



LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL


Land at Ashton Road, Oundle, Peterborough

on behalf of

Persimmon Homes, East Midlands

August 2012

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1.0 Rationale and Scope

- 1.1 James Blake Associates has been instructed by Persimmon Homes, East Midlands to prepare a landscape and visual appraisal regarding the land at Ashton Road, Oundle, East Northamptonshire. This report reviews information regarding the site and its surrounding area to develop a landscape-led strategy that will be used to inform the site masterplan for residential development.
- 1.2 For the purpose of this report a desktop study of planning policy and landscape character as well as a site survey have been undertaken. The findings are summarised within this report and are illustrated by the accompanying figures.

2.0 Site

- 2.1 The site is located on the south eastern edge of the small market town of Oundle, approximately 19km south west of Peterborough. Oundle is situated along the meandering course of the River Nene and is bypassed by the A605 to the east. The A605 connects the A14 at Thrapston to Peterborough within the centre of East Northamptonshire District.
- 2.2 The site (approximately 4.7ha) has a slightly undulating topography at approximately 25m AOD. It comprises a medium size former arable field, which is visually and physically contained by broadleaf linear woodland along the south western, eastern and north eastern boundaries with the close board fence of the rear gardens of the existing residential housing to the north western site boundary. Along the eastern boundary, which adjoins open countryside, runs the busy transport route of the A605. Beyond the woodland to the south west of the site lies the grounds and buildings of Prince William School. To the north beyond a small woodland lies the Nene Valley Business Park.
- 2.3 The former arable field is currently covered in rough grassland. The surrounding woodland vegetation contains mature trees like Ash, Oak and Sycamore trees as well as hawthorn, hazel, rose, field maple and elm. The scrub along the close board fence towards the existing residential area is approximately 4-6m in height, containing hawthorn, rose and elder.
- 2.4 The site can be accessed by the bridleway at the north eastern site boundary. For views of the site refer to Views A to C on Figure 2 to 4 as well as Figure 1 for the setting of the site.
- 2.5 The residential properties to the north west of the site are of 1990's character. The building materials include a mix of yellow and red brick, off white and beige render as well as timber features. The roof tiles consist of dark red and grey shades. The houses are 2 storey detached properties with small back gardens.

3.0 Policy Constraints

- 3.1 All development within the northern part of East Northamptonshire will be determined in accordance with the vision and the policies of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit, adopted June 2008), the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (East Northamptonshire, adopted July 2011) and the remaining saved policies of the East Northamptonshire District Local Plan (adopted 1996).
- 3.2 Oundle is defined within the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy as a Rural Service Centre. Together with the towns Thrapston and Raunds as well as the village King's Cliffe, it forms a 'Rural Service Spine', providing services for a large rural catchment area. As a Rural Service Centre, Oundle will provide a main focus for infrastructure and development in the rural north east (Policy 1). Within the plan period of 2001 and 2021 the Core Spatial Strategy indicates a housing requirement of 610 dwellings in Oundle, of which 161 have been built until April 2008 (Policy 10, Table 5).
- 3.3 The Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan identifies 3 new housing allocations in Oundle up to 2014. A further site is proposed for the period after 2014, with 2 more potential sites for long term allocation, i.e. from 2018 till after 2021. These sites would meet the required housing numbers, but do not include the application site. The development strategy for Oundle states that the scale of new development will be limited in accordance with its special character and sensitive setting.
- 3.4 The application site was assessed within the Sustainability Assessment of sites for Development Plan Documents (DPD) (Roger Tym and Partners, May 2007) and the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan – Assessment of potential housing sites in Oundle and Thrapston (Roger Tym and Partners, February 2009). The site was identified within the North Northamptonshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (Roger Tym and Partners, February 2009) as a category 2 site, which includes sites that perform moderately well against the assessment criteria, facing more significant constraints than the best-scoring sites, but which still appear to be achievable/deliverable.
- 3.5 Within the Sustainability Assessment of sites for DPD's the site forms part of growth sector 4, which includes potential urban extension sites located in the Lower Nene environmental character area (refer to landscape character chapter below). The assessment states that 'there is a degree of coalescence with Polebrook but this is not significant given the intervening A605.' The site achieved an overall rating of 'orange', meaning there are significant constraints, although mitigation should be possible. In respect of assessment criteria landscape character, cultural heritage and biodiversity the site achieved a 'yellow' rating, meaning that the development fits well with the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and avoids being visually intrusive in the wider landscape; there are no designated heritages site; and no designated wildlife sites within a 100m buffer zone. Regarding the assessment criteria of potential for coalescence the site achieved an 'orange' rating due to the development of the site reducing the gap to Polebrook to between 1km and 2km.

