small proportion of a wider view. There are open views of part of the site or proposed development such that it is easily visible as part of the wider view;
- **Open:** there are open views of the site or proposed development such that it forms a substantial part (is a dominant element) of the overall view and affects its overall character and visual amenity; or the site or proposed development is the dominant feature of the view, to which other elements become subordinate and where the site/proposed development significantly affects or changes the character of the view.

1.4 Summary of landscape/visual baseline

1.4.1 The baseline survey identifies the landscape resource (landscape features and character) and visual receptors (VRs) likely to be affected by the proposed development, and then evaluates the sensitivity of each to the likely effects of the proposed development.

2 Mitigation

2.1 For the purposes of this assessment mitigation refers to the landscape proposals shown within the Illustrative Landscape plans (HDA6 & 7), designed to respond to the constraints of the site and mitigate the landscape and visual impacts that arise from the proposed development. Aside from the change of use, there are no proposed changes within Site B, as a result no landscape mitigation has been proposed for Site B. The

following paragraphs focus on proposals for Site A. This report discusses both primary and secondary mitigation.

- Primary mitigation – the iterative process of masterplanning
- Secondary mitigation – additions or changes to the landscape proposals as a direct response to the results and comments obtained through public consultation.

3 Landscape Impact Assessment Methodology

3.1 The landscape impact assessment addresses both direct and indirect impacts of the proposed development. Firstly, the direct effects of the development on the site itself are categorised, through an assessment of the magnitude of effect. The focus is on the loss or change to identified landscape features within or adjacent to the site, together with the creation of new landscape elements.

3.2 **Landscape character:** The effects on local landscape character that would result from the proposed development are assessed. The effect on site landscape character directly correlates with the impact on landscape features (extent and duration). The effect on landscape character in the environs of the site is dependent on a range of factors (sensitivity) and overlaps with the visual assessment because the extent to which the proposed development would be visible from the surrounding countryside may influence neighbouring character areas.

3.2.1 Changes to landscape character may be adverse, beneficial or neutral. The erosion of character equates to an adverse impact, whilst strengthening of characteristics is regarded as beneficial. The substitution of a landscape character area with another that is different but locally appropriate may be assessed as a neutral impact.

3.2.2 For the purposes of this assessment, 'magnitude of effect' on each landscape feature and landscape character area is classified using the categories listed below (Whilst potential effects may be adverse or beneficial, for simplicity, the following definitions use examples of adverse impact, bearing in mind that significant effects on landscape features, in the context of LVIA, usually equate with total or partial loss. Where effects are deemed to be beneficial this will be clearly stated in the assessment text):

- **High:** Notable change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area;

- The proposals are the dominant feature and there is substantial damage (or major improvement) to key characteristics, features and elements that contribute to landscape, and/or the effects are long term and irreversible.
- Effect on a landscape feature of designated importance that cannot be replaced; total loss of features that would be difficult to replace.
- Loss of existing landscape character and its replacement with characteristics that are atypical of the character area.
- **Medium:** Moderate changes in localised area:
 - The proposals form a visible and immediately apparent new feature that results in partial damage to (or addition of) key characteristics, elements and features that contribute to landscape, and/or the effects are medium to long term and largely irreversible.
 - Total loss of feature that may be recreated over time; loss of small proportion of a feature that would be difficult to replace (e.g. mature woodland or historic species rich hedgerow);
 - A considerable change to landscape character (proposed landscape character appropriate to character area but different from adjoining areas);
- **Low:** Small change in any components;
 - Some measurable change where the proposal constitutes a minor feature in the landscape and results in loss (or addition) of one (or maybe more) key characteristics, and/or the effects are short to medium term or could be irreversible.
 - Total loss over sizeable area of a feature that can be recreated relatively easily (e.g. arable farmland); partial loss of feature that may be recreated over time, (e.g. young plantation/hedgerow); very minor loss of feature that would be difficult to recreate (e.g. woodland);
 - A noticeable change to landscape character (proposed landscape character similar to existing landscape character of the area);
- **Very Low:** Virtually imperceptible change of a temporary nature.
 - The proposals result in very minor loss (or benefit) to the characteristics, features and elements that contribute to character, and/or effects are likely to be short term or could be reversible.
 - Partial loss of feature that can be recreated relatively easily or which would regain its characteristics over time; minor or temporary effect on feature that can accommodate limited removal without noticeable change (e.g. gappy hedgerow);
 - A barely perceptible change to landscape character;

3.2.3 The impact of the proposed development on the local landscape (character) is described and illustrated. The degree of significance of the landscape impact of the development is a product of sensitivity and magnitude of effect.