- 3.6 Within the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan – Assessment of potential housing sites in Oundle and Thrapston the site has been assessed as having potential for housing. The assessment states that the site is well enclosed and not prominent visually. An assessment based on the Environment Character Assessment (refer to landscape character chapter below) considers that the site has low heritage sensitivity, but medium landscape character and biodiversity sensitivity.
- 3.7 Relevant policies regarding landscape and the site within the Core Spatial Strategy include Policy 5 (Green Infrastructure), Policy 13 (General Sustainable Development Principles) and Policy 16 (Sustainable Urban Extensions).
- 3.8 Policy 5 aims to create multi-functional areas of green spaces that promote recreation, tourism, public access, green education, biodiversity, water management, the protection and enhancement of the local landscape and historic assets and mitigation of climate change. These areas will be linked via sub-regional Green Infrastructure (GI) corridors, which are supported by a larger number of local corridors. The sub-regional corridor 2 Nene Valley, which links Northampton to Wansford, runs just to the east of the site, whilst the local corridor 30 connects Oundle with Great Gidding further to the east. The River Nene Regional Park (RNRP) will be the key mechanism for delivering GI within North Northamptonshire.
- 3.9 Policies 13 and 16 requires development to:
- Incorporate flexible design for buildings and their setting with access to amenity spaces, which can be adapted to future needs and allows for needs of all users;
 - Design out antisocial behavior and reduce crime;
 - Be of high standard of design, architecture and landscaping, respecting and enhancing the character of the surroundings and be in accordance with the Environmental Character of the area;
 - Create a strong sense of place by strengthening the distinctive historic and cultural qualities and townscape through its design, landscaping and public art;
 - Promote healthier living and to be active outside homes and work places;
 - Allow travel to home, shops, work and school on foot, cycle and public transport;
 - Not result in an unacceptable impact on amenities of neighbouring properties or the wider area, including light, loss of light or overlooking;
 - Conserve and enhance landscape character, historic landscape designated built environment assets and their setting, and biodiversity (refer to Environmental Character Assessment and GI Strategy)
 - Provide access to well designed, overlooked cycleways and walking routes serving local facilities;
 - Offer a network of green spaces linking to the wider GI, offering landscape enhancement, conservation of important environmental assets and natural resources, biodiversity and formal and informal recreation areas;
 - Respect environmental character of the sites rural surroundings and existing townscape character; and
 - Create a well designed and defined edge to development and a sensitive transition to adjoining areas in the wider countryside. Proposals to include plans for long term use and management.

- 3.10 Relevant policies regarding landscape and the site within the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan include Policy 4 (Green Infrastructure) and Policy 11 (Enhancing Biodiversity) and Policy 15 (Open Space and Recreational Facilities).
- 3.11 Following these policies development should:
- Contribute and link into the wider GI network. Establishment of other routes utilising and enhancing existing rights of way network to promote and diversify GI;
 - Provide improved connectivity through the provision of foot and cycle routes and the creation of space for nature conservation and green education, green economic uses and imaginative recreational facilities;
 - Contribute towards the creation, restoration and management of characteristic priority habitats and to provide stepping stones and corridors links; and
 - Provide new open spaces, sport and recreation facilities in accordance with the local quantity and accessibility standards and/or improvement to existing off-site facilities.
- 3.11 Remaining saved policies as relevant to landscape and the site within the East Northamptonshire District Local Plan include Policy H4 and Policy EN20. Policy H4 requires residential development sites to provide a variety of dwelling types and styles, taking into account the character of the site and its relationship with the surrounding area. Policy EN20 states that development that adversely affects open land of particular significance to the form and the character of a town will not be granted. This includes land that contributes to the retention of the existing form and character of the settlement and land that allows views into the settlement from open countryside as well as views into the countryside from within the settlement.
- 3.12 There are no relevant statutory or non-statutory landscape constraints identified on site or within the vicinity of the site (refer to Figure 1). However a public bridleway runs along the north eastern site boundary, crossing over the A605 along the River Nene and connecting Ashton Road and Herne Road. The long distance way 'Nene Way', which follows the River Nene runs around the site at a distance of approximately 240m. However there are no links from this path toward the site and the site is well enclosed by mature trees and the A605.

4.0 Landscape Character

- 4.1 The character of the landscape evolves over time as a result of the interaction of human activity and the natural environment (people and place). Attributes used to assess landscape character include:
- Physical – geology, landform, climate, soils, landcover;
 - Cultural and Social – land use, settlement, enclosure & history; and
 - Aesthetics – colour, texture, pattern, form and perception.
- 4.2 The landscape character types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within the study area from National to County level are shown on Table 1. The main features of the landscape within the study area and County Landscape Character Types are shown on Figure 1.

Table 1: Hierarchy of Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas

National (<i>National Character Map of England, 2005</i>):				
Rockingham Forest (NCA 92)	Northamptonshire Vales (NCA 89)		Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands (NCA 88)	
Regional (<i>East Midlands Landscape Typology, 2010</i>):				
Forest Hills and Ridges (10a) RLCT	Floodplain Valleys (3a) RLCT		Clay Wolds (8a) RLCT	
County (<i>Environmental Character Assessment, 2006</i>):				
Rockingham Forest (3) ECA	Lower Nene (Aldwinkle to Wansford) (5) ECA		East Northamptonshire Claylands (1) ECA	
County (<i>Current Landscape Character Assessment, 2006</i>):				
Wooded Clay Plateau (7) LCT	Broad River Valley Floodplain (18) LCT	Limestone Valley Slopes (12) LCT		Farmed Claylands (9) LCT
Deene Plateau (7b) LCA	The Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock (18f) LCA	Oundle to Nassington (12f) LCA	Thrapston to Warmington (12c) LCA	Polebrook Claylands (9b) LCA
		Aldwinkle to Oundle (12e) LCA		
County (<i>Historic Landscape Character Assessment, 2006</i>):				
19 th Century Non Parliamentary Enclosure	19 th Century Parliamentary Enclosure		Large Modern Fields	
Nene Valley – Fotheringhay to Pilton (2b) HLCA	Nene Valley – Oundle to Warmington (5) HCA		Titchmarsh to Lutton Clay Plateau (7a) HLCA	
Barnwell Valley Sides (2d) HLCA				
County (<i>Biodiversity Character Assessment, 2006</i>):				
Boulder Clay Woodlands	Major Floodplain	Limestone Slopes		Cropped Clayland
Fermyn and Southwick Woods (7e) BCA	Lower Nene (11b) BCA	Islip to Perio (8j) BCA	Thorpe Waterville to Warmington (8n) BCA	Ashton and Barnwell Wolds (4o) BCA

National Level

- 4.3 At the national level (*National Character Map of England, Natural England, 2005*) Oundle lies within the Northamptonshire Vales National Character Area (NCA 89), with the Rockingham Forest NCA 92 immediately adjoining to the west and the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA 88 bordering further east. The key characteristics of Northamptonshire Vales NCA are:
- Gentle ridges and valleys with little woodland and strong enclosure pattern;
 - Distinctive river valleys with flat floodplains and gravel terraces;
 - Frequent small towns and large villages, often characterised by red brick buildings;
 - Prominent parks and country houses;
 - Frequent imposing, spired churches;
 - Attractive stone buildings; and
 - Great diversity of landscape and settlement pattern.
- 4.4 The Rockingham Forest NCA is characterised by an undulating landform with large woodlands on higher ground and large arable fields with low hedges. This is an undisturbed, deeply rural landscape.
- 4.5 The Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA is a gently undulating landscape with plateau areas divided by broad shallow valleys. The area is predominately open and in intensive arable use. Fields are bound by open ditches or sparse closely trimmed hedges and hedgerow trees. Woodland cover is variable.

Regional Level

- 4.6 At the regional level (*East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment, East Midlands Landscape Partnership, 2010*), Oundle is situated within the Floodplain Valleys Regional Landscape Character Type (RLCT 3a), which extends along the River Nene. The Forest Hills and Ridges RLCT 10a adjoins Oundle immediately to the west, whilst the Clay Wolds RLCT 8a is situated further to the east. Both lie on higher ground.
- 4.7 The key characteristics of the Floodplain Valleys RLCT are:
- Flat floodplains surrounded by rising landform of adjacent Landscape Character Types;
 - River channels are often managed and bordered by riparian habitats;
 - Predominately pastoral land use with some arable;
 - Limited woodland cover;
 - Regular pattern of medium to large fields, bordered by hedgerows and post and wire fencing;
 - Hedgerows and riverside trees, including Alder, Willow and Poplar, are important features;
 - Limited settlement and development;
 - Roads and communication routes often on outer edges of the floodplain; and
 - General absence of built development creates a quiet, rural character.
- 4.8 Forces for change within the Floodplain Valleys RLCT include development on the edges of settlements, which is damaging the character of the landscape through visual intrusion. Therefore the aim is to protect the open and unsettled character of the landscape and to limit visual impact by locating development on previously developed land or close to existing settlement. The impact on the local landscape and townscape character shall be

minimised through innovative and eco-friendly design solutions. Tree planting around the settlement edges will help to integrate development and contribute to the perception of a well treed landscape.

- 4.9 The Forest Hills and Ridges RLCT comprise broad, elevated plateaux and ridges with an undulating landform. There are extensive areas of woodland within this landscape. The woodland lies on elevated ground, forming a backdrop to farmland. The farmland includes medium to large scale fields defined by low well clipped hedges and hedgerow trees. The area is sparsely populated and has a quiet and tranquil character.
- 4.10 The Clay Wolds RLCT includes broad plateau areas surrounded by undulating ridges and valleys. The plateau tops are used for arable farming, whilst the steeper slopes are mainly used as pasture. There are limited areas of large woodlands. However due to the many hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small woodlands the area has a well treed character. The area has a quiet, remote and often empty character.

County Level

- 4.11 At the county level Northamptonshire County Council together with the River Nene Regional Park Community Interest Company produced the Environmental Character Assessment (ECA) for North Northamptonshire. It provides a suite of information, comprising the Current Landscape Character Assessment, the Historic Landscape Character Assessment, the Biodiversity Character Assessment and the Green Infrastructure (GI) Study. It includes a series of strategies and guidelines to direct future development, landscape change and management. The guidelines relevant to the site are set out in following paragraphs.

Current Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.12 The landscape character boundaries within the Current Landscape Character Assessment only vaguely follow the boundaries of the regional character areas. Oundle's eastern and southern boundary, including the site, lie within the Broad River Valley Floodplain LCT, and The Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock LCA. To either side of this character area lie the Limestone Valley Slopes LCT, with the Aldwinckle to Oundle LCA and the Oundle to Nassington LCA to the west of the River Nene and the Thrapston to Warmington LCA to the east of the river. Further to the east lies the Farmed Claylands LCT, comprising the Polebrook Claylands LCA, whilst further to the west the Wooded Clay Plateau LCT is located with the Deene Plateau LCA. For the location of the landscape character areas in relation to the Oundle and the site please refer to Figure 1. For the purpose of this report only the Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock LCA will be described in further detail.
- 4.13 The Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock LCA comprises a meandering, largely naturalised course of the River Nene and lake areas including Barnwell Country Park. The area is predominately open, but marked by scattered willow shrubs as well as oak and ash trees. There are broadleaf copses around the lake areas. Woodland in surrounding landscape types creates a well-wooded backdrop to the valley. The edge of the river is marked by banks of irises, rushes and reeds. Medium scale pastoral fields adjoin the river edge with larger arable fields located on the edge of the floodplain next to the adjoining character areas. Within the floodplain settlements are limited to scattered dwellings along the edges of the character area, although glimpsed views of nearby settlements are possible. Settled areas like Oundle have a

strong influence on the rural landscape, including suburban building styles and materials as well as busy infrastructure development. Therefore the character of the landscape varies from urban to deeply rural and remote. The report states that where urban development is extensive and insensitive to the landscape character, the condition of the landscape can be regarded as low.

- 4.14 To limit the effect of urban influences on the wider rural landscape the Current Landscape Character Assessment recommends sensitive siting of development and creative mitigation that is in keeping with the local landscape character. Significant new development shall be resisted and located in close proximity to the existing settlement to conserve the sparsely settled character. Consideration shall be given to the use of broadleaved native tree species to enhance biodiversity.
- 4.15 Although the site is situated within The Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock LCA and the Broad River Floodplain LCT, it is recognised that the site is separated from the river valley character by the transport corridor of the A605, associated ground remodelling and highway buffer planting to the west as well as the grounds of Prince William School to the south. There is also a strong urban influence due to the adjoining residential area to the north west. Therefore the above mentioned characteristics of the area do not fully apply.

Historic Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.16 Oundle including the site is situated within the historic area of 19th Century Parliamentary Enclosure, which comprises the Nene Valley: Oundle to Warmington Historic Landscape Area (HLCA). One of its main characteristics are the straight hedgerow boundaries and enclosure roadways. Key recommendations for this HLCA include the conservation and enhancement of historic hedgerows, the siting of new woodland in accordance with the historic woodland pattern, and species choice that reflects the requirements of the Biodiversity Character Guidance.

Biodiversity Character Assessment

- 4.17 Following the Biodiversity Character Assessment Oundle and the site lies within the Limestone Slopes, which comprises fragmented areas of mixed plantation woodland and lowland calcareous grassland. The study area contains the Islip to Perio Limestone Slopes Biodiversity Character Area (BCA) to the west of the River Nene and the Thorpe Waterville to Warmington Limestone Slopes BCA to the east. The site is situated within the Islip to Perio Limestone Slopes, which contains wildlife sites such as Oundle Nene Woodland, Wadenhoe Marsh and Achurch Meadow SSSI as well as man-made fish ponds and species-rich limestone grassland. Proposals should seek to conserve and enhance existing broadleaved woodlands, lowland calcareous grassland and neutral grassland, hedgerows, open standing water as well as habitat linkages. Woodland planting stock and new hedgerow species shall be of local provenance, where possible. Proposals should consider the buffering of existing woodlands to protect them from potential damage.

Environmental Character Assessment

- 4.18 The environmental character boundaries within the Environmental Character Assessment approximately follow the boundaries of the Regional Character Assessment. Oundle, including the site lie within the Lower Nene (Aldwinkle to Wansford) Environmental Character Area (ECA). Immediately adjoining to

the west is the Rockingham Forest ECA and further to the east lies the East Northamptonshire Claylands ECA. As only the Lower Nene ECA is relevant to the site, only this character area will be described in further detail.

4.19 The Lower Nene (Aldwincle to Wansford) ECA is a sweeping valley landscape, which is sparsely settled with individual farmsteads, small linear villages and medium sized market town like Oundle. Church spires provide focal features. Advice for new development include:

- Reflect locally distinctive building styles;
- Avoid settlement expansion into the floodplain and located so as not to obscure vistas to church spires; and
- Protect historic sites and their wider setting to enhance the historic rural character of the landscape.

Green Infrastructure Study

4.20 The GI Strategy has been prepared by the River Nene Regional Park (RNRP) and steering group members (including the county council, local authorities, Natural England and the Environment Agency). It provides the context for a countywide GI network. It aims to:

- Deliver improved environmental quality, quality of life, well being and 'liveability';
- Celebrate the unique experience, image and visual qualities of Northamptonshire's landscape;
- Improve connectivity between urban and rural landscapes, connecting communities to spaces and places and people to nature;
- Create multi-functional 'working' landscapes which deliver a wide range of interlinked environmental, social and environmental benefits;
- Work with environmental processes to improve flood-risk and water management systems, biodiversity and air quality; and
- Provide the landscape/townscape context for appropriate urban development and a strong environmental infrastructure framework within which planned settlement growth and associated landscape change can be positively managed.

The River Nene Regional Park (RNRP) will be the key mechanism for delivering GI within North Northamptonshire.

4.21 The GI strategy outlines a network of GI corridors throughout the county. These routes are not intended to indicate rigid corridors for GI provision, but instead identify broad landscape zones, within which GI related proposals should be focussed.

4.22 The Green Infrastructure strategy is based on the identification of sub-regional corridors which broadly follow the principal river valleys and their tributaries including the River Nene (Sub-Regional GI Corridor 2). The aim of these sub-regional corridors is to connect environmental spaces by linking locations with natural heritage, green space, biodiversity and other environmental interests. These areas are priority areas for investment and a focus for further enhancement. Sub-regional GI corridors will be safeguarded by:

- Not permitting development that compromises their integrity and the integrity of the overall GI framework;
- Using developer contributions to facilitate improvements to their quality and robustness; and

- Investing in enhancement and restoration where the opportunities exist, and the creation of new resources where necessary.
- 4.23 The sub-regional framework is complemented by a larger number of local corridors, which include a variety of landuses, natural and built resources and settlement, although they incorporate fewer assets and less multi-functionality. The aim is to increase the range of uses within each local corridor and to improve benefits at the local level. Local GI corridors connect communities and sub-regional corridors to create a comprehensive network and are important to ensure GI benefits at the local level.
- 4.24 Within the vicinity of the site on the eastern edge of Oundle lies the Sub-Regional GI Corridor of the Nene Way, which connects Northampton in the south with Wansford (to the west of Peterborough) in the north. It approximately follows the River Nene and the long distance footpath route of the Nene Way. This corridor forms the backbone of the GI framework within North Northamptonshire. Other Sub-Regional GI corridors link into it. It comprises inter alia the rich floodplain and valley bottom landscapes of the Lower Nene. Common habitats are the mosaic of wetlands, open water and semi-natural grasslands. There are also notable views of valley bottom settlements such as Oundle and Thrapston, which include many buildings constructed in the local vernacular and stone. The site lies within this corridor.
- 4.25 Main priorities of the Sub-Regional GI Corridor Nene Way include:
- Enhance and link the wetland habitat and woodland reservoirs;
 - Connect to the strategic leisure and recreation sites;
 - Provide sustainable movement use at the inter-settlement and local level; and
 - Pursue opportunities of introducing iconic landmarks and features into the landscape.
- 4.26 Crossing the Sub-Regional GI Corridor Nene Valley and connecting Oundle with the countryside to the south west is the Local GI Corridor Oundle – Great Gidding. To the east of Oundle the two Local GI Corridors Brigstock Country Park – Oundle and Oundle Wood – Shire Hill Wood link Oundle with the countryside to the south west and north west.
- 4.27 By adopting a GI approach, the layout of development schemes may be adapted or designed to provide improved connectivity through the provision of:
- Footpath and cycle routes which are part of a strategic network;
 - Space for nature that contributes to the larger sub-regional pattern of connected habitat; and
 - Imaginative recreational facilities that give educational and physical health benefits to local people.

5.0 Visual Envelope and Views

- 5.1 Oundle lies within the wide river valley landscape of the River Nene at a height of around 20 - 55m AOD. To the east and the west of the river Nene the land rises up to an area of hills and plateaux (approximately 30-70m AOD).

- 5.2 The enclosed and wooded character of the site results in a very limited Visual Envelope (VE), with primary views of the site from the public bridleway to the north east and the residential dwellings and Prince William School to the north west and south west of the site. Secondary views, from where the development, predominately rooftops, might be visible, comprise an area immediately to the south and an area along the valley slopes further to the east. The approximate visual envelope of the site is shown on Figure 1 and photographs of representative views on Figures 2 to 5. View A, B and C are photos taken from the site, views 1 to 5 are near distance views (<0.5km), view 6 is a middle distance view (0.5-2km) and views 7 to 8 are long distance views (>2km).
- 5.3 In the near distance, the site is visible from the public bridleway to the north east (Views 1 to 3), St. Christopher's Drive (View 4) to the north west as well as from residential properties on St. Christopher's Drive and Rowell Way and Prince William School to the south west. The secondary VE includes the grounds of Prince William School, the bridleway (View 5) and a small part of an arable field to the south of the site.
- 5.4 Views 1 to 3 show the site from the public bridleway to the north east of the site. Due to the densely wooded area and the existing enclosure of the Anglian Water tank the open arable part of the site is screened. However future residential development might be visible beyond the dense boundary vegetation, particularly during the autumn, winter and spring season, when the broadleaved vegetation is without leaf cover. View 3 shows the site from the site entrance. The gap within the vegetation allows a clear view of the site and the existing abrupt settlement edge with dense residential housing. Prince William School can be glimpsed through the vegetation at the western corner of the site.
- 5.5 View 4 looks along St Christopher's Drive within the existing housing area to the north west of the site. The close board fence along the site boundary and the vegetation within the site are visible. This is likely to be the vehicular access point of the proposed site.
- 5.6 View 5 demonstrates the visibility of the site from the public bridleway to the south of the site. The open arable part of the site is not discernible due to the strip of dense woodland along the south western site boundary. However rooftops of the proposed development, particularly within the southern part of the site, might be visible above the boundary vegetation.
- 5.7 In the middle distance, the site is not visible. However rooftops of the proposed development are likely to become discernible from the valley slopes at Nene Way. View 6 is a representative view from this area within the secondary VE. It clearly shows the existing rooftops of the residential housing along St Christopher's Drive, situated within an extensive woodland setting. The spire of St Peter's Church can be seen just to the right.
- 5.8 In the long distance, neither the site nor the development is/will be visible. View 7 shows a view from Stoke Doyle Road to the south west of Oundle. The view looks down the river valley towards the town. Glimpses of the rooftops within the historic part of Oundle as well as the spire of the landmark St Peter's Church are visible. The eastern part of Oundle, including the site is screened by woodland within the valley. Similar to View 7, View 8 is situated

on higher ground, looking down the river valley towards Oundle. Only the more recent residential development within the northern part of Oundle and St Peter's Church are visible. The site is again screened by extensive woodland within the valley.

6.0 Landscape Strategy

6.1 The landscape strategy and recommendations take into account local landscape and settlement character and associated guidelines, along with the visibility of the site. The aims of the landscape strategy are to minimise potential effects and integrate opportunities for enhancement to ensure that the development is integrated into the existing settlement and surrounding landscape. The principles are demonstrated on the accompanying Landscape Strategy drawing JBA 12/152-01.

6.2 The following principles are recommended as part of the masterplan to reduce the potential effects on landscape character and visual amenity and integrate the development into the surrounding landscape:

- Retain and reinforce the existing woodland around the edges of the site and create a new woodland edge (where possible). This will protect the woodland and benefit wildlife, maintain existing screening and integrate it with surrounding landscape;
- Integrate a central open space to incorporate large-scale native tree planting, which will help to break up the roofscape of the proposed development and integrate the built development, when viewed from higher ground of the surrounding valley slopes;
- The open space shall be fronted by houses for natural surveillance and incorporate sustainable drainage, wildlife habitats and a play area with an appropriate buffer zone towards adjoining properties. Open spaces and play area should be designed in accordance with the Open Space Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) – Consultation Draft (July 2011);
- Create a green corridor through the built development linking the northern and southern woodland to provide additional screening and habitat connectivity;
- Design an attractive frontage along the existing public bridleway. Set back and front development with a shared private driveway to allow for the retention of the existing trees. Development shall have large front gardens to provide space for additional tree and shrub planting. Fronting the houses along the bridleway will help natural surveillance and safety of the public path. The bridleway provides a green link between Oundle and the Nene Valley. Improvements to this link could be made, including the surfacing of the bridleway with an appropriate material suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders, the provision of a safe crossing point across the A605 and the establishment a connecting path between the bridleway and the Nene Way long distance path;
- Set back and back on the new development along the north western boundary with the existing residential houses to reduce the overlooking issue between the existing and new houses and to respect privacy. Establish an appropriate landscape buffer within the new back gardens along this boundary;

- Explore the opportunity to create a pedestrian and cycle link towards Prince William School to discourage unnecessary car journeys (in accordance with the Core Strategy Policy 13: General Sustainable Development Principles);
- In accordance with the adjoining residential area buildings should be a maximum of two storeys in height, so that they can be effectively screened by the existing mature trees. This will contribute to the preservation the relatively undeveloped character of the valley in views of Oundle from the surrounding countryside.
- Ensure that the design of the new development (buildings and landscape) creates and enhances the sense of place and local identity. This will include hard and soft materials and planting which respects local character and enhances biodiversity;
- Residential areas shall reflect the existing settlement pattern. Create a low density, informal and landscape dominated north eastern boundary/ fronting the existing public bridleway, along the north western boundary/ towards the existing residential houses and surrounding the central open space. Utilise local vernacular styles and materials (or their modern equivalents) appropriate to Oundle to reinforce the local distinctiveness in particular along the boundary with the bridleway;
- Create a varied roofscape with different building orientations and a mix of darker colours including greys and darker reds of different shades, avoiding bright red colours;
- The level of lighting should be the minimum required and designed so as to minimise pollution from glow, glare and light spillage towards the existing residential properties as well as woodland boundaries to minimise potential disturbance to bats;
- No construction of buildings, hard surfaces or services should take place within root protection areas (RPA) of retained vegetation unless suitable mitigation measures are employed. The root protection areas should be protected throughout the course of the development. The calculation of the RPA should be informed by the detailed tree survey by a Tree Survey in accordance BS5837:2012 'Trees in Relation to Construction';
- All structural and open space planting should use native species (of local provenance where possible) – refer to the National History Museum Postcode Plant Database (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/plants-fungi/postcode-plants/>). Any future planning application should include details of planting including proposed plant species and a management plan for structural vegetation and open space areas; and
- Regarding the design of the development particular consideration shall be given to the Sustainable Design SPD (June 2009), the Northamptonshire Place and Movement Guide (November 2008) and the Planning out of Crime in Northamptonshire Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) (December 2003).

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 This report sets out a summary of the landscape character and visibility of the potential development site at Ashton Road, Oundle and the key landscape principles to be considered as part of the development masterplan.
- 7.2 Within the Core Strategy Oundle is defined as a Rural Service Centre and as such will be a focus for development. The Core Strategy indicates a housing requirement in Oundle of 610 dwelling within the plan period 2001-2021. In accordance with the 'Sustainability Assessment of sites for DPD's' the site has constraints, although mitigation should be possible. Regarding the assessment criteria of landscape character, cultural heritage and biodiversity, development of the site would fit well with scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and avoids being visually intrusive in the wider landscape. There are no designated heritage sites and no designated wildlife sites within a 100m buffer zone. However, a degree of coalescence between the settlements Oundle and Polebrook would be created, although this was **assessed** as insignificant. In accordance to the 'Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan' the site has the potential for housing. It is generally suitable, available and achievable. An assessment based on the Environment Character Assessment considers that the site has low heritage sensitivity, but medium landscape character and biodiversity sensitivity.
- 7.3 The proposed development site (approximately 4.5ha) lies to the south east of Oundle immediately adjacent to the existing settlement edge. The area currently comprises a slightly undulating area, covered in rough grassland. This former arable field is enclosed by broadleaved woodland to the north east, east and south west, whilst to the north west the site is contained by existing housing.
- 7.4 Oundle and the site lies within the Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock landscape character area (LCA) of the Broad River Valley Floodplain landscape character type (LCT), which follow the River Nene from north to south. To either side of the Broad River Floodplain rises the Limestone Valley Slopes LCT. The Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock LCA contains a meandering, largely naturalised course of the River Nene and lake areas. The area is mainly open, but marked with scattered willow scrub and oak and ash trees as well as woodland around lake areas. There are medium sized pastoral fields adjoining the river edge with arable fields located on higher ground, away from the river edge. Settlements like Oundle have a strong influence on the rural landscape within suburban building styles/materials and infrastructures. Therefore the character of the area varies from deeply rural to urban.
- 7.5 Although the site is situated within The Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock LCA and the Broad River Floodplain LCT, it is separated from the river valley character by the transport corridor of the A605 to the west as well as the grounds of Prince William School to the south. Due to the adjoining residential area to the north west there is a strong urban influence. Therefore the above mentioned characteristics of the area do not fully apply.
- 7.6 The visual assessment of the site established that the primary visual envelope is limited to the bridleway to the north east, St Christopher's Close and the adjoining residential properties. The secondary visual envelope from where the development and in particular the proposed rooftops of the new houses

might be visible is restricted to an area immediately to the south of the site, including the grounds of Prince William School, the bridleway and a small area of arable field, and an area along the valley slopes further to the east.

- 7.7 Due to the visually enclosed character of the site, the proposed development can be easily integrated within its landscape context. The main landscape strategy is to restrict the building height to 2 storeys and to integrate a central open space to incorporate skyline tree planting, which will help to break up the roof scape of the proposed development. Other aspects of the strategy include the retention of the existing woodland belt and the creation of an appropriate woodland edge where possible to integrate the development, the design of an attractive frontage along the existing bridleway and the establishment of an appropriate landscape buffer to minimise the overlooking issue towards the existing residential housing. In addition a new footpath and cycle link towards Prince William School would be beneficial.
- 7.8 As long as the landscape strategy and principles outlined in this report are implemented as part of the development masterplan, the development of the site can be accommodated within the existing landscape and settlement character without causing a negative impact upon the landscape character or visual amenity of the area on the south eastern edge of Oundle.