3.3 Visual Impact Assessment Methodology

3.3.1 The degree of significance of visual impact is assessed at two levels:

- i) the significance of the impact on each individual VR;
- ii) the overall significance of the visual impact in the context of the zone of visual influence and the range of VRs as a whole.

3.3.2 In accord with the visual baseline, the degree of visibility of the proposed development from each VR is assessed based on the same four categories: No view; Glimpse; Partial view, Open view. The view as it would be both during construction and operation of the proposed development is described. A direct comparison of the descriptions of the view following development (or during construction) with that of the existing situation, together with degree of visibility, indicates the extent of the change to the view. The relationship between visual intrusion and extent of change to the view is dependent upon the character of the development in the context of the view and whether they are consistent or contrasting.

3.3.3 The scale or magnitude of visual change has been made with reference to the following:

- The scale of change in the view with respect to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposed development;
- The degree of contrast or integration of any features or changes in the landscape with the existing or remaining landscape elements and characteristics in terms of form, scale, mass, height, colour and texture;
- The angle of view in relation to the main activity of the receptor;
- The distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development; and
- The extent of the area over which changes would be visible.

3.3.4 The magnitude of change can be classified as follows:

- **High:** Total loss of, or major alteration to, key elements of the baseline view, and/or introduction of elements considered to be uncharacteristic of the baseline view. The development would occupy most of the view (open or panoramic view) resulting in significant change in the existing view.

The proposals would cause a significant deterioration/improvement in the view. (If adverse, the proposals would be a dominant and incongruous feature in the view).

- **Medium:** Partial loss of, or alteration to, (one or more) key elements of the baseline view, and/or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not necessarily be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic to the baseline view. The development may affect a partial view of most of it, or viewers would have a clear view of only a small part of the development. Also refers to distant views in which the site forms a significant proportion of the wider view resulting in a noticeable change in the existing view;

The proposals would cause a noticeable deterioration/improvement in the view. (If adverse, the proposals would form a visible and recognisable incongruous new element readily noticed by a casual observer. If beneficial, the proposals would form a recognisable improvement that could be noticed by a casual observer.)

- **Low:** Minor loss of, or alteration to, one or more key elements of the baseline view, and/or introduction of elements that may not be uncharacteristic of the baseline view. Poor or difficult view of the development resulting in a perceptible change in the existing views; and

The proposals would cause a minor deterioration/improvement in the view. If adverse, the proposals would be a small incongruous element in the view that could be missed by a casual observer. If beneficial, the proposals would form a small improvement to the view that could be missed by a casual observer.

- **Very Low:** Very minor loss of, or alteration to, one or more key elements of the baseline view, and/or introduction of elements that are not characteristic of the baseline view. Poor or difficult view of the development resulting in barely perceptible changed of a temporary nature. Approximating to the 'no change' situation, where the proposals overall would not form a noticeable deterioration or improvement in the view.

3.3.5 Significance matrix for landscape and visual impacts (for ES compliant LVIA)

		<i>Sensitivity</i>				
		Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
<i>Magnitude of effect</i>	High	Major	Substantial	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
	Medium	Substantial	Moderate	Moderate / Minor	Minor	Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Negligible	Negligible
	Very Low	Minor	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

Major significance: an impact of international/national importance and is important to the decision-making process;

Substantial significance: an impact of regional/district significance and could be a key decision-making issue; prominent changes to a sensitive view or substantial change or widespread loss of characteristic features in a sensitive landscape with little capacity for change;

Moderate significance: an impact of district/local significance and not likely to be a key decision-making issue; noticeable change to view or in an average, ordinary landscape with some capacity to accommodate development; In combination the cumulative impacts of VR's with a moderate significance would be more significant and a key decision making issue.

Minor significance: an impact of very local significance and unlikely to be of importance to the decision-making process; small scale or temporary changes to view or to a low sensitivity landscape with capacity to accommodate development;

Negligible significance: not significant to the decision-making process.

References

- 1 Town and Country Planning; 2011; Statutory Instrument No 1824 - Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 Department for Communities and Local Government; 2012; National Planning Policy Framework
- 2 Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment; 2013; Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (third edition).
- 3 The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage; 2002; Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